

# GRATITUDE LETTER FOR TEENS

Difficulty: **MODERATE** | Frequency: **1X/WEEK** | Duration: **10 MINS**



## WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

Focusing on the good can be hard for teens to do because their emotions fluctuate more frequently, especially during **early adolescence**. Even when teens do receive help and kindness, they may **struggle** with feeling dependent on others at a time when they're trying to gain more autonomy and independence.

Practicing gratitude can help teens tune into the positive feelings of gratitude, which has **been found** to increase happiness and well-being and reduce depression in adults. Grateful children also reap a wide range of benefits. They **tend** to have better family relationships and are more likely to avoid using substances. What's more, grateful youth **are** more motivated, engaged, and successful in school and **extracurricular activities**.

## TIME REQUIRED

This practice can take as little as 10 minutes a week.

## HOW TO DO IT

The later teen years are an ideal time to help young people establish positive habits that can continue to serve them well into adulthood. A practice of noticing, reflecting on, and writing about who and what they're grateful for can help teens strengthen their social connections and well-being.

To establish the habit, each week for a month, invite your teen to spend about five minutes reading expressions of gratitude from other people, including people their age. For example, they can read public gratitude journals online on **Thnx4** or notes on a public gratitude wall at school.

Next, invite your teen to spend about five minutes writing their own letter of gratitude to someone who was kind or helpful. They can focus each of their weekly gratitude letters on a positive experience with a friend, parent, teacher, or coach. These prompts may help:

- Think of someone who helped you with your health, like encouraged you to eat well, get a good night's sleep, or go on a nature hike.
- Think of someone who helped you with your schoolwork, like helped you prepare for a test, write an essay, or make progress on a group project.
- Think of someone who did something kind for you, like gave you a ride, cheered you up after a tough day, or held the door open for you.

In each of their gratitude letters, invite your teen to include any of these additional reflections:

- What were the intentions of this other person’s actions? What was the cost to them? What benefits did you receive because of their actions?
- How did gratitude make you feel connected and indebted to them?
- How did gratitude make you feel humbled and elevated—a positive, uplifting emotion like feeling moved—because of them?

If your teen feels compelled to, you can support them in sending or reading their letter to the person they wrote to, either in-person or over the phone, as an additional experience of sharing their gratitude.

## EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Armenta, C. N., Fritz, M. M., Walsh, L. C., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2020). [Satisfied yet striving: Gratitude fosters life satisfaction and improvement motivation in youth](#). *Emotion*.

Teens in ninth and tenth grade were randomly assigned to complete 10-minute activities weekly for four weeks. In one group, teens wrote gratitude letters to someone who was kind or helpful, and did other reflection activities related to gratitude. Another group simply worked on their organizational skills. Compared to the teens who did the organization activities, teens who practiced gratitude were more satisfied with their lives and more motivated to improve themselves throughout the month, as well as three months later.

## WHY TO TRY IT

When teens take the time to notice, reflect on, and write about their grateful feelings, they tend to feel greater elevation—and can be inspired to work toward their goals. They also feel more connected as they think about the support they receive from others in their efforts toward these goals. Finally, they feel just enough indebtedness to the people they are grateful for to compel them to make positive changes in their lives. All these feelings explain why gratitude helps teens to feel more satisfied with their lives and more motivation to improve themselves.

Gratitude can play an important role in teen motivation, happiness, and success.

## SOURCES

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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](#).

