



FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



FAMILY

CHILDREN

Our Family Can Do This! Sharing a Positive Outlook

Right now we are spending a lot of time at home with our families. Young children might miss their friends and teachers and wish they could go out and do the things they are used to doing. It's okay for children to feel sad, mad, or frustrated about not being able to do some of the things they like to do. Helping children to build resilience is easier when we focus on what children **CAN** do! Let's focus together on helping our children help others!

This week we will focus on an activity that encourages a feeling of happiness and a positive outlook in children and others. A fun way to encourage a positive outlook in children is by doing an activity that encourages them to "fill someone's bucket."

Filling Someone's Bucket

Description:

- **Filling someone's bucket** can be a fun way for children to spread positivity and feelings of happiness. Filling a bucket can be as easy as complimenting one another or doing something nice for someone. Each time a child says something nice or does something nice for someone, they get to place an item in the person's bucket! You may also wish to encourage the child to place an item in their own bucket as well, as a "reward" for spreading happiness!

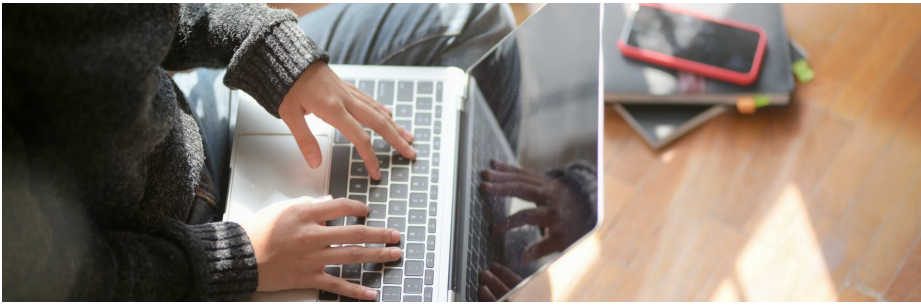
Supplies:

- For young children, it's fun to have a concrete object they can pretend is their bucket. Use things you already have around the house such as jars or plastic containers. These can be filled with smaller items such as small toys.
- You can even use check marks or stickers on a small poster displayed on the refrigerator. Encourage children to fill the "buckets" of others as well as their own!
- There are several books with stories about filling someone's bucket. You may enjoy viewing [*Have You Filled a Bucket Today?*](#) with your child.

Scaffolding tips:

- For toddlers who are not yet able to fill someone's bucket with kind words or acts, consider using sign language to help fill a bucket. Filling a bucket can be as easy as encouraging a toddler to use sign language for "[*thank you*](#)" or "[*please*](#)."
- Older children may need an introduction to, or review of the word "[*compliment*](#)."

This activity was adapted from *Fill a Bucket* by Carol McCloud, <https://bucketfillers101.com/team-cmccloud/>



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FAMILY

YOUTH

Our Family Can Do This! Sharing a Positive Outlook

Brain research shows that positive emotions, like gratitude, can benefit our bodies and minds. Feeling grateful for what we have (instead of obsessing about what we don't) helps with many different aspects of our lives — like relieving stress and boosting determination to try again when things don't work out the way we want.

You might be experiencing pockets of gratitude right now. Stepping outside into the sunshine or walking around the neighborhood after days spent indoors becomes a simple pleasure with extra meaning. Preparing food and enjoying a slow meal with your family brings a moment of joy and laughter. Quiet time at home cuddling with your pet or having the time to stream a movie with your family can help you appreciate the comforts of your home and family when everything else feels out of control. Here are some ideas to help you capture the pockets of gratitude you are experiencing right now.

Gratitude Challenge

WHO or WHAT are you GRATEFUL for and WHY? Did something good happen recently that you feel grateful for? Do you feel grateful for someone? It can be something special or important, or it can be something small — as long as it's a good thing or makes you feel good. Just be SPECIFIC so that you can record and recall meaningful events! Challenge yourself to find or see the good in your life every day. The more the better! It could be big or small things.

How do you keep track of WHO or WHAT you are GRATEFUL for and WHY?

- **Keep a gratitude journal.** List three things or people you are grateful for today and say why. Do this as many times as you can during the week.
- **Record yourself on the phone by making a video.** Mention in the video three things or people you are grateful for.
- **Create a TikTok with on your own or with your family and record what you are grateful for.** Use the #gratitude when sharing the TikTok with friends and family.
- **Take pictures that document what you are grateful for.** Post them on Instagram or share them on your story with the #gratitude.
- **Give thanks.** Write a letter to someone to let them know what you are so grateful for and why.
- **Start a daily gratitude tradition.** During mealtime, go around the table and share something that you are grateful for that day or incorporate it into the evening routine. Ask yourself or a family member "What is one thing that you liked about today?"
- **Celebrate mistakes.** Staying at home can produce high levels of stress, gratitude isn't about documenting perfections. Gratitude is most helpful when things don't go as planned or when things are difficult. Validate your feelings of frustration or sadness and remember to reflect through listening deeply, empathizing and acknowledging your feelings.

At the end of the week take a few minutes to reflect on your week of gratitude. What did you notice? Did someone do something nice or helpful? Why did this person do it? What they do to make it happen? And how did it affect you? If it didn't involve another person and it was just a good thing that happened, then think about your experience and how it affected you.

These activities were adapted from Tanks! A Strengths-Based Gratitude Curriculum for Tweens and Teens by the Greater Good Science
<https://ggsc.berkeley.edu/>



FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



FAMILY

YOUNG ADULT

Our Family Can Do This! Sharing a Positive Outlook

Let's just be blunt — 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. In addition, there have been less tangible but no less important losses as well: loss of resources, loss of freedom, loss of social contacts, and loss of experiences and opportunities we were all anticipating. And perhaps the most difficult part of these losses is that they have caused so many of us to 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 thoughts, our feelings, and our actions. That's what we focus on in this space week to week: the ways we can control our thoughts and feelings to shift them in a more optimistic direction, the behaviors we can engage in to help us feel a greater sense of self-control, and the ways we can accept what we cannot control. For this week, we'll hone in on two pieces: letting go of "mental pollution" and mastering what is possible and letting go of the rest.

Sub-theme 1: 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. Neuroscientists have found that our brains are significantly more active and also active for longer periods of time when we are exposed to negative versus positive stimuli. Some scholars believe that this tendency, which they call the negativity bias, was at one point necessary for our survival, but has since outlived its functionality.

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 disrupts the flow of our awareness, clogs the rivers of our thoughts, and chokes our creative ideas. Rather than spending our energy on ruminating, 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.

Video resources:

- https://www.ted.com/talks/dan_gilbert_the_surprising_science_of_happiness
- https://www.ted.com/talks/david_steindl_rast_want_to_be_happy_be_grateful

Internal actions:

- Recognize and acknowledge your negative thoughts. Trying to block or avoid them takes more energy than it is worth and you will just get exhausted.
- Take control of your thoughts by setting aside a block of time, such as 10 minutes, to consider them fully.
- Sort through your thoughts. Which ones can be recycled into lessons learned? What situations in your life do you have control over and which do you not have control over?
- De-catastrophize by pushing your thoughts to the limit. What if the worse did occur? Then what? Be honest with yourself and consider options you would have for coping.
- 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 a far.
- 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 tell them something about them that you're grateful for.

Sub-theme 2: Mastering what is possible and letting go of the rest (accept what cannot be changed)

Story:

This parable is told of a farmer who owned an old mule. The mule fell into the farmer's well. The farmer heard the mule praying or whatever mules do when they fall into wells.

After carefully assessing the situation, the farmer sympathized with the mule, but decided that neither the mule nor the well was worth the trouble of saving. Instead, he called his neighbors together, told them what had happened, and enlisted them to help haul dirt to bury the old mule in the well and put her out of her misery.

Initially the old mule was distraught! But as the farmer and his neighbors continued shoveling and the dirt hit her back, a thought struck her. It suddenly dawned on her that every time a shovel load of dirt landed on her back, SHE WOULD SHAKE IT OFF AND STEP UP!

This she did, blow after blow. "Shake it off and step up... shake it off and step up... shake it off and step up!" She repeated to encourage herself. No matter how painful the blows, or how distressing the situation seemed, the old mule fought panic and just kept right on SHAKING IT OFF AND STEPPING UP!

It wasn't long before the old mule, battered and exhausted, stepped triumphantly over the wall of that well! What seemed like it would bury her actually helped her ... all because she took control over what she could.

Video resources:

- https://www.ted.com/talks/phil_hansen_embrace_the_shake

Internal actions:

Mastering what is possible and letting go of the rest starts with understanding the difference between what is and what is not within your control. As [Amy Morin suggests in Psychology Today](#), determining what you can control can be as simply "taking a minute to examine the things you have control over. You can't prevent a storm from coming, but you can prepare for it. You can't control how someone else behaves, but you can control how you react. Recognize that, sometimes, all you can control is your effort and your attitude. When you put your energy into the things you can control, you'll be much more effective."

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 breathes. In through your nose (count to three), out through your mouth (to the count of 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? A table perhaps?)
- 3 – things you can hear (traffic noise or birds outside, when you are quiet and actually listening things in your room constantly make a 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 chocolate handy in case you are doing this grounding exercise! You can always leave your chair for this one and when you taste whatever it is that you have chosen, take a small bite and let it swirl around your mouth for a couple of seconds, really savoring the flavor).

Take a deep breath to end.

External actions:

Sometimes even little things, like cleaning or organizing our space, can help us feel more in control. And (added bonus!) they can also help out the people who we're living with! Why not take back some control by choosing and completing a small, manageable house project that would be helpful to yourself or the folks you're living with.



FAMILIES

TACKLING TOUGH TIMES

TOGETHER



FAMILY

OLDER ADULTS

Our Family Can Do This! Sharing a Positive Outlook

It's difficult to be distant from loved ones even when it is for their and our protection. Sharing memories can help families feel connected. They can also bring feelings of happiness and remind families of their strengths. Older adults may have faced difficult challenges in the past that allow them to provide insights and reassurance to others today.

Here are some ways that you and the older members of your family can share memories:

Display family photos in unusual places. When you or other family members notice one, you can use it as an opportunity to talk about what makes it special.

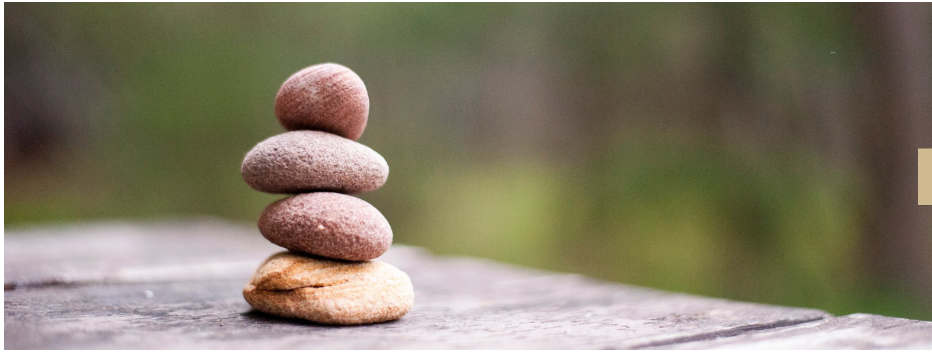
Decorate empty boxes with family photos. You can use the boxes for any purpose around the house (e.g. a pen holder). If there are toddlers or young kids in the house, they can use the boxes as building toys. They may even enjoy helping to decorate!

Make a memory book. Pictures of children, grandchildren, parents, or grandparents from different times in their lives can be included.

Share photos and stories virtually. There are many ways to connect from a distance — phone, FaceTime, Skype, etc. Some ideas of things to share are:

- Pictures of your children or yourself when you were young
- Happy memories
- Times you overcame challenges

Photos can conjure up memories and bring feelings of closeness to those you love. Memories can remind you of times your family persevered. These memories can help your family build a sense of hope, pride, and confidence about the future.



FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



COMMUNITY

Our Family Can Do This! Sharing a Positive Outlook

Communities and neighborhoods can feel disconnected during this period of social distancing. Spreading cheer can help communities regain a sense of connection. Community connectedness helps families keep focused on their strengths during challenging times.

Spreading cheer can also:

- Help combat feelings of disconnect, despair, and helplessness.
- Provide a sense of control in situations that are not controllable.
- Give you, your family members, and your neighbors more confidence in coping.

Here are some ways you can spread cheer in your neighborhood and community. These simple acts can encourage others to stay strong in this time of social distancing.

Paint kindness rocks. Kindness rocks are rocks that you paint and leave for others to find and collect. Some ideas are to:

- Decorate with anything that will bring a smile to whoever finds it.
- Include an inspirational message such as "love" or "hope" or "peace."

Kindness rocks spread positivity around your community. Your family can enjoy seeing them too!

Make window or sidewalk chalk art. Window and sidewalk chalk art is a way to share messages of hope and cheer with your neighbors, and connect from a distance. Some ideas are to:

- Share themes with your neighbors for everyone to participate in;
- Join a trending idea like "Hearts in the Window", "A World of Hearts" or "Heart Hunters" which asks people to place colorful hearts in their window for neighbors to enjoy;
- Make zoo animals so children can then hunt around the neighborhood for exotic animals;
- Write messages of encouragement, hope, and reassurance; or
- Map out obstacles courses that people can engage in during a walk.

Creating art can give you a sense of purpose, get family members out of the house, and lift neighbors' spirits. It is a reminder that everyone is in this together.

Celebrate birthdays and milestones. There are nice ways for people to celebrate important events in the lives of their neighbors. One idea is to:

- At a safe distance, gather outside the relevant house to sing "Happy Birthday" or applaud. Local police have been willing to visit children's homes with lights flashing to help celebrate birthdays.

Connect with your neighbors online. Connecting online is a great way to stay in touch with one another, learn about local events, and offer services (e.g. grocery shopping). One idea is to:

- Start or join a neighborhood Facebook group or email list.



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Our Family Can Do This! Sharing a Positive Outlook

Parents and Caregivers

Given how good they are for us, positive feelings like happiness, gratitude, compassion and empathy probably get too little attention. Gratitude, for example, can help to improve sleep, increase feelings of pleasure and joy, and reduce loneliness. Paying more attention to gratitude makes it easier to avoid dwelling on negatives, and harder for stress to overwhelm us. Simple activities that take only a few minutes can be powerful in building gratitude and positivity.

In the press of daily responsibilities, parents and caregivers often put their own needs aside to care for others. But the airlines' instruction to put your own mask before helping others applies here as well. Parents are their children's most important teachers, and when parents take good care of themselves, children learn to do that too.

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

Counting Blessings

This can be done anytime and in many ways, but one easy strategy is to make a point each day at some regular time — such as while brushing teeth or showering or just before bed — of identifying three things that have gone well or for which to be grateful in the past day. This will be easier on some days than others — sometimes remembering to get mail from the mailbox is something to be grateful for! These could be written down and posted or saved so that you can remember them later.

Pits and Peaks

At mealtime or other times together, parents or caregivers can lead a "pits and peaks" discussion. Each person can share a challenge and 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. Family members also can share pictures of pits and — especially — peaks to visualize how each member is feeling. These can be posted as reminders for the coming week and future family discussions.

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

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

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.