GRATITUDE LETTER BY PARENTS

Difficulty: MODERATE | Frequency: VARIABLE | Duration: 10 MINS

WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

Parenting and daily responsibilities can leave us feeling underappreciated at times. Yet it is very likely that, in the midst of it all, we ourselves might miss opportunities to express gratitude for the people in our lives who help us feel cherished, protected, or accepted. This practice invites us to take a step back from our responsibilities and boost our own well-being by reflecting on and expressing our gratitude to others. In doing so, research suggests we might be setting ourselves up to have better physical and mental health, stronger relationships, and greater resilience.

In other words, we don't have to wait for a thank-you from others to feel better and reap the benefits of expressing gratitude.

TIME REQUIRED

The practice will take 10 –15 minutes.

HOW TO DO IT

If possible, find a comfortable and quiet space where you won't be disturbed. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths, if that feels supportive.

When you're ready, take a moment to think back over the course of your life and remember someone who did something that made you feel especially cherished, protected, or accepted. For example, this might be someone in your family or a close friend who has been especially important to you in this way.

For the next 10 minutes, write a letter of thanks to this person. Use the following guidelines to facilitate your process:

- Use whatever format you like; just remember to write as though you are directly addressing the person to whom you are grateful. If it's helpful, feel free to start the letter "Dear [Their Name]" and end with "Sincerely, [Your Name]."
- Describe in specific terms why you are grateful to this person and how their behavior affected your life.
- Describe what you are doing now and how you often remember their efforts.

- There is no need to worry about perfect grammar or spelling.

Although you may give your letter to the person, that isn't necessary. The purpose of this practice is to give you an opportunity to express your gratitude freely without anyone else needing to see it.

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Nelson-Coffey, S. K., Johnson, C., & Coffey, J. K. (2023). Safe haven gratitude improves emotions, well-being, and parenting outcomes among parents with high levels of attachment insecurity. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 18*(1), 75–85. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2021.1991454

In one study, predominantly white parents with at least one child under the age of 18 were asked to either write about their previous week or write a gratitude letter—either a general one or a "safe haven" letter focused on someone who made them feel cherished, protected, and accepted. Parents who wrote either kind of gratitude letter experienced more pleasant emotions, empathy, and meaning in life. What's more, "safe haven" gratitude letters boosted feelings of connectedness among parents who were high in attachment insecurity, and in turn, improved their well-being and parenting.

WHY TO TRY IT

Writing a gratitude letter, particularly one about someone who makes us feel cherished, protected, and accepted, can improve parents' emotions and sense of meaning by drawing their attention to the supportive and loving relationships in their lives. This shift helps parents feel more connected, which is essential for cultivating a deeper sense of purpose and meaning.

The letter writing also serves as a powerful reminder for parents that they, too, have been the recipients of someone else's care, love, and kindness. This can help counter unpleasant emotions that arise from the challenges of being a parent—renewing a sense of strength, appreciation, and hope.

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.