



Mott Poll Report

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Parent Efforts to Teach Children about Gratitude

Gratitude involves both feeling and expressing thankfulness. The C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of parents of children 4-10 years about their opinions on gratitude and how they are teaching their children to have and show gratitude.

Most parents (81%) agree that children today are not grateful for what they have. Over half of parents (58%) worry that they are giving their children too much, while 42% say they sometimes are embarrassed by how selfish their child acts.

Nearly all parents (96%) agree it's possible to teach children to be grateful, and 63% say their family has daily conversations about what they are grateful for. To help their child learn to show gratitude, 88% of parents regularly have their child say please and thank you, while 11% do this occasionally, and 1% rarely. Many parents also have their child do chores to help the family (60% regularly, 34% occasionally, 6% rarely). Less common strategies include having their child donate toys or clothes to charity (37% regularly, 46% occasionally, 17% rarely), say prayers about what they are thankful for (36% regularly, 26% occasionally, 38% rarely), or write or make thank-you cards for gifts (25% regularly, 41% occasionally, 34% rarely). Less common is having their child donate their own money to charity (13% regularly, 26% occasionally, 61% rarely).

Three in four parents (76%) rate teaching their child gratitude as a high priority, and 22% rate it as a medium priority; and only 2% say it's a low priority. Parents who place a high priority on teaching their child gratitude are more likely to report they regularly have their child say please and thank you, do chores to help the family, donate toys or clothes to charity, say prayers about what they are thankful for, write/make thank-you cards, and donate their own money to charity.

Nearly two-thirds of parents (63%) have involved their child in volunteer or service activities, including informal help for neighbors or family members (50%), school activities such as fundraisers or clean-up days (35%), and volunteer or service efforts through a place of worship (28%) or community organization (18%).

Parent strategies to teach their child to show gratitude

% of parents who say child does this regularly

Say please and thank you

88%

Do chores to help family

60%

Donate toys or clothes

37%

Say prayers of thanks

36%



Report Highlights

Four in five parents agree that children today are not grateful for what they have.

Three in four parents say it's a high priority to teach their children gratitude.

Two in three parents involve their children in volunteer or service activities.

Data Source & Methods

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Ipsos Public Affairs, LLC (Ipsos) for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. The survey was administered in June 2021 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults who were parents of at least one child age 3-18 years living in their household (n=2,019). Adults were selected from Ipsos's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 56% among panel members contacted to participate. This report is based on responses from 1,125 parents with at least one child age 4-10. The margin of error for results presented in this report is ±1 to 3 percentage points.

A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics, and the University of Michigan Susan B. Meister Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Center.

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C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health

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Implications

Many parents feel that children today are not grateful for what they have. Parents may look back to their own childhood and, in comparison, wonder if they are giving their child too much in the way of material things. Parents may have watched their child behave selfishly, such as refusing to share with other children or saying they don't like a particular gift. In those situations, parents may wish their children would be more grateful.

However, gratitude is not something that children usually acquire automatically; it needs to be nurtured, in an age-appropriate way. In this Mott Poll of parents of children age 4-10 years, nearly all felt it is possible to teach children to be grateful, but they reported different ways to do this. The most common strategy is having children say please and thank you on a regular basis. However, there is a difference between politeness and gratitude. To help children learn to be grateful, parents also need to emphasize why they are asking their child to say thanks. This can be as simple as taking time to say "thank you for..." with a brief explanation.

Having children help with household chores is another common strategy that parents use to teach their children to be grateful. To help younger children understand the connection, parents can explain that everyone in the family has a responsibility to help each other, and then point out how different family members contribute to the household in different ways. This can help children to appreciate their role in the "greater good" and nurtures their sense of gratitude.

It is a natural step from helping with household chores to volunteering with neighbors or at a school or community event. Nearly two-thirds of parents in this poll have involved their child in some type of volunteer or service activity. To help nurture children's sense of gratitude, parents may want to give an age-appropriate explanation of the reason for the activity and how it will be helpful to others, such as "Aunt Martha isn't feeling well so we will help rake the leaves in her yard," or "we're helping to collect mittens for children who don't have any." Specific examples can help children understand and connect with others, which allows the volunteer activity to build a sense of empathy, kindness, and compassion. After volunteering, parents may want to talk with children about their experience and how it made them feel.

Birthdays, holidays and other gift-giving events create an opportunity for parents to encourage children to appreciate both the gift and the giver. Children of all ages can make or write thank-you cards to express their gratitude for a gift. However, in this Mott Poll, only one-quarter of parents say they regularly have their child send thank-you cards. This may be a missed opportunity to help children learn gratitude.

While Thanksgiving is a wonderful time to give thanks, parents can teach and model kindness and gratitude throughout the year. Over time and through experiences, children will learn to be grateful for others and appreciate what they have.