

Developing gratitude and appreciation as a child

Most people would agree with the notion that you can't buy happiness. However, our materialistic society makes it difficult to separate our "things" from the happiness we seek. It is even harder to try to raise a child to understand that it is not what you own that defines your worth.

Despite the pressure from society to spend your way to happiness, you can help your child learn to find contentment from within.

Spend more time than money. It is often expected that anything from a special occasion to good behaviour should be rewarded with a gift or money. Instead, reward your child with extra time together doing something special.

Limit exposure to advertising. This is easy to do when your child is very young, but it becomes harder to avoid in later years. Watch ads together and talk about how the advertiser is portraying the product. Is it realistic? How does the ad exaggerate the product to make it seem more desirable?

Talk about wants and needs. The difference is not always clear to a child, who might believe that everything is a need. Help her learn to separate the two, and to prioritize the wants.

Take time for gratitude every day. Make it a daily habit to

think about and appreciate all the people and experiences, as well as the comforts and luxuries, in your lives. This creates an underlying feeling of satisfaction that helps curb the need to acquire more "stuff". Around the dinner table or just before bed are good times to focus on gratitude.

Give your child the

opportunity to manage money. Start an allowance at an early age, set some guidelines, and let your child begin to learn the basics of money management. Try not to make the allowance dependent on completing regular household chores. The purpose of an allowance is simply to pass on the responsibility of money you

would have otherwise spent on your child.

Lead by example. Your child learns the most by watching you. When you avoid unnecessary impulse buys, you are teaching him about priorities. When you save for a purchase rather than using a credit card, she learns about delayed gratification.

Demonstrate the importance of giving, whether you are passing along clothes and other items you no longer use, donating money or offering your time to help a person or a cause. This helps your child see that you are truly living an abundant life.

Shawna Munro

PARENTING POINTS

Shawna Munro works at the Elspeth Reid Family Resource Centre.