

What is gratitude?

Gratitude is being thankful for something. It is about expressing appreciation for what one has or for what someone has done. We can express gratitude for anything no matter how big or small. For example, gratitude can be expressed when noticing simple pleasures like the sunshine, or a warm drink, and it can also be expressed when something big has happened and someone has really made a difference to our lives.

Why is it important?

There are many benefits of expressing gratitude. Research has linked gratitude with greater happiness and wellbeing.

In fact, studies have shown the following benefits from regular gratitude practice:

- Lower blood pressure and stronger immune systems;
- Fewer feelings of isolation and loneliness;
- Higher levels of positive emotions;
- Greater happiness, optimism, joy and pleasure;
- Acting with more compassion and generosity;
- Better sleep, increased exercise and care of health; and
- Reduced depression.

Why might this occur? When you focus on what you have and don't have there is often a gap between the two which can lead to discontent. With gratitude, the focus is solely on what you have rather than what you do not have. Also note that you can't be angry, or envious or jealous at the same time you are expressing gratitude, so expressing gratitude can lead to greater expression of positive emotions.

"Gratitude helps you to grow and expand; gratitude brings joy and laughter into your life and into the lives of all those around you" - Eileen Caddy

How to increase gratitude?

One way to increase your expression of gratitude is to start a daily gratitude practice. This could take a variety of forms for example:

Gratitude diary - Start a gratitude diary, writing down 5 things you are grateful for each day.

Gratitude jar/box - Write a note each day and put it in the jar, you could do this individually or as a group (e.g. family or classroom). Make a time, perhaps monthly, to open the jar and reflect back on all the things you have been grateful for.

Daily reflection - Mentally reflect on three things you were grateful for during the day. You may want to do the practice verbally for example at dinner time, with other family members *"I'm grateful for my family, the coffee I had this morning and for the sunshine today"*.

Give thanks - Seek out people who have made a difference in your life and let them know you are thankful.

Tip - Creating new habits can take time. When starting out you may want to set a reminder in your phone or place a visual reminder around the house to help you to do your gratitude practice.

Sources and Links

Greater Good: <http://greatergood.berkeley.edu>

Seligman, M. E. P., Steen, T. T., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: Empirical validation of interventions. *American Psychologist*, 60(5), 410-421.