

HUMILITY REFLECTION FOR TEENS

Difficulty: **MODERATE** | Frequency: **VARIABLE** | Duration: **VARIABLE**



WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

As children grow, they become better able to **notice** and appreciate humility, making them gravitate toward others who are humble. But in the age of social media, older children and teens can be bombarded by social pressure to self-promote and be self-absorbed. Humility offers a buffer against this.

Humility is also a **common trait** in purposeful young people, suggesting that it might support children in achieving their long-term life goals. Over time, children who grow into humble adults will tend to have **stronger relationships** and **better health**.

TIME REQUIRED

This practice can be done at regular intervals when parents want to help their teens cultivate humility. It can take as little as 15 minutes or as long as 45 minutes.

HOW TO DO IT

Humility is about being able to see and accept your strengths and limitations without defensiveness or judgment, as well as being open-minded to other's perspectives and to new information. This practice can help teens bolster their humility in that second sense—by orienting them toward others and helping them become more flexible and adaptable.

1. Ask your teen to consider a time when they acted humbly toward someone by doing something that put that person's interests first and theirs second, such as inviting a lonely new student to be their science lab partner rather than pairing up with their usual classmate. Inquire what they did and how they felt during and after.
2. Encourage your teen to reflect on a time when someone humbled themselves to them so that your teen could decide on the agenda for a shared experience, such as when their older sibling scrapped her weekend plans in order to hang out with them, because they were sad that their best friend moved away. Ask them: How did it feel when someone put aside their opinion or agenda and followed you so that you could take the lead? What were your feelings when you recognized that someone humbled themselves before you? Why do you think this person gave you this gift of humility?
3. Help your teen consider an upcoming occasion when they can be the gift-giver of humility to someone. Ask them how they plan to be open and adaptable to another person's opinions, needs, or wishes in a helpful way. Encourage them to think back to a time they fell short of being humble and consider what they could do differently to show humility.

In one study, this exercise helped college students as young as 17 years old cultivate humility when they did it on their own as part of a workbook. For younger teens, parents can help by providing both examples and encouragement. You can model how to do the exercise in front of your teen—reflecting on your own life—and encourage your teen to try it with you.

You can have this conversation with your teen during dinner, your commute, or a nature hike. You might write your reflections as letters or emails to each other, or your teen can do it privately in their journal.

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Lavelock, C. R., Worthington, Jr., E. L., Griffin, B. J., Garthe, R. C., Elnasseh, A., Davis, D. E., & Hook, J. N. (2017). [Still waters run deep: Humility as a master virtue](#). *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 45(4), 286-303.

Researchers randomly assigned college undergraduates to either a workbook with humility exercises, including the reflections in this practice, or alternative workbooks about forgiveness, patience, or self-control. The study found that participants in the humility group were more humble and had fewer negative emotions after the humility exercises compared to the other groups.

Worthington, Jr., E. L., & Allison, S. T. (2018). Becoming more humble—deliberately. In [Heroic humility: What the science of humility can say to people raised on self-focus](#) (pp. 209-227). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

This chapter reviews programs that have aimed to help increase humility and the current limitations of the science around helping people become humble. The authors review the humility workbook activity and the science behind it.

WHY IT WORKS

This practice helps teens (and parents) increase their awareness of the thoughts and feelings that humility evokes and encourages them to imagine acting with humility in the future.

When parents model thinking and acting with humility, teens learn what it means to work toward becoming humble. Ultimately, that involves shifting your orientation away from your own desires and perspectives and toward others.

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](#).

