GRATITUDE JOURNAL FOR STUDENTS

Difficulty: CASUAL | Frequency: 1X/DAY | Duration: 10 MINS

WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

Adolescence can be a tumultuous time, as students face stress both in their academic life and their social life. By orienting students toward positive experiences and good relationships, the Gratitude Journal can help counterbalance these difficulties.

In particular, research suggests that gratitude journaling can help students become more satisfied with their school experience—which, in turn, helps them see school as more enjoyable, interesting, and educational, an attitude that sets them up for success inside and outside the classroom.

TIME REQUIRED

5-10 minutes a day, daily for two weeks

HOW TO DO IT

In this exercise, you will guide students to complete the Gratitude Journal practice, where they make a list of things they feel grateful for.

To introduce the exercise, the following prompt may be helpful:

> Grateful or thankful is the feeling we get when something good happens to us. Many of us feel grateful for family, friends, or pets. Feeling grateful could also come from a time when someone helped you. An example could be that you were having difficulty understanding your homework. You asked your older brother or sister or a parent to help you. They spent some time with you helping you to understand the assignment.
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> Think back over the past day and write down up to five things in your life that you are grateful or thankful for.

Research on this practice involved students in grades 6-7, but it can be adapted to other age groups.

When teaching about gratitude in a school setting, it is important to keep in mind that students differ in terms of culture, race, socioeconomic status, and religious background. This may mean that they also differ in the way they express and practice gratitude, including verbal expressions, gestures, acts of kindness or caring, rituals, or gifts. Welcoming discussion of these and other differences in the classroom will deepen students' understanding of gratitude.

In addition, the experience of gratitude may be challenging for children facing personal struggles, community suffering, or systemic inequality. Rather than simply encouraging them to "look on the bright side," researchers Jeffrey Froh and Giacomo Bono suggest listening deeply, empathizing, and acknowledging their feelings. This can help them cultivate resilience, which—along with other qualities like self-compassion and hope—could help plant the seeds for gratefulness.

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Froh, J. J., Sefick, W. J., & Emmons, R. A. (2008). Counting blessings in early adolescents: An experimental study of gratitude and subjective well-being. *The Journal of School Psychology, 46*(2), 213-233.

In this study, students in grades 6-7 who completed Gratitude Journals daily for two weeks ended up being more satisfied with their school—even three weeks afterward—than students who didn't do any journaling. Compared to students who journaled about their hassles, they also felt less negative emotion, greater satisfaction with their home, and more optimism.

WHY TO TRY IT

In order to keep a Gratitude Journal, students have to reflect on their days and remember the good parts. Students who have tried out this exercise tend to express their gratitude for a variety of things, including friends and family, their teachers and school, and basic needs like food and clothing.

Over time, this practice teaches students to pay more attention to the kindness of others—small acts that they might not have noticed otherwise. And it helps extend and expand feelings of thankfulness in response to those blessings. What's more, actually writing things down is key: Research suggests translating thoughts into concrete language makes us more aware of them, deepening their emotional impact.

SOURCES

Jeffrey J. Froh, Ph.D., Hofstra University

This practice is part of Greater Good in Action, a clearinghouse of the best research-tested methods for increasing happiness, resilience, kindness, and connection, created by the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley and HopeLab.

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