



# TERM 02 TOPIC

Parents Newsletter

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# HOW TO RAISE AN APPRECIATIVE CHILD IN THE “I WANT (MORE)” WORLD

*It's Christmas day. Your child is super excited and can't wait to open their presents. You are excited too but also a bit apprehensive – will they be happy with what you got for them? You remember their Birthday when they complained that they didn't have enough presents. And here it goes: a whining voice says “But, I didn't want this toy! I wanted the other one! And there are only just a few presents here for me!” Your heart sinks and you feel like a failure, but also annoyed. Why can't they just appreciate what they've got?*

Appreciating and being happy with what you've got are skills that many children struggle with. Sometimes this is just developmental, and it means that a child is taking time to transition from the egocentric stage of childhood. Sometimes it is about the fact that we live in a society that promotes instant gratification and consumerism that we all occasionally fall for. The good news is your child has the need to help others and show appreciation built in them (although some of them are hiding that well). Our job is to unearth that and encourage them in the right direction. Below are some suggestions on how to do it.

## **DRAW ATTENTION TO PEOPLE'S GOOD DEEDS**

Teach your child from an early age to notice when other people do something for them and to compliment and appreciate them for it. The best way to start teaching this is by modelling. For example, over dinner you can say “I'd like to appreciate Rory for helping me set the table today. That was very helpful, and it saved me time”. You can then encourage the other members of the family to compliment and appreciate each other but don't push them if they don't want to do it. Sometimes it takes a while for children to be comfortable to try new things like this.

## **TEACH VALUES**

When your child comes home and tells you that “so-and-so” has now got TV in their room, that their parents bought them new phone for Christmas and that they feel hard done because they haven't got any of those things, resist the urge to lecture your child as this will most likely push them away from you. Instead, use the opportunity to teach your family values. Start with exploring where your child is coming from – ask them to tell you more about the situation, what they think and how they feel about it. Validate their feelings (“I can see that you feel upset by the fact that you didn't get TV for your room for Christmas. It's ok to feel that way.”) and explain your thinking (“I can see why it works in some families, but in our family, we value spending time together which includes watching things together so that we can talk about it.”) Likelihood is your child won't like what they hear to start with but over time the message will get through and become part of their own value system.

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## **GIVE THEM A RESPONSIBILITY**

Sometimes children struggle to appreciate other people's effort and hard work because they haven't been given the opportunity to be on the giving end themselves. One way to help with this is to give them more responsibilities around the house. In this way you are helping your child focus on their contributions and what they can give rather than what they'll will receive or what they are missing out on. Don't wait until children are "old enough" to start with this – even toddlers can have jobs and responsibilities.

## **TEACH MONEY MANAGEMENT**

If you'd like to nurture gratitude and appreciation in your children, teaching them the value of money is one of the steps. You can do this by giving your child pocket money and agreeing on a budget that you will use to buy their Birthday or Christmas presents. Anything that goes over that budget, they can either use their pocket money to buy or they can do some extra jobs around the house to earn the money. You can also encourage them to use their own money to buy Christmas gifts for family members. Watch their faces while they anticipate other people's reactions to their efforts!

## **MAKE AN APPRECIATION / GRATITUDE TREE**

Teaching appreciation is about looking for silver linings. But sometimes it can be hard for children to spot those and focus on them. Having a visual reminder of all the good things that are happening in our lives can help with that. You can have an appreciation tree or a jar: encourage everybody in your family to regularly write or draw one thing they appreciate or are grateful for and pop it on the tree. Make sure that you draw attention to the appreciation tree/jar on a regular basis by reading and talking about those notes of gratitude.

## **DELAY GRATIFICATION**

It is hard for anyone to appreciate what they have unless they are given a chance to delay gratification. And in the world of Amazon Prime that is even harder. But you can do this by saying "No" to buying the latest craze straight away and telling your child to wait until their Birthday or Christmas. You can also teach them to save up their pocket money to buy what they want.

## **ENCOURAGE THEM TO GIVE**

Make it a part of your family values and rituals to regularly give your time or possessions to others. This could be in the form of charity shops or food banks but there are also so many volunteering opportunities that the whole families can get stuck in. If you are not sure where to start, have a look at the following website:

<https://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/volunteering/>

Finally, don't be concerned that your child won't like you if you take the above steps.

Our job isn't to be our children's friends but to show them love and teach skills. Not encouraging them to develop appreciation and gratitude might make you more popular right now, but it won't help your child in the long run. As always, if you find that you need additional support, please contact me on [marijana@move-more.org](mailto:marijana@move-more.org) – I am more than happy to talk to you.

Until then, from everyone at Move More, we wish you all  
a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!