



Gifts & Gratitude

The science behind gift giving,
gratitude, and children's development.

A COLLECTION OF RESEARCH
CURATED BY THE CREATORS OF
SCIENTIFIC MOMMY & RIGOR

gratitude

as a personality trait

Some people are more inclined to feeling grateful. These people tend to be more optimistic in general and are more likely to think that others are going out of their way to be kind to them.

an in-the-moment emotion

This is the rush of happiness we get when we feel grateful for something that has happened. We can train our brains to be more responsive to these moments using the strategies outlined below.

Evidence-Based Strategies to Boost Gratitude

LISTS

You may have heard this one before: making a list of the things that you're grateful is one of the most researched and effective methods for boosting gratitude. Gratitude lists are meant to be written on a regular basis over the course of several weeks or months. This embeds grateful thinking into your routine, keeping your gratitude muscles toned.



LETTERS

Another tried and true method for boosting gratitude is to write a letter to someone thanking them. The exercise of reflecting and writing a letter to someone has been shown to have psychological benefits lasting as long as 3 months later.

This can be adapted for different ages. For younger children, this might mean having a conversation about a person they are grateful for and then using that conversation as inspiration for a drawing. As an alternative, you could record the conversation (and send it or save it for yourselves to listen to another time!).

For older children, ask them to think of someone they feel they didn't thank properly - a former teacher, coach, mentor, family member, friend, anyone. Then encourage them to write them a letter expressing their gratitude. If sending the letter is too much pressure, then that's okay! The act of writing and reflecting is what's important. They may feel so inspired by the process that they end up deciding to send it.

Greater Life Satisfaction

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Lower Anxiety & Depression

Greater Optimism

Higher Self Esteem

More Hope

The Long Term Benefits of Gratitude

the psychology of Gifts

The average American household spends approximately \$1,300 on gifts each year.

“It's not how much we give but how much love we put into giving.”

— MOTHER THERESA



GIFTS & THE BRAIN

Recent studies have used technology used to track brain activity to study the neurological effects of exchanging gifts. When friends exchange gifts, not only does it make them feel closer to one another, but it also improves their cognitive performance.

EXPERIENTIAL GIFTS

Compared to material gifts, experiential gifts have been shown in past studies to strengthen relationships, make people feel closer to one another, to lead to less buyer's remorse, and greater happiness for both the giver and receiver.

Studies of Mother's and Father's Day gifts have shown that parents tend to feel closer to their children when they are given experiential gifts. In contrast, material gifts are not linked to how close parents feel to their children.

Children, however, tend to appreciate material gifts more. It isn't until late adolescence that they appreciate experiential gifts more than material gifts.

COST

A gift doesn't need to be expensive; research has shown that there is no correlation between the cost of a gift and how much the gift recipient appreciates it.

3 *Points to Keep in Mind When Buying a Gift for a Child*



EXPERIENTIAL vs. MATERIAL GIFTS

Until children are in their late teens, they tend to appreciate material gifts more than experiential gifts. This is likely because younger children are still developing the cognitive skills necessary to fully appreciate experiences as memories. They might be thrilled in the moment to be doing something special, but they tend to struggle to look back on the memory with as much appreciation as an adult would. Material gifts, on the other hand, offer a tangible 'thing' that is easier for them to appreciate over time.



OPEN-ENDED TOYS

The ways that children can play with open-ended toys are limitless. Blocks, for example, are one of the most versatile toys a child can have. As children grow, how they interact with blocks become increasingly complex allowing for new avenues of exploration. Toys that have only one purpose tend to have shorter lifespans because they aren't as flexible and can't "grow" with the child.



TRADITIONS

The traditions that coincide with gift exchanges build children's anticipation of upcoming holidays. These traditions, not the contents of individual gifts, are often the memories that we carry with us into adulthood.

Children will also build their sense of identity as they come to realize what traditions are unique to their family, community, and culture.



RIGOR

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NOTE

The reported annual expenditure on gifts was calculated as 2% of the median annual income for a family of four, reported by the U.S. census for the year 2005 (US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013)).

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