

Spotlight on Annie Zirkel, Author of *You'll Thank Me Later: A Guide to Nurturing Gratitude in Our Children and Why That Matters*

(Annie Zirkel, M.A., LPC is a parenting consultant, therapist, and speaker. She is a Nationally Board Certified Counselor with a Master's degree in counseling from EMU. She works with families on communication power struggles, optimism and gratitude. Annie writes regularly for AnnArbor.com. She also is the past Editor of A Different Path, a publication for the families of special needs children in Washtenaw County. Annie is grateful to live in Ann Arbor with her husband and three teenage sons.)

Rachel Pastiva: Your book, *You'll Thank Me Later: A Guide to Nurturing Gratitude in Our Children (and Why That Matters)*, is a guide for parents on how to instill gratitude in their children. How does gratitude change a child's outlook?

Annie Zirkel: Gratitude is, quite frankly, one of the critical elements for a child to have in order to develop into a more connected, responsible, resilient and happier grown-up. Noticing what you have and remembering the positives of your life help you savor your good experiences and bounce back better from life's challenges. Children who practice gratitude show more of this life satisfaction and resilience and even, according to a study by Robert Emmons, et al, like school and their families more.

On the back of your book you suggest that children experience a sense of entitlement in our fast paced world. What do you attribute this attitude to, and how do you suggest parents help their child overcome it?

Annie Zirkel: Entitlement is about believing that you deserve something even when you haven't done anything to earn it. Parents feed entitlement by giving too much (stuff and of ourselves) and asking too little of our children. When it comes to appreciation, getting something for nothing is about the hardest thing to notice and be grateful for.

Add to this our societal consumerism messages which encourage you to be unsatisfied with what you have, and the speed with which our worlds are moving, and it creates the perfect storm for ingratitude. The practice of gratitude is a reflective process which means you need the right messages and enough time to notice.



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Parents can help children avoid entitlement by doing less, and instead having their children participate in earning the material items and privileges that they want. Through chores, working for life's rewards, and behaving in positive ways children can reap the benefits of their participation. And in doing so, hopefully feel more connected and appreciative of the end results.

In your book there is a chapter on relationship challenges to teaching your child gratitude. What is the most common relationship obstacle parents face in nurturing gratitude in their children?

Annie Zirkel: Probably the most common relationship obstacle for parents trying to nurture gratitude is pushing too hard and expecting gratitude too fast. Whether with too much shame and impatience or because of a lack of empathy for the big feelings of 'small' disappointments, parents can struggle to get this just right.

Watching the 'shame factor' and allowing some time to process a disappointment before we ask them to 'get over it' and remember all that is positive can actually help children get to gratitude faster and in a more genuine way.

What can people expect to learn from your book event at Crazy Wisdom in November?

Annie Zirkel: I hope that those who attend walk away with a refreshed sense of appreciation for the many facets and benefits of gratitude. And that they find ideas on how to instill this important trait into their children's repertoire of life skills so that their kids really can ~ thank them later.

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(Annie Zirkel's writings can be found on her website, anniezirkel.com, under the tagline, *The Writer Side of Annie*. She can be reached at 734-735-5522, or at annie@practicehow.com.)



Parenting Consultant and Therapist Annie Zirkel will be doing a Book Signing and Talk in the Crazy Wisdom Tea Room, on Wednesday, November 3rd at 7pm.

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