

## Being Thankful as a 5-year-old

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My son just turned five. Every time my husband and I look at him, we muse to ourselves, "When did this happen?" We know that the journey of parenthood has only begun, but these beginning milestones still manage to be tear-jerkers. Just the other day, my husband's teary moment was the sight of cupcakes for our boy's Pre-K classmates. At that moment, it dawned on him that he goes to school and has friends!

Yes, indeed, in every way - in his height and weight, vocabulary, understanding of the world around him, and even his relationships with family and friends - he is growing. And one of the more challenging yet intriguing parts of his growth has been - and still is - developing a grateful heart. The theme of gratitude comes up every Thanksgiving. But it also presents itself whenever he has temper tantrums, or wishes for something that another kid has, or starts demanding for something he cannot or should not have.

I read an [article](#) that introduced the idea of "contentment" and how important it is to feel content as a young child as a foundation for feeling gratitude. I thought about that for a long time. Hmm, my boy complains a lot. What can I do to change that?



I noticed a pattern. Whenever my son had a fun playdate or a nice outing with the family, I asked him at the end of the day, "Did you have fun today?" and to my shock, he would say, "No. Today wasn't fun for me." At first, I was puzzled, alarmed, even angry. How could he want more when everything went the way he wanted? Why can't he be grateful for all that he had been given that day? However, prodding deeper and taking note of his little outbursts, "Today was so short. It was too short for me!", I realized that he wasn't trying to complain or diminish the good times he had. He simply wanted the acknowledgment that he wants more. It was in fact the opposite of lack of gratitude, it was a little person's way of expressing just how much he liked what he had. But he was a little person so the only way he knew how to say that was, "No, today wasn't fun for me." So I taught him a new phrase. Now, he says, "Yes, today was so fun, I wish it was longer." This way, a more productive discussion ensues on how we can make the next day just as much fun in its own way.

These were some of our baby steps to introducing gratitude, but fast forward to this Thanksgiving season. My 5-year-old boy casually exclaimed something deeply profound, "Sometimes, the best things are the things that we already have." I agreed with him and asked where he received this inspiration. He just shrugged his shoulders. Full disclosure though, a few moments later, he attempted to be wise again and said, "Sometimes, the best things are the new toys we get!" I said, "Uh, let's go back to that first thing you said." I suppose that in his mind, the two statements were of equal importance. As a mom, however, it was my job to appreciate one more than the other, and clearly communicate that distinction, so that he could see which perspective is valued in our family.

I learned that the process of developing a grateful heart cannot be rushed, and will probably take a lifetime. It requires mindfulness of everyday moments and diligence in helping our children process their thoughts and experiences. Moreover, as parents, the most precious thing we can do to teach gratitude is to model it for our children. How often do I make the effort to be grateful for my day?

To all families everywhere, I wish you a very happy and gratitude-filled Thanksgiving!