



JOHNSON FINANCIAL GROUP

THE BIGGER CONVERSATIONS®

Teaching young people about philanthropy: Begin with gratitude

In our adult lives, we're often naturally inclined toward philanthropy. Whether we give our time, talent or financial resources, doing so is a response to feeling grateful for our own good fortune. Many who have succeeded in business and career feel that much has been given to them to make their success possible – mentorship, training, education and opportunity. We find ourselves wanting to give back – applying gratitude to restore the equilibrium.

How do we teach and imbue the philanthropic cycle with young people who have yet to complete their first decade of life? Creating practices and awareness around gratitude is a place to start.

Embracing non-financial philanthropy

You can begin the process by sitting down with a grandchild, niece or nephew and discussing the aspects of life that make him or her feel safe or happy. Record the young person's thoughts in a dedicated notebook that you'll come back to for future parts of this adventure. After you've created an initial list together, ask the young person to specifically consider things that can't be held in two hands – intangible things that make him or her feel safe or happy. This might include playing outdoors, laughing with friends or learning new things in school.

Through the course of your conversation, help the young person understand that to “have” isn't limited to physical possessions. When you become aware of what you have that doesn't cost anything, there can be an unlimited supply to give away.

Creating contrast: take an observation field trip

With your notebook in hand, take the young person out and about into the community. Visit a mall or a playground, a soup kitchen or a hospital. Select an environment that will stretch his or her thinking without being overwhelming or scary. Ask the person to notice what the people around them have and what they don't have. Ask them to consider things that are intangible – that they can't hold in their hands. This could be a special talent on the playground, a beautiful smile or an inclination to share.

Anchor the experience with gratitude

Consider creating a regular connection time to continue discussing what the young person noticed in his or her life and the lives of others. Help the young person understand the connection between being happy about your circumstances and being thankful. Awareness of gratitude takes people to that adult response of wanting to give – to restore equilibrium for all we've received.

Over time you can transition your discussions to help the young person identify behaviors he or she would like to donate and to whom he or she wishes to donate. This could be as simple as giving a special smile to a kid at school, or as involved as going back to the soup kitchen to play games with or serve soup to the people in the room. Throughout your interactions remember to pause and be grateful for the experiences.

As always, please feel free to call with any questions regarding this or other important topics.

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