

MARCH  
2021

# Coach's Corner

## Gratitude and Growth

*Written by Meghan Pallante, Delaware Stars Technical Assistant*

At the Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood (DIEEC), we have been spending the month of March focusing our social media channels on gratitude and growth. There have always been countless reasons to be thankful for our early childhood professionals, but throughout the past year we have added about a million more! Early childhood professionals have been the backbone of the frontline workforce as we continue to navigate this pandemic. At DIEEC we are constantly in awe of the support that early childhood education programs provide to the children and families of Delaware. We look forward to continuing to find ways to say “thank you” for all that you do!

Back in November, our Coach’s Corner blog focused on gratitude as it pertains to the holiday season. This month, we hope to extend this theme by providing ideas for weaving gratitude into and focusing on growth in your daily routines.

# The Science of Gratitude

Researchers Robert Emmons and Michael McCullough have stated that feelings of gratitude stem from a personal outcome that is typically the result of the actions of another person (2003). Several studies have suggested that gratitude triggers the feel-good chemicals in our brains which increase feelings of happiness. During trying times, stopping to practice gratitude can be like taking a deep breath. It can help us to center ourselves and refocus. This is not to say that it is easy to just simply stop and feel thankful in difficult moments. It takes practice and consistency. Gratitude is more than just feeling thankful; it is a state of mind.

## Putting Gratitude into Practice

There are many ways to incorporate gratitude into your daily routine. It is all about finding the practice that best suits you! The best part is that no way is better than another and it doesn't cost a dime! Below are a few examples of how you can add a few minutes of gratitude to your day.



Journaling- Take a few minutes each day to write down a few things or people for which you are grateful. Choose the time of day that works best. If your mornings are busy, choose a different time. Ideally, you want to be able to have a few quiet minutes to reflect.



Make it social- Reach out to people in your life for whom you are grateful. Be intentional. Send them a note or text message about something specific that made you feel grateful. Choose one person per week to connect with. This not only helps you focus on feelings of gratitude but also brings joy to the people in your life.



Gratitude Jar- This is one that a family could do together. Decorate a jar. Each day, add something that brings you feelings of gratitude. Invite family members to do the same. When someone is having a tough day, open the jar and read all of the things that everyone has written. This will remind the whole family of all of the good things in your lives.

## Practicing Gratitude with Children

Children are able to understand what it means to be thankful at a young age. It is up to us to help them reflect on these feelings. Begin with talking to toddlers about saying thank you. If there is an opportunity for a toddler to say thank you, use that opportunity to talk with them about what it means. When first introducing gratitude, many young children will state that they are thankful for their toys or other material things. Don't discourage this! They are beginning to think about the things that bring them joy. This is a natural first step to understanding gratitude. Think about your current lesson plans and daily schedule. How can you work in practicing gratitude? Below are some simple ideas to add to your day!

1. Introduce the topic of gratitude to children during group time or during mealtimes. Invite 1 or 2 children to share something that they are grateful for each day during these times. Or have a few children share one kind thing they would like to do for someone that day. Each of these sharing activities help children focus on positivity. If you choose to do this activity as a group, I would suggest limiting the number of children who share each day so that you can complete the activity in a reasonable amount of time.
2. Model gratitude with the children. Talk about things you are thankful for during the day. Remind the children that you are grateful for them! Children learn so much by watching the adults around them. It is important for us to set a positive example. Think about how impactful it would be for them to hear the language of gratitude throughout their day.
3. Create a gratitude collage! Hang some large paper (such as butcher paper) on a wall in your space. Invite children to bring in photos or draw pictures of people and things for which they are grateful. Invite families to participate as well! The collage can continue to grow throughout the year.

## Focusing on Growth

One of the most important things about gratitude is that it can lead to growth. When going through a difficult time, finding positive things to focus on can be a coping mechanism. The past year, for many, has brought a lot of sadness and disappointment. It can be easy to reflect back and only think of the people, things, and events that we have missed. But I'm sure each of us could think of at least one instance of positivity or growth.

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## Posttraumatic Growth

Posttraumatic growth is a concept developed by psychologists, Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun. They defined posttraumatic growth as the positive developments that occur after experiencing a difficult life event. They found that this type of growth occurs in the following 5 areas:

- 1.Appreciation of life
- 2.Relationship with others
- 3.New possibilities in life
- 4.Personal strength
- 5.Spiritual change

It is important to remember that posttraumatic growth is not meant to discredit or downplay the struggles a person may have gone through. It is more a way to look at how a person can respond and persevere following a traumatic experience. I challenge each of you to take a moment to reflect on this past year through the lens of posttraumatic growth. Have you grown in any of the 5 areas listed above? Have there been any positive changes within your life that may have stemmed from the adjustments we've had to make over the past year? Feel free to share some of your thoughts on our social media page. My gratitude focus for this month is for our early childhood education community and the hope that in the near future we will be able to gather together again in person!

## Resources

### Gratitude

- [Small but Powerful Steps to Build a Sense of Gratitude](#)
- [8 Activities to Foster Gratitude with Children and Youth](#)
- [Zero to Three- Nurturing Gratitude](#)
- [Video: How to Talk to Kids About Gratitude](#)

### Posttraumatic Growth

- [Posttraumatic Growth- There can be positive change after adversity.](#)
- [Video: Posttraumatic Growth](#)