



Epping School District Mental Health and Wellness Newsletter Developing an Attitude of Gratitude

November 16, 2020

Dear Epping School Community,

With Thanksgiving right around the corner, we thought we would focus this month's newsletter on gratitude. Not only is gratitude a timely seasonal theme, but it is also a powerful strategy for improving the social and emotional well being of ourselves and our children. This holiday season may be especially difficult for many of us this year, with family gatherings needing to be limited. Finding ways to cultivate gratitude can help us get through a difficult time. Gratitude is defined as thankful appreciation for what we have or what we receive, whether a material object or something intangible. Gratitude is about acknowledging the good in our lives. It is not meant to minimize the struggles, rather it is about compensating for the negative by focusing on the positive. Science has shown that individuals who regularly demonstrate gratitude are more resilient, report higher levels of life-satisfaction, experience less depression and anxiety, have stronger social connections and healthier immune systems. Below you will find some additional information about the impact of gratitude on our brains and ideas for how you and your family can practice gratitude. As always, feel free to reach out with questions or concerns. In the meantime, we wish you a safe and happy Thanksgiving.

Sincerely,

Sarah Wagner and the Epping Counseling Department

Gratitude Activities



Keep a gratitude journal – write down 3 things that you are grateful for every day. Try to think of new things instead of repeating the same ones.



Make a gratitude jar – have a jar that is kept in a common area of the house with slips of paper nearby (a box works too). Every day, each family member writes down something they are grateful for and puts it in the jar. Every so often, take them out and read them all aloud. Here's a link that has some prompts that might help with your jars:

<https://www.therisingspoon.com/2019/11/diy-gratitude-jar.html>



Write thank you notes. These have the added bonus of making someone else feel good too! Handmade cards are lovely but a simple text or email works too.





At the start of dinner, have each family member share something about their day that they feel grateful for. If this is too hard to keep up with every night, try just once a week.



Take a walk and observe your surroundings. Find things in your neighborhood or on a local trail that you feel thankful for.



Gratitude rock. Find a small rock, or another similar object, like a shell. Be sure to pick something that you like (maybe you think it is pretty or you like the texture). Keep the rock with you or near you (your pocket, at your desk) and whenever you notice it think of something about your day that you are grateful for.



Try a fun Thanksgiving craft: <https://www.pbs.org/parents/crafts-and-experiments/gratitude-turkey>

Gratitude and the Brain

- ☆ Neuroscience has shown that when we express gratitude, our brain produces the “feel-good” chemicals serotonin and dopamine. These chemicals immediately enhance our mood and increase feelings of happiness
- ☆ When we practice gratitude daily, it strengthens the pathways in our brains that allow us to experience these positive feelings more easily and more frequently
- ☆ When we feel gratitude, our brains are better able to regulate the hormones that are produced when we are stressed, allowing us to feel less stress and anxiety.
- ☆ Gratitude also stimulates the part of our brain that regulates sleep, allowing us to sleep better and more deeply

