

# FAMILIES

TACKLING TOUGH TIMES

# TOGETHER



**OUR FAMILY CAN DO THIS!  
SHARING A POSITIVE OUTLOOK**





# FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



## Our Family Can Do This! Sharing a Positive Outlook

Our families may be spending more time together because of the pandemic. While some children are back at school, others are learning from home. Young children may feel sad, mad, or frustrated about not being able to do some of the things they enjoy doing. Helping our children to build resilience is easier when we help them to focus on what they **CAN** do instead of what they can't. Being grateful is one way to help our children look at things positively. We can help foster resilience in our children by encouraging them to think positively about the things they are grateful for!

### Encouragement and Positive Thinking

The benefits of having a positive outlook are endless. Positivity helps children to better deal with difficulties and also helps build coping skills. When our children feel better about themselves and the world around them, they are more likely to express their emotions in a positive way. Encouragement is also important for young children. When we encourage our children, it helps build their self-esteem and “can do” spirit. Children model what they see - if we encourage our children daily, they will, in turn, learn the benefits of encouraging others.

#### *Filling Someone’s Bucket Activity*

Filling someone’s bucket can be a fun way for children to spread positivity, gratitude and happiness. Filling a bucket can be as easy as saying or doing something nice for another person. Each time your child or family member says something nice or does something nice for someone, invite them to place an item like a note or pebble in the person’s bucket! [Click here](#) for one example of how this activity can be done with young children.

#### Supplies

- You may wish to use things you already have around the house such as jars or plastic containers. These can be filled with smaller items such as little toys.
- An alternative to a bucket could be making a poster and using check marks or stickers on a small poster to hang on the refrigerator. Encourage your child to fill the “buckets” of others as well as their own!
- There are several books for young children about filling someone’s bucket. You may enjoy viewing “[Have You Filled a Bucket Today?](#)” with your child.

#### *Scaffolding Tip*

- For toddlers, consider using sign language to help fill a bucket. Filling a bucket can be as easy as encouraging your toddler to use sign language for “[thank you](#)” or “[please](#).”

The above activity was adapted from [Fill a Bucket by Carol McCloud](#).

To learn more about the science behind bucket filling and character education, you can read:

- [The effect of character education literature of bucket filling strategies on the ability of 5-year-old students to self-regulate in a Montessori classroom.](#)
- [Proactive measures in combating bullying in schools: examining the effectiveness of the Bucket Fillers program in character building education.](#)



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## Our Family Can Do This! Sharing a Positive Outlook



FAMILY  
YOUTH

Many people might experience pockets of gratitude even when things get tough. Feeling grateful for what we have (instead of worrying about what we don't) helps with many different areas of our lives. A positive outlook and feeling grateful can help relieve stress and boost our ability to try again even when things don't work out the way we want them to. Sometimes, stepping outside into the sunshine or walking around the neighborhood can become a simple pleasure with extra meaning. Preparing food and enjoying a slow meal with our family may bring a moment of joy and laughter. We may also learn to appreciate quiet time cuddling with a pet or streaming a movie with our family. Thinking about what we are grateful for can help us appreciate the comforts of our homes and families when everything else feels out of control.

### Showing Our Gratitude

Brain research shows that positive emotions, like gratitude, can be good for our body and mind. Sharing gratitude can give us an instant mood boost and may increase a positive outlook which helps us to spread positivity to others. Positivity is an important part of being resilient. When we try to look at things in a positive way, we are better able to deal with life's stressors.

#### Gratitude Challenge Activity

Ask yourself: WHO or WHAT are you GRATEFUL for and WHY? You may feel grateful for something special or important, or you may feel grateful for something small – as long as it's a good thing or makes you feel good. It's good to be SPECIFIC about what you are grateful for so you can write down and remember meaningful events! Challenge yourself to find or see the good in your life every day, big or small. The more you find, the better! Below are some ways to keep track of WHO or WHAT you are GRATEFUL for and WHY.

- Keep a gratitude journal throughout the week. Each time you make an entry in the journal, be sure to list three things or people you are grateful for, and why.
- Create a video by yourself or with your family and record what you are grateful for. In the video, mention three things or people you are grateful for. Use #gratitude when sharing the video with friends and family.
- Take pictures that show what you are grateful for. You may wish to post the pictures on social media using #gratitude.
- Give thanks. Write a letter to someone and let them know why you are grateful for them.
- Dinner Table Activity: Start a daily gratitude tradition with your family. During mealtime, go around the table and encourage each person to share something they are grateful for. You may also wish to share what you are grateful for into your evening routine. Ask family members to name one thing they liked about their day.
- **Celebrate mistakes.** Gratitude isn't about perfections. Sometimes it can be most helpful to think about what you are grateful for when things don't go as planned or when things are difficult.

At the end of the week, take a few minutes to reflect on your week of gratitude. Did you notice things you were grateful for that you hadn't thought about before? How can you continue to think about what you are grateful for?

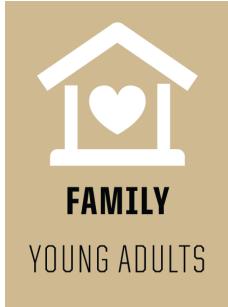
The above activity was adapted from [Thanks! A strengths-based gratitude curriculum for tweens and teens by Greater Good Science](#)

To learn more about the science behind the benefits of gratitude, you may wish to read the below research:

- [Happiness intervention decreased pain and depression, boosts happiness among primary care patients](#)



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## Our Family Can Do This! Sharing a Positive Outlook

Let's just be real — this pandemic sucks. It's scary and heartbreaking and has turned so many things upside down. It has also led to mountains of loss: there have been big losses, like the loss of lives and the loss of jobs. We are faced with multiple losses such as: loss of resources, loss of freedom, loss of social contacts, and loss of experiences and opportunities we were all looking forward to. And many of us feel that we have no control.

**But we do.**

True, we may not be able to control the spread of COVID-19 or the economy or whether we can return to school or our jobs. But we do have control over our actions and how we respond to what we are thinking and feeling. To shift our focus on finding moments of gratitude throughout our day. To learn some ways through which we can get a greater sense of control, we will focus on letting go of “mental pollution”.

### Mental Pollution (Hope, optimistic bias; confidence)

*Story from Heather, one of the team members for Families Together:* During a particularly rough time in my life, I gained an insight that has stayed with me. I was distractedly washing dishes and looked up to see the bottle of soap alongside the sink. As my eyes flashed to the label, I literally saw the phrase “mental pollution.” It struck me hard. I thought — that is what I am experiencing right now. I am overwhelmed with mental pollution. After turning the bottle slightly I could see the “environ-” at the end of line above, but hey — I went with it. Since then, the phrase has served me well.

Human beings are truly hard wired to hold on to negative experiences.

When we get negative thoughts about our missteps, failures, defeats, and even disasters stuck in our minds, the mental pollution can become so thick that it, clogs the rivers of our thoughts, and chokes our creative ideas. Rather than dwelling on it, we need to find ways to identify, pick up, and throw out the trash. Will the rubbish be gone for good? Likely not — it is an ongoing process. But I believe you will find, as I have, that practice makes it easier to sift through the junk and find the gems and to practice gratitude.

### Video Resources

- [The Surprising Science of Happiness](#)
- [Want to Be Happy? Be Grateful](#)

### *Internal Actions*

- Take control of your thoughts by setting aside a block of time, such as 10 minutes, to consider them fully.
- When **good** things happen, pause and think about them — your brain needs more time for the positive experiences to sink in.
- Every time you experience a setback or failure — challenge yourself to consider at least five accomplishments, achievements, and/or truly good things in your life. The research indicates a 1:5 ratio of negative to positive is what our brains need.

### *External Actions*

- Direct your productive energy outward by going outside and picking up physical garbage, exercising, or helping others from afar.
- Write a small note to everyone you live with or a short email to friends or family members if you're living alone right now to share something about them that you're grateful for.

In addition, if you're having a moment when you feel like things are too out of control, try a grounding activity like this one suggested by [Dr. Sarah Allen](#): To begin, find someplace comfortable to sit, then (if you feel comfortable) close your eyes and take a couple of deep breaths. Breathe in through your nose (count to three) and out through your mouth (count to three).

Now open your eyes and look around you. Name out loud:

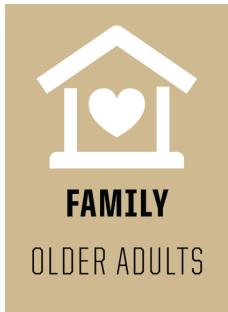
- 5 – things you can see (you can look within the room and out of the window)
- 4 – things you can feel (the silkiness of your skin, the texture of the material on your chair). What does your hair feel like? What is in front of you that you can touch?
- 3 – things you can hear (traffic noise or birds outside). When we are quiet and actually listening, things in our room constantly make noise, but typically we don't hear them.
- 2 – things you can smell (hopefully nothing awful!)
- 1 – thing you can taste. It might be a good idea to keep a piece of food handy when you are doing this grounding exercise! You can always leave your chair for this one and when you taste whatever it is you have chosen, take a small bite and let it sit in your mouth for a couple of seconds as you savor the flavor.
- Take a deep breath to end.



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It's difficult to be distant from those we love, even when it is for our own protection and the protection of others. Sharing memories can help our families feel connected by enabling us to express our gratitude about overcoming challenges. Reflecting on memories can also give rise to feelings of happiness and offer us a respite from our hectic world. It can be helpful to pause, take a deep breath and reflect on memories of times in our past we are grateful for.

### Sharing Memories

Sharing memories is a good way to connect with others and share what we are grateful for and why. Discussing past family milestones, such as the birth of a child or a wedding, can bring back fond memories and remind us of our many blessings. Memories of small moments in time are also important to share. Small moments we choose to share might include something as simple as the time a dragonfly landed on our hand or the night we sat outside collecting fireflies that lit up the evening sky. Sharing memories, while taking a moment to pause and take a deep breath, can provide us space to reset and reflect on why we are grateful.

### Making a Family Memory Book Activity

Making a family memory book can be done face-to-face or virtually. Consider including pictures of children, grandchildren, parents or grandparents at different times in their lives. Take time to look at the photos and think about the people and places pictured, and ask yourself why you are grateful for that moment in time. Think about the good in the moment, big or small. As you think about the photo, you may remember something you are grateful for that you hadn't thought of before. Consider sharing thoughts with your family or practice this on your own.

### Internal Action

Settle into a quiet and relaxing place and take a few deep breaths in and out through your nose as you think about the special person or place in one of the photos. Take a few minutes to picture the person, place or moment and think about why you are grateful. Repeat this with three different photos. To learn more about mindfulness activities, you may wish to read [Mindful Minutes](#).

### External Action

Reach out to family and friends and invite them to share three special pictures with you. Ask them to share why they chose the photos what they are grateful for.

Photos can bring up memories and feelings of closeness to those we love. These memories may also help family members to build a sense of hope, pride, gratitude and confidence.

To learn more about the science behind the importance of gratitude, you may wish to read the below research:

- [Using a Gratitude Intervention to Enhance Wellbeing in Older Adults](#)



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### Parents and Caregivers

The following activities are for Parents and Caregivers. Having a positive outlook and gratitude, for example, can help improve sleep, increase feelings of pleasure and joy, and reduce loneliness. Simple activities that take only a few minutes can be powerful in building gratitude and positivity.

Below are two positivity-building activities. "Counting Blessings" can be done when alone and "Pits and Peaks" can be done with others.

#### *Internal Action*

#### **Counting Blessings**

Counting blessings can be done anytime and in many ways.

- Begin by making a point each day to identify three things that have gone well or for which you are grateful for. This can take place during daily routines such as while brushing your teeth, showering or just before going to bed. Counting blessings may be easier on some days than others.
- Something as simple as remembering to get mail from the mailbox can be a blessing!
- Try writing down your blessings or save them so you can remember them later.
- Sharing your blessing is another way to improve your outlook.

#### *External Action*

#### **Pits and Peaks**

At mealtime or other times together, can lead a "pits and peaks" chat.

- Each family member shares a challenge experienced as well as the best thing that happened during the day. Starting with the pits and ending with the peaks allows everyone to end on a positive note. You may also share drawings of pits and – especially – peaks.
- Drawings help others to see how each family member is feeling. The drawings can be posted as reminders for the coming week and future family talks. To learn more about sharing Pits and Peaks you may watch this short video: [Pits and Peaks: Lunch and Learn](#)

The activities on this page were adapted from:

Emmons, R. A. (2008). *Thanks!*: How practicing gratitude can make you happier. Houghton Mifflin.

Emmons, R. A. (2010). Why gratitude is good. [https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why\\_gratitude\\_is\\_good](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why_gratitude_is_good)

Emmons, R. A. (2010). Ten ways to become more grateful.

[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/ten\\_ways\\_to\\_become\\_more\\_grateful1/](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/ten_ways_to_become_more_grateful1/)

Emmons, R. A. & McCullough, R. (2003). Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(2), 377-389.



# FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



College of Health and Human Sciences

## Welcome to Families Tackling Tough Times Together!

We hope you find the enclosed ideas and suggestions helpful as you care for your family during the pandemic. We know the pandemic is a very big challenge. How families cope can affect both parents and children for a long time.

We are scientists, educators, and students from Purdue University, and we are here to help! For nine weeks this fall, we will provide weekly collections of ideas for families to use to build on their strengths.

These tools are free, flexible, and informed by science. They are designed for families of all types, with tailored suggestions for children, youth, young adults and older adults, and suitable for both civilian and military families. We hope that your family will try one activity each week!

### Would you like to earn financial rewards?

We especially welcome families living in the continental US who are interested in trying out project materials and telling us about their experiences. These families can earn financial rewards by sharing about one hour of their time over the next two months. Sign up now at the link below!

[https://purdue.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_3vK1BJq2EiUksAJ](https://purdue.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3vK1BJq2EiUksAJ)

For more information

- Join the Families Together Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/HHSFamiliesTogether/>
- Or visit the project website: <https://www.hhs.purdue.edu/families-together/>