



Gratitude

Understanding Gratitude

“Gratitude implies humility—a recognition that we could not be who we are in life without the contributions of others. Gratitude also implies the recognition that it is possible for other forces to act towards us with beneficial, selfless motives. In a world that was nothing but injustice and cruelty, there would indeed be no possibility of gratitude. Being grateful is an acknowledgement that there are good and enjoyable things in the world.” Dr. Robert A. Emmons, published in *Thanks! How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier*.

Gratitude is a positive emotion that occurs when you understand and acknowledge that the positive experiences you have in life, small or large, are not owed to you, but are gifts. It is the opposite of taking things for granted. The experience of this emotion on a regular basis has been shown to have very positive effects on enthusiasm, energy, and well-being. Because of the positive benefits of Gratitude on health and happiness, it is important to increasing your resilience to bring the regular practice of gratitude into your life.

Research has shown that the positive effects of gratitude are multiplied as you increase:

- The strength of your feeling of gratitude.
- How often you experience gratitude in any given minute, hour or day.
- How many life circumstances you feel grateful for.
- The number of people in your life who you feel grateful to.





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Developing Gratitude

There are a number of exercises that can increase your sense of gratitude in each of these areas. They take just a few minutes a day and can have a life changing effect.

- **Begin each day with a two-minute gratitude session.** Find a quiet space of two minutes, close your eyes if possible, and bring to mind the things and people in your life you are grateful for. Remind yourself that they are gifts because none of this is owed to you.
- **Create a short prayer or affirmation concerning the gifts you have received.** Use this on a daily basis to remind yourself that even though you have worked and planned for what you have, life could have turned out differently.
- **Use a Daily Gratitude Journal.** Make it special by purchasing an inexpensive journal you can use just for this purpose. Every day write at least five things that you are grateful for. Your entries can be short or long, it doesn't matter. To begin, make a commitment to do this for at least two weeks and then work to develop it into a lifelong habit. The key to doing this is to never repeat an entry. Each new entry has to be different. You will find that this helps you to begin to pay attention to many of the small gifts that come into your life.
- **If you have children in your life, make it a practice to discuss gratitude on a daily basis.** Help them to create and use their own Gratitude Journal. Doing this is a wonderful teaching tool as you help your children to develop resilience.
- **Focus on the fact that Gratitude can turn difficulties into gifts and use this truth each time you are faced with a challenge in life.**
- **Write a Gratitude Letter.**
 - ◆ This exercise takes the form of identifying a person to whom you are grateful for their presence in your life or for something that was done for you recently or in the past. The person does not need to be present in your life now. This person should be someone to whom you believe you have not sufficiently, or ever, previously expressed your gratitude.
 - ◆ After you have identified this person, take a few minutes to write a letter expressing your gratitude, how your life was affected by the person's actions and specifically what the person did for which you are grateful. Be as specific as possible in describing the contribution they made to your well-being.
 - ◆ If you decide to actually express your gratitude to someone and you don't get the response you hoped for, remind yourself that this isn't a contract with the other person. You are not owed anything in return. This is about who you are.
- **Look for opportunities to be grateful for the experiences and people who come into your life on a minute-to-minute basis.** Get used to noticing when the traffic lights are timed just right for you, when someone holds the door or lets you into traffic. Pay attention to the beauty that you are surrounded by all the time—a flower, a tree, a vista. Try not to repeat things you notice. There is plenty to be grateful for without repeating.