



Teaching Threads

A Time for Giving

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The months of November and December are an ideal time to teach and model the skills related to giving: giving thanks, giving gifts, and giving respect.

Giving Thanks

Around Thanksgiving teachers often design activities based on the question: What are you thankful for? While many students will share expected responses such as “my family” and “my home,” others may not. A student might say he or she is thankful to be living in a foster home rather than with his Mom. The statements and facial expressions that you use when responding are critical to how the student and his or her classmates interpret such disclosures. One suitable response might be for the teacher to ask, “And what are the things in your foster home that you are most thankful for?” The student may then identify such things as caregivers, food, and a safe place to live — ideas which will be accepted and shared by classmates.

Giving Gifts

Teachers can take advantage of students’ high interest in gift giving and receiving to teach them why gifts are given and the messages this sends. Create simple role-play activities, such as “Today is your friend Marcus’s birthday. You see Marcus waiting for the school bus and you want to give him the card you made for him.” Following your direction, students can practice the social skills of giving and receiving gifts, showing appreciation, and saying thank you. Include difficult social skills, such as saying “thank you” when you don’t like the gift or accepting a gift from someone you don’t like. Demonstrate that “It’s the thought that counts” by having students create gift coupons for free services, such as cleaning the garage for a parent or reading a story to a younger sister.

Remember that expectations for social behavior can vary across age, school, culture, situation, and environment.

Giving Respect

When encountering others of diverse background, students may need practice in showing respect. Students might make comments such as “Eating spaghetti on Thanksgiving is weird!” Teaching students how and why to say, “Eating spaghetti on Thanksgiving is different to me. Most people I know eat turkey on Thanksgiving,” can help students develop the awareness that because something is different or new to them doesn’t mean it’s wrong. Students will benefit from concrete examples of respectful language and behavior. Positive examples, such as not reaching in front of a classmate to use the crayons, acknowledging a greeting, and letting another person finish before you start talking are easily understood by most students. Model respectful behavior, and your students will be more inclined to follow.

As always, my intent in presenting these activities is to help teachers answer this question -

What can I do to make it easier for my students to learn and behave?



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