



## Connecting your kids to the spirit of giving

Emphasizing gratitude this Thanksgiving

**O**n Thanksgiving Day, families and friends come together to prepare and delight in the most popular American holiday meal: turkey, stuffing, sweet potatoes, pumpkin pie and more! But we know that this holiday is about much more than a meal. On Thanksgiving the spirit of goodwill, compassion, thankfulness and gratitude fills our hearts. Here are some ways to enrich your child's experience of this wonderful holiday:

**Family and Friends.** First and foremost, emphasize the value and importance of family and friends. Thanksgiving is a time of the coming together of all family members. It is also a time to welcome friends and those who are alone to your Thanksgiving table. Be grateful for the love of family and friends. Cherish your loved ones.

**Learn.** Every holiday presents a unique opportunity for learning. This Thanksgiving, read books with your children, watch movies and go on the Web to explore and learn about the rich and interesting history of Thanksgiving. There is much to be discussed about our country's history as it relates to the declaration of the Thanksgiving holiday. Make sure that this process is fun

and educational for all!

**Participate.** Have your children participate in the preparation of the Thanksgiving meal and the decoration of the Thanksgiving table, though make the involvement age-appropriate. Younger children can make turkey placemats and decorate the table playfully, and older children can help in the cooking and preparation of the meal. Let your children pick the flowers, serve the food, join the clean-up committee. Active involvement and participation make the experience much more meaningful for each child. Help your children to feel as if the preparation of the Thanksgiving table and dinner is a group effort. Every contribution is a valuable contribution. It's all about togetherness, cooperation and building tradition.

**Be Thankful.** During the Thanksgiving meal, talk about what the holiday represents—being thankful and giving. Emphasize that we all should be thankful for our family, our friends, our teachers, our doctors, our health, our freedom, our lives as Americans. Nothing should be taken for granted. Recognize the wonderful feeling of being thankful and how this holiday, unlike many others,

involves no exchange of gifts. The gift is in the giving.

**Give Back.** Finally, focus on the true meaning of "giving" during "Thanksgiving." Families can go together to serve meals to the homeless and elderly at soup kitchens and nursing homes or join programs at their churches or synagogues that are designed to give to those less fortunate. Emphasize that giving to others is the core to a meaningful life and strengthens one's sense of self—from drawing a picture for an elderly person to preparing the Thanksgiving meal for the hungry or disabled. Many people in your community will benefit from the food left over from your scrumptious Thanksgiving dinner. Perhaps your children can accompany you as you deliver the excess food to shelters or hospitals and the many organizations that provide food to those in need. Giving in these ways makes each one of us stronger, kinder, more fulfilled. Reward your child's efforts to give. Help them to acknowledge that the ability to give to others is a gift. Teach them, by example, to be thankful for every blessing and to cherish those they love.

Happy Thanksgiving to all!!

—Dr. Betsy Schur Levy