

# Gratitude and Kindness: A Modern Parents Guide to Raising Children in an Era of Entitlement

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Gratitude & Kindness

A Modern Parent's Guide to Raising Children

in an Era of Entitlement

Dr. Carla Fry & Dr. Lisa Ferrari

REGISTERED PSYCHOLOGISTS

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First Edition

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### Dedication

This book is dedicated to the numerous clients that we have worked with over the years. They lit our fire to put words to paper to share what we know about this entitlement phenomenon that is infecting our communities and families as we speak.

### Acknowledgments

We give thanks to our remarkable families for their flexibility, understanding, and patience. Five a.m. editing sessions, missed dinners, and postponed movie nights were forgiven and understood. They have inspired us with their words and their deeds, which helped to make this book the thriving beast that it is. Our families inspire our awe.

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Note by the Authors

If this book looks shiny and new at the end of your read of it, we have failed you. If this book has dog ears, three shades of highlighter pen marking up the chapters, notes in the margins, sticky notes on every third page, coffee stains, asterisks, bookmarks, and muffin crumbs stuck deep in the spine, we will have served you well.

Please read this book thinking about action, interaction, change, and movement. We would like to sit down with every one of you to discuss in person your trials and triumphs down the pathway of encouraging gratitude and kindness with your children and sidestepping the pitfalls of unwittingly encouraging entitlement. But alas, providing you with our best knowledge, tips, and how tos in the following pages will have to do.

Please do not be a passive recipient of information as you move through the chapters. When the mood strikes you, do the exercises, make lists, text tips to yourself to remind you to stay on track, and talk to your friends, your spouse, and your kids.

We are grateful to the many families and individuals who have provided heartfelt inspiration, have shared their joys and pains with us as we have gathered our data and clinical impressions and combed over the research of our peers to bring you this book.

We are grateful to you for picking up this book and considering some kind of change—even though we have not met you. Every ounce of change that each of us makes in this area affects our local, national, and international communities.

~ Dr. Carla Fry & Dr. Lisa Ferrari  
Preface

You have picked up this book, which means that you have a real commitment to your family and an earnest desire to do what is right for your children or for children you care about. The good news is that you are now further transforming yourself to become a more active part of the positive change movement in our local, regional, and global society.

Positive Psychology, a scientific area of psychology founded by Martin Seligman, is gaining in momentum and covers the study of positive emotions, engagement in activities, virtuous personal characteristics, and the search for paths to meaning and deeper fulfillment in life.<sup>1</sup> As the scientific basis for this book, it will help equip parents with specialized knowledge and tools that will help them to make the good changes they want to make in the lives of their children.

This book has been designed to address the cultural phenomenon of entitlement, and how we transform it from the norm to the exception by adjusting the way we talk, think, and act in front of our children. Entitlement has snuck its way into society like an unwanted party guest. We are here to show you how it got in—and how we can kick it back out. It is not up to our children. It is up to us.

As a parent, you know that you can only do what you can and, you are already likely doing lots of things to be proud of—as parents, leaders, and teachers. This guide should make it easier for you to take the next step on your parenting journey.

We are clinical psychologists who work with groundbreaking Positive Psychology methods and techniques with families and individuals. Our practice specializes in pediatrics, mental health, families, divorce adjustment and medical psychology. We are the co-founders of Real Parenting Lab, an enterprise consisting of multimedia and e-health research and services targeted at bringing positive change how tos to all.

As you read this book, you will become more aware of the realities of the trends in modern parenting and will learn how easily a child can be unwittingly encouraged to be ungrateful and uncaring in today's world. Best of all, you will be shown how to positively adjust these behaviors and attitudes based on solid clinical research and advice.

We have joined forces due to our shared passion, our commitment to children and families, and our growing interest in fostering kindness and gratitude in children. We have formed a practice based on cultivating resilience—the ability to bounce back from life's challenges—with individuals and families. After many long hours talking to teens, kids, and parents; comparing our clinical notes; engaging in our own research; and poring over the current research of our colleagues, this is what we are excited to share with you.

[1](#). Positive Psychology: Harnessing the power of happiness, mindfulness, and personal strength, Harvard Health Publications, 2013.

1

Why Do We Care about Gratitude & Kindness?

“As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.”

[John F. Kennedy]

We have wondered about the answer to this question as well. We have spent days, weeks, and months massaging the data, doing our own research, and processing the rich experiences uncovered in our psychology practice.

Every day parents come to us panic-stricken that their choices may be messing up their family, and wanting to prevent unhappy, unsuccessful, rude children.

We know what parents want. We know what they are fearful of.

What they find themselves not knowing sometimes is how to achieve what they want for their children.

When parents are focused on the physical health of their child, they turn to their medical doctor for advice. Parents can be easily reassured and relieved when their medical doctor tells them that to have a healthy child they need to get their child to bed on time, get him or her the flu shot, feed him or her balanced meals, and give him or her vitamins. You do these things because you understand the clear health benefits, and as a responsible parent, you want to take action. Most of you that are reading this book are doing these kinds of things every day. You incorporate these steps in your routine for the short- and long-term health benefits for your child.

We know that parents are desperate to do all that they can to avoid “screwing up” their children.

Now, what if the psychological doctors told you that all you need to do to have happy, successful, kind children, is to incorporate a few amazingly simple concepts to gain powerfully positive results?

We know that as motivated, caring parents keen to do the right thing —with this book in hand—you will do all that needs to be done. We are going to show you how.

In short, the amazingly simple concepts we refer to that have such a powerful impact are: gratitude and kindness.

We care because gratitude and kindness can increase a child’s happiness, decrease their stress, increase their ability to reach their goals, and allow them to have more caring friendships and social connections.

We have come to the conclusion that this is worth caring about. Okay, here we go...

Notes from the Real Parenting Lab about Gratitude and Kindness

We held a small group meeting with parents and children who wanted to learn more about gratitude and kindness. It was soon clear that each and every one of them came into the meeting pointing the finger at the other for NOT having enough of these two traits.

The parents agreed that the children were in serious need of a more in-depth understanding of what it meant to be grateful and kind. They complained almost immediately: “My children don’t appreciate what I do for them,” and, “They don’t know the sacrifices we’ve made to give them everything they have.”

The children were having none of it. “She doesn’t understand me at all,” one of the children said. “Even if I do say ‘Thank you’, my mom says my tone shows that I’m not really thankful. Nothing I do is ever good enough for my parents, so why bother?”

The good news is, the parents and children had something in common—both agreed that things had to change. Both parents and children felt undervalued or underappreciated, but they were simply thinking about the situation purely from their own perspective. It was fascinating to see how miscommunication and blame seemed to be the final step in communication for these families. We executed a simple exercise called Family Gratitude Dialogue (see Appendix 3) that involved both sides detailing what they were most grateful for. The children spoke about their parents, and the parents spoke about their children.

By the end of the group meeting, we had shown the parents how important it is to live and model these behaviors if they want their children to be more grateful and more kind. The parents were able to make a connection between everyday opportunities to facilitate acts of kindness. For instance, one child commented, “Sometimes when I ask if I can help mom, she says she’ll do it herself quicker, then she complains later that I never help and that I’m selfish.” The parents began to understand that it is not so much about blaming their children for being self-centered, but much more about showing them how to not be.

Authenticity and Consistency

Positive Psychology offers up some of the most cutting edge research about human happiness

today. Do not be fooled, however, by its seeming simplicity. Resilience and gratitude are far from new concepts, but we know now how to maximize these experiences and, conversely, how to miss maximizing them, too. How we demonstrate our gratitude makes the difference between whether we end up boosting our happiness or not.

More than simple emotions or attitudes, being kind and grateful are ways of being that philosophically make everything better in your life, according to researcher Robert Emmons, University of California Davis. He's one of the world's most published and respected social scientists. While studying the effects of gratitude, Emmons and his colleague, McCullough, concluded: "The ability to notice, appreciate, and savor the elements of one's life has been viewed as a crucial element of well-being."<sup>2</sup>

Parents we have worked with have told us that they are grateful to us for pointing out to them that there are often two ways of being: how we are at home, and how we are when we are in social situations. It is very important that we parents are authentic and consistent in showing gratitude in both situations.

What does a parent who authentically thanks family members for each small effort model when they are at a restaurant or shop and act without gratitude to their server or, vice versa, when a parent takes great effort to tip and thank, waiters, cashiers and the soccer coach, but almost never shows appreciation to their family at home?

Here is the first of many self-reflections we want you to consider as you read this book: Does your private and public self match up with regard to being grateful? Are you consistent? Is what you practice at home the same as that which you practice outside the home?

The family home is the teaching ground for children. As parents, we are very influential in the lives of our children. Our behavior directly influences them, and when we are not authentic and consistent, we cause confusion. It is essential that we have an awareness of the mixed messages we can send to our children. Preaching, versus practicing the value of gratitude in different situations shows that we are not being authentic and consistent. Through the years in our practice, it has become increasingly clear to us that children watch the behavior of their parents, but rarely listen to their lectures and pep talks.

Children can spot our lack of authenticity with eagle eyes, and

they will not swallow our message if we are not real and consistent in how we act.

### What Are You Teaching Your Children?

There's a perplexing phenomenon that occurs in parenting psychology that goes something like this: All the things you think you are teaching your children, you are NOT teaching them—and all the things you do not think you are teaching them, you actually are.

This is the reality of raising children: We parents are often not truly mindful of the lessons that we pass on, so a lot of bad habits are unfortunately easily learned along the way. We are sure you have probably heard the sayings, "Say what you mean and mean what you say" and "If you want your children to do it, you must do it first." We do not always live by these words of wisdom of past generations, but when it comes to kindness and gratitude, we must. We have to be grateful—genuinely grateful—if we want our children to be grateful too. Otherwise, children will learn to parrot the words and will never really understand what it means to live with gratitude.

When your child is at a friend's house and is given lunch by his friend's mother, hopefully he will

say “thank you”, but will he mean it? Has he mumbled the powerful words under his breath while looking at his broccoli, or recited it like a robot? Has he used eye contact and voice tone to: Demonstrate appreciation for being invited into the family home? Show appreciation that they shared their family meal with him?

We know, through Positive Psychology research and thought, that if your child is at a friend’s house for lunch, and if he has respect for other people and appreciation for the friend’s family, he may have said his “thank you” with true gratitude.

To continuously feed these important traits, our children need to experience what it is like to be grateful and kind so that it becomes part of their belief system. Speaking is only a small percentage of communication. As perceptive, insightful human beings, our children will pick up on the other forms of communication we may be underappreciative of, or clueless about, including the fact that our actions speak for us.

For example, they will see how we react to situations where gratitude can either be embraced or overlooked. If we ignore it, so will they. Not taking the way we speak to other people into account is a mistake. When thinking about what we are showing—and therefore teaching—our children about gratitude, we need to pay attention to our facial expressions, gestures, body language, paralinguistics (tone, pitch, inflection), and eye contact.

It is nearly impossible for us to hide the way we really feel about gratitude and kindness, which is why change needs to begin with us first. For example, if your children see you being over-the-top grateful to the neighbor for cutting part of your lawn but taking for granted their own efforts to tidy their room because you were busy checking emails and packing lunches, they are going to believe that this is the right way to behave. Unknowingly, you have just passed on poor behavior and the following confusing messages: Treat family with little-to-no gratitude. Display fake, non-authentic gratitude to non-family. Gratitude is not valuable.

Yikes! Not what you would have thought you were teaching, right?. Don’t worry: there is much that can be done to right all such inadvertent teachings and fumbled opportunities to teach gratitude the right way. There is almost always a second chance. First, let us look further in to what gratitude is, and what it is not.

### What is Gratitude?

You already know that gratitude is a way of being. Robert Emmons<sup>3</sup> says that it is made up of two components. These components must be understood so that they can be applied.

The first is that gratitude is an affirmation of goodness. By being grateful, we affirm that there are good things in the world that we have received. The second is that we recognize that the source for this goodness is outside ourselves.

We can be grateful for tangible and intangible things, for big things and small things. That green traffic light when you are late for a meeting, that time your daughter packed her own toys away, and the fact that you have two functioning eyes or ears are all things worth feeling gratitude for. This signature strength of noticing the good, experiencing thankfulness and, in some cases, expressing gratitude as Positive Psychology emphasizes, will help our children lead happier lives.

**GRATITUDE TIP** Gratitude is the thankful appreciation of what you receive in life as you acknowledge the goodness around you. It will help our children realize that goodness lies partially outside themselves, and it will connect them with something larger than the individual

experience—be it nature, spirituality, or connection to others.

Emmons and McCullough examined the impact of keeping a gratitude journal in their 2003 study. After 10 weeks, the group that focused on being grateful was more optimistic about their lives, less stressed, less depressed, and even visited the doctor less in that time. Turns out a “thank you” a day keeps the doctor away!

Our culture seems to have trained us to always reach for something new, something better. However, the practice of gratitude is a great way to really help us stop and appreciate what we already have. If we are not grateful for what we have now, chances are that when we get something new, we will not be truly grateful for the new thing for longer than it takes to send a text message.

### What Is Kindness?

In Positive Psychology, it is important to focus on creating positive emotions by activating key strengths. It is no secret that when children feel grateful, they behave in a kind manner. That is why, where there is gratitude, there is kindness. The two work as a unit. It is rare to have one without the other.

It has been proven that kindness makes people happier. A study was conducted involving researchers at Harvard Business School and the University of British Columbia.<sup>4</sup> They found that when people spent money on others, they felt happier, and that made them more likely to focus on making others happy in the future.

This is the positive feedback loop between kindness and happiness. Performing kind deeds for others does make you happier. But just telling your children to be kind does not make them more compassionate people. You need to cultivate conditions for compassion, so that your children can experience these emotions on their own.

Children need to be given opportunities to practice kindness, in order to experience the pleasure it generates. Gratitude is a great way to get your children to open up and allow them to experience the world in a positive light.

Social reciprocity theory<sup>5</sup> states that we treat others as we are treated. If someone is nice to your children, they will tend to be nice back. If someone is rude, mean, or unkind to your children, they will almost always respond with a similar behavior. Your goal is to practice kindness so that you increase the likelihood that your children return the kindness and pass it forward.

**Kindness Tip** Kindness can be defined as the act of being good, charitable, pleasant, and considerate of others. When you practice kindness, it becomes easier to be filled with gratitude. Likewise, when you practice gratitude, it becomes easier to be filled with kindness. Both have remarkable effects on happiness.

When your child is able to treat the rude, mean child with kindness or compassion, it is a step toward changing the world. But first they need to be shown, by you, that kindness is an essential part of life. It will be important to practice genuine gratitude and kindness in order to show your children meaningful ways to relate to others.

### Why These Two Social Skills Are Important

As we have already mentioned, gratitude and kindness are instrumental to the future happiness of your children: Grandmothers have always known it, and modern science has proven it. Kind deeds

for others make us happier people, and the happier we are, the more likely we are to perform kind acts.

A child who is grateful and kind early in life is given a rock star advantage in all things. By cultivating gratitude in your children, you simultaneously cultivate kindness.

Grateful Children = Kind Children.

When you are able to relish positive experiences and enjoy and appreciate the things that you already have, it lowers stress levels and significantly increases your happiness. Martin Seligman<sup>6</sup> studied the implications of Positive Psychology with 411 research participants. He instructed them to deliver a letter of gratitude to people in their lives they had never thanked before.

There was instantly a huge increase in their happiness scores and a major decrease in their depression scores. The benefits of this lasted for about a month—pretty significant in our opinion. It's clear we can encourage kindness with such a simple gratitude action and, that combined, the elements of kindness and gratitude make a potent recipe for happiness.

Gratitude and kindness also give us a huge social advantage. When your children practice these strengths, they become aware and conscious of other people's feelings, which results in positive social adjustment as they grow up.

As your children become internally motivated to care for others, they will develop their own tendencies toward compassion and other social behaviors that will help them connect with other people in powerful ways. Social connections and good relationships are essential for a happy life.

**Gratitude Action** To experience the wonderful effects of gratitude, write a gratitude letter to someone in your life to whom you cannot deliver the letter - someone who has passed away, perhaps. Take this opportunity to appreciate their kindness. Some of you may ask "what's the point of this gratitude action if you don't send the letter?". Research shows that you do not have to deliver the gratitude letters for them to have a positive effect on your social, physical or emotional well-being.

In fact, the simple answer is that the intention, appreciation and gratitude action of the grateful person doesn't require recognition or appreciation for what they have done to have the positive effect. This is about the grateful person's own increased life satisfaction, optimism, joy, pleasure, and better sleep and improved immune system.<sup>7</sup> It also helps children to be resilient, compassionate, and forgiving.

[7](#)

## The Entitled Child Today

Why are there so many children that feel entitled instead of grateful? Consistently in our workshops, there are an overwhelming majority of parents who state that their children and their communities are increasingly impacted by entitlement. Some are calling this an epidemic, and we find ourselves regularly being begged for help.

The entitled soul feels that they are owed advantages, friendship and rewards just because they are alive. These children get into more trouble at school. They are notoriously impatient, have low motivation, are demanding, and are described by others as "whiny" and "high maintenance." They tend to be hesitant to accept the consequences of their actions and almost never take a "NO" from

others eloquently or with graciousness.

To the modern parent, this can cause endless worries, not to mention the dreaded parental guilt: “Did I spoil my child?” “Where did I go wrong?” “It is all my fault...”

An entitled child is a child crying out for help—but that might not be obvious to them or to their parents. The help they are crying out for is linked to their own inability to regulate feelings such as sadness, stress, fear, anger, boredom, inadequacy, loneliness and rejection. A child who acts entitled is seeking stuff or special privileges as a means of distracting or deflecting from these uncomfortable feelings. Giving them the things they are demanding is not truly what they are looking for from their parents. It’s what it sounds like, but that’s not what it is. We encourage you to be more curious about what your child’s emotional state actually is. Cater to the emotional needs that may be fueling entitled behavior. Pull back from indulging in the material demands and granting privileges.

If you are reading this because your children lean more easily toward being entitled than grateful, not to worry. This is why we wrote the book—and why we want to spread the word to everyone, whether they have children or not. As Western culture spreads globally, it supports children and youth in always wanting more, and our children will expect that from everyone if nothing changes. Generation Y has a reputation as being narcissistic, ungrateful and entitled, expecting jobs, university placements, high salaries, and families and friends that give, give, give.

If your children are turning into these not-so-grateful members of society, you can still do something about it. Entitled children grow up to have a hard time at work, in social situations, and in life in general. You can prevent that by learning how to implement gratitude and kindness in all of your lives now.

Exercise: The Parenting Values Checklist

Do you know what your parenting values are? Many parents wing it when it comes to raising their children. They have a sense of the values they would like their children to have, but they have not mindfully taken the time to actually sit and reflect and make note of them.

Listing the values that you would like your children to have will allow you to parent your children according to these values in a more coherent manner. Before you take a closer look at how to enhance gratitude and kindness in your home, you need a clear vision of what you value and what you are hoping to support in terms of future qualities and strengths in your children. Check the qualities / values that you envision for your children:

Happiness

Inquisitive / Curious

Success

High Self-Esteem

Assertive

Honest

Leader

Respectful

Emotionally Connected

Grateful

Kind

Unique

Financially Successful

Persistent

Adventurous

Good Sense of Humor

Positive Attitude

Family Centered

Passionate

Love of Learning

Forgiving

Many Friendship

Generous

Motivated

Empathic

Spiritual

Risk Taker

Hard Working

Disciplined

Justice Focused

Loving

Affectionate

Compassionate

Creative

Self-Centered

Impatient / Demanding

Entitled

Greedy

---

Do you think you are raising an entitled child? Find out if you are unintentionally encouraging them to want, want, want all the time.

Entitled children are not born; they are made. In this Modern Parents Guide, you'll find out how to enrich your children's lives by making gratitude and kindness real to them.

Based on the latest in science and psychological research, this book will teach you the practical skills to buffer the effects of entitlement and turn your family around.

• Discover why YOU need to care about gratitude in your family.

• Find out where entitlement comes from and how it is continues to grow.

• Use our Family Change Model to help save your family from entitlement.

• Realize what YOU can do about it right now.

You have picked up this book, which means that you have a real commitment to your family and an earnest desire to do what is right for your children or for children you care about. The good news is that you are now further transforming yourself to become a more active part of the positive change movement in our local, regional, and global society. Positive Psychology, a scientific area of psychology founded by Martin Seligman, is gaining in momentum and covers the study of positive emotions, engagement in activities, virtuous personal characteristics, and the search for paths to meaning and deeper fulfillment in life. As the scientific basis for this book, it will help equip parents with specialized knowledge and tools that will help them to make the good changes they want to make in the lives of their children. This book has been designed to address the cultural phenomenon of entitlement, and how we transform it from the norm to the exception by adjusting the way we talk, think, and act in front of our children. Entitlement has snuck its way into society like an unwanted party guest. We are here to show you how it got in; and how we can kick it back out. It is not up to our children. It is up to us. As a parent, you know that you can only do what you can and, you are already likely doing lots of things to be proud of; as parents, leaders, and teachers. This guide should make it easier for you to take the next step on your parenting journey.

Written by two clinical psychologists in the field of parenting, this guide combines experiences from their clinic with current scientific data. Dr. Ferrari and Dr. Fry are often quoted by local and national lifestyle magazines and television for their expert advice and tips; from Canadian Living, Global News and Today's Parent to Flare, ELLE, Canadian Family, and more. Begin reading now and see how you can inoculate and safeguard against the damaging effects of our entitlement-enhancing society.

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