

Teaching Gratitude

As 2022 comes to a close, we will tend to reflect on what has happened during the year. For many in the world, these were not the best of times.... It is a challenge to not dwell on the negative but it is so important to embrace the good that has occurred as well. Research shows gratitude can change the brain by increasing dopamine, serotonin production, activity in the medial prefrontal cortex, as well as activating the brain's altruism and reward seeking systems. This translates, day-to-day in breeding optimism, reducing stress, and improving relationships.

In Linda Kavelin Popov's *The Virtues Project* (2000): "Thankfulness is being grateful for what you have. It is an attitude of gratitude for learning, loving, and being. It is appreciating the little things which happen around you and within you every day. It is having a sense of wonder about the beauty of this world. It is being aware of the gifts in your life."

How can we teach our youth to practice Gratitude?

- Dr Sara Salmon's Character Education includes lesson plans on Gratitude as one of her 15 Character Traits.
- Dr Ellen McGinnis created the skill of Saying Thank You in all 3 levels of Skillstreaming
- Three activities where one may choose to share one's gratitude with others:
 - A Gratitude Journal is included as a support tool for mental health. Daily or weekly, one writes down 3-5 things one is thankful for.
 - The Gratitude Circle: form a circle. Ask each person to share one thing, using a word or phrase, that they are grateful for. Begin with "Something I am thankful for is..." This can be a difficult exercise for some so each person can either speak or pass.
 - Thank You Letter: create a Thank You card for someone, trying to be specific about why you are grateful. This may be for receiving a gift or for something that person has done that makes you thankful.

We can also teach ourselves. Write your own Gratitude Journal, do a Gratitude Circle with your friends, begin your evening meal with a Gratitude Blessing and start a staff meeting with "What went well this week?"

No amount of regret changes the past, no amount of anxiety changes the future, any amount of gratitude changes the present. – Ann Voskamp

May 2023 be a year of Gratitude for you all.