Be Gracious to your family

It’s never too late to work on improving the emotional environment of your home. Making positive changes in how you communicate and show gratitude with family can result in a more comfortable, loving dynamic. Here are some ideas on how you can show gratitude towards your family members:

Offer your full attention when others are talking. It is easy to dismiss a child or spouse’s story. When someone is speaking, offer your undivided attention. Listen closely and understand what it is your family member is saying. Take time to ask questions, learn about each other’s day, help with problem solving and provide encouragement.

Encourage manners with yourself and others. Be sure that when you are asking for help from a family member to always remember to use basic manners. Saying please and thank you shows your family that you are thankful for the help they provide. It is also important to be a role model for your children by using manners during your daily routine.

Reward others. You can offer a reward to family members to show your gratitude. Rewards don’t always have to come in the form of a material item. Rewards can be expressed through love, affection and spending quality time together as a family.

Make family time. Sometimes family members lose touch with each other because they’re so busy. Despite the crowded schedules, plan at least some family time each week such as movie night, game night, outdoor sports night, etc. Also, try to have dinner together as often as possible.

Get ready to share your “thanks” during November. Take a picture of you or something that is meaningful to you and post it on Facebook, Twitter or Pinterest using #my4thanks. This is a great way to show your thanks and build awareness about the importance of showing gratitude towards each other.
Positive communication within relationships

Communication is a key element in the success of our family, social and working lives. Consider these tips for improving your communication skills…positively!

Focus on listening. Active listening is the foundation for all effective communication. Trying to understand a speaker’s points can help you establish a better connection.

• Focus on the speaker and don’t give in to distractions.
• Repeat and clarify the speaker’s points. Show that you’re focused on understanding them.
• Wait until the other person is finished speaking. Put aside your views and really listen.
• Intersperse small responses such as “right” or “I see” to indicate that you’re listening.

Use body language, show interest. You can use your body to show that you’re invested in the conversation. Sit or stand up straight, maintain direct eye contact with the person speaking, and nod your head to acknowledge their statements.

Be encouraging, have empathy. Offer encouragement and authentic praise to others. Show that you value and appreciate them. Also, whenever appropriate, use people’s first names.

Be positive and assertive. If you disagree with someone’s position, try some positive assertiveness. A response such as, “I understand your point, but…” helps to keep communication flowing.

With children and teens, ask open-ended questions. To better engage kids, get in the habit of asking them questions that require more than a one-word “yes” or “no” answer. Ask them for their opinions about their recent experiences, current events or entertainment.

Establish an optimistic tone. While there are certainly plenty of difficult challenges in life and work, try not to dwell on the negatives with others. In your conversations, shift gears as soon as possible into active problem solving so you can envision positive outcomes. Also, don’t participate in gossip or negative talk about others; it’s never helpful.

Wear a smile whenever possible. Smiling at others almost always fosters positive interactions and better understanding between people.

Value and nurture your friendships

There are many ways to help your friendships grow over the long term.

• Try to be more conscious of your friendships. Sometimes we get busy and forget our important friends. Remember that you might lose touch if you don’t reach out.
• Make an effort to overlook a friend’s shortcomings or eccentricities. Accept them as they are. Appreciate what makes each of them unique.
• Be respectful, even when you disagree. Don’t use harsh language or sarcasm to criticize a friend—in person or to a third party.
• Be willing to apologize when you are wrong about something. Don’t hold onto the conflicts or missteps of the past. Focus on the present and move forward.
• Keep it positive. Give your friends space to vent about their current struggles, but before too long, move toward seeking positive solutions to problems.
• Be there in good times and bad. Enjoy the good times together, but more importantly, make yourself available when a friend is struggling and needs help.
• Show your gratitude. Remind friends that they mean a lot to you.
Decrease stress during the holidays

Here are some ways to steer your holiday season away from stress and more toward comfort and joy.

- Be realistic about what you can do prior to and during the holidays. Avoid taking on too much or trying to visit everyone on the same day.
- Remind yourself that everything about your holiday season doesn’t have to be perfect or just like last year.
- Don’t try to do it all. Brainstorm for shortcuts to getting your to-do list completed, and delegate some tasks to family members.
- Keep control of eating and drinking. You can start by having a snack before your holiday gatherings. Then stick to smaller portions, alternate drinks of water with other beverages and take a walk outside after big meals.
- Stick with your workout plan over the holidays. This will help keep stress in check and burn some of those extra calories.
- Set aside time to see a movie, read a book or schedule an alternative health session (e.g., massage or acupuncture) over the holidays. Or, just take some quiet meditative time and slow down.

Ideas for handling family stress at the holidays

Consider these tips for avoiding the stress of family holiday celebrations.

- Hot topics like politics and religion can derail the fun of family gatherings. If a discussion gets heavy, defuse it with humor or just change the subject.
- Don’t use holiday celebrations to confront others. This isn’t the best time to revive old conflicts.
- Be sensitive to people’s need for private space. Give everyone (including yourself) the opportunity to step aside for some private time or a long outdoor walk as a healthy escape.
- When planning holiday get-togethers, try to ensure that no one feels forced to continue a tradition they no longer enjoy. Discuss specific activities in advance; if you can’t agree on what to change, maybe it’s best to make other plans this year.
- Establish your boundaries. You can say no to certain requests, and you can exit a gathering if someone in your family needs a break.