

THANK YOU NOTES

Still in Style

In this day of texting and emails, the effort of sending a handwritten thank you note communicates an important message of appreciation.

Requiring your children to write thank you notes helps instill a lifelong habit that they can carry into adulthood. Besides birthday and holiday gift thank you's, have your kids write notes when someone does something special for them, such as a grandparent taking them to the amusement park. "By taking the time to express their thanks, kids focus on the thought and effort the person put into buying or doing something special," says Suzanna Narducci, mother of two and founder of www.TweenParent.com.

Many parents wonder if email thank you notes can replace handwritten ones. According to Jodi Smith, president of Mannersmith Etiquette Consulting, "An email thank you note says that you care enough to do the very least." Smith says an email thank you is appropriate when you want the giver to know quickly that your child received or really appreciated the present and should be used in addition to a thank you note, not instead of it. Follow the email with your child's handwritten or drawn thank you.

Create a Routine

Have your child participate in writing thank you notes as soon as she is old enough to hold a crayon. Smith encourages parents to have their toddler play with or hold the gift while the parent writes the thank you note. Parent and child can talk about the present so the child can begin to make the connection. When the parent is done with the note, have the toddler add their scribble. For preschoolers, Smith recommends that parents have the child draw a picture on the thank you note and then ask the child what they like about the present so that can be included in the note.

"Once a child begins elementary school, have her dictate the thank you note for the parent to write and then have her sign her name on the card," says Smith. By age 7, most children can complete pre-purchased or homemade fill-in-the-blank cards and then progress to writing the entire note. Smith reminds parents to consider their child's abilities when determining the level of participation and the number of thank you notes that the child can reasonably complete in one sitting.



The Process

While your child opens his presents make a list of each gift and who gave him the present. Keep your handwriting large and legible. Draw a checkbox next to each name so that he can check off that he has finished writing the thank you note.

Let your child pick out the stationary to use for his thank you notes. He can decorate the envelope with stickers. Another fun way to personalize the notes is to purchase blank note cards and have your child decorate the front of the cards with a picture.

Smith suggests parents make the actual writing of the thank you cards as fun as they can. "Be positive and point out how nice it is that the person cared enough about them to get them such a special present," says Smith.

When your child is writing their thank you notes, sit down at the table with them and write your own thank you notes. Dads should also be encouraged to do the same because it is important for children to see that it's something that both men and women write.

Addressing

You can address the envelope for your child to ensure that the address is legible. For young children the task of addressing can be challenging and the act of writing the note is more important. Have your child put the stamp on the envelope and take him to the mailbox with you.

If the recipient is a family member, ask them to tell your child how much they appreciated their note. Positive reinforcement can go a long way. By understanding how much thank you notes are appreciated, your child will be encouraged to develop a lifelong habit of writing thank you notes.

— Jennifer Gregory