



Helping Children Acknowledge Their Good Fortune

By Wilson McCaskill

In the many ways there are to help children develop an optimistic and healthy perspective on life, asking children to acknowledge their good fortune before they make complaints can prove worthwhile.

When a student approaches a teacher agitated, upset and eager to complain about something, it can help calm emotions and create perspective to first acknowledge the emotional state, and before listening to the complaint ask the child to share one or two things they are thankful for today. These can range from the minor to the magnificent.

EXAMPLES:

- Mum made me a special breakfast this morning.
- John & Richard helped me in class.
- I could see everything at assembly.
- My new shirt feels good.
- We have sport today.
- After school I'm off to a birthday party.

After sharing the things for which she can be thankful the child can proceed to make her complaint.

Invariably the enormity and intensity of the complaint has been reduced by the simple process of being made aware of what's good in the world.

Of course, teachers must use their judgment and if the child has an urgent and pressing story to tell they must be allowed to tell it straight away.

Making this judgment call is not too difficult as it's usually the same people who have complaints to make and it can be assessed fairly easily (before they even speak) if the complaint is of any great consequence.

If more than one student approaches a teacher to complain, the teacher can first acknowledge the emotional state of the group and then invite each student to share something for which they are grateful. *Astute questions by the teacher can prolong this process and get the children to focus on the good things that have happened before they express their complaint.*



Should the teacher misread the signals and think the situation is serious only to discover the complaint was of little magnitude, then simply invite the child to share something she is happy about after the complaint has been made.

Acknowledging our good fortune no matter how small, helps us all to see our cup as half full and not half empty.

SCENARIO:

Mary and Tom run towards the teacher on yard duty. They obviously have a bee in their bonnet.

Mary: Excuse me Miss Jones.

Miss Jones: Yes Mary, you both look upset.

Tom: When we had the ball....

Miss Jones: Please pause for a second Tom. I can see you want to tell me what has upset you, but first please tell about something you liked today.

Tom: When we had the ball, Joshua came up and....

Miss Jones: What Joshua did is obviously very important to you. I do understand that. Now see if you can calm yourselves enough to tell me about one good thing that has happened to you today. It doesn't have to be a big thing. In fact it can be tiny, just so long as it was a good thing that pleased you. Would you like to start, Mary?

Mary: (After a few seconds) Umm, I got to sit next to April this morning.

Miss Jones: And that made you happy because?

Mary: Because she's the new girl and I got a chance to help her.

Miss Jones: I'm sure April was very glad to have you sitting next to her. Your turn Tom. (pause) Take a few seconds to think. I'm happy to wait. (pause) Let me help. Did anything happen at home, before you got to school, that pleased you?

Tom: No.

Miss Jones: Did you have breakfast?

Tom: Yea.

Miss Jones: Would you have preferred to have no breakfast – to come to school hungry?



Tom: Na.

Miss Jones: Then you're pleased you had breakfast?

Tom: Yea.

Miss Jones: So, that's something that pleased you.

Tom: But that happens every day.

Miss Jones: Not for everyone Tom. How lucky some of us are to start everyday with something that pleases us. Now, I thought of that one, the next one you think of yourself.

Tom: I got to help Mrs Bloom hand out the art materials.

Miss Jones: And you were happy to help?

Tom: Yea. It was a really cool art activity.

Miss Jones: So, do you think you could both find quite a few things to feel pleased about today if you thought about it?

Tom & Mary: Yes.

Miss Jones: Now, this complaint you wanted to make about Joshua. Is it sort of important, important or extremely important?

Tom & Mary: Sort of important.

Miss Jones: Do you both think you can sort it out yourselves or do you need me to help you with a problem that's, sort of important.

Tom: We can sort it out ourselves.

Miss Jones: Soon you'll be able to say, "Today we sorted a problem out ourselves." That will be something else to be pleased about.

Tom & Mary: (Walk off to find Joshua while thinking Miss Jones is a little strange but nice.)