

As we approach Thanksgiving, the exhortations to feel grateful are as rampant as Black Friday promotions. On a social level, giving thanks is the right thing to do: it makes us feel good and it makes others feel good, so we teach our children to say “thank you” almost as soon as they can speak. But you may not be aware that **a wealth of research points to the power of gratitude to help us cope with hard times.** Robert Emmons, Ph.d., Professor of Psychology at the University of California, Davis, presents a convincing case for developing a prevailing attitude of gratefulness in his article, “How Gratitude Can Help You Through Hard Times.”

http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_gratitude_can_help_you_through_hard_times

He describes scientific findings that **grateful people are more resilient to stress, whether from life’s minor hassles or from traumatic life events.** As an exercise, Dr. Emmons encourages us, first, to remember the bad things from the past and look at where we are now. Contrasting the present with past bad experiences points out that we have, in fact, managed to cope well and may have even come to a better appreciation of the present because of those hard times.

We can also use gratitude to **reframe disaster.** Gratitude enhances happiness because it helps us interpret memories of unpleasant events in a way that decreases their painful emotional impact. **Grateful coping entails looking for the positive consequences of negative events.** It might, for example, involve recognizing how a stressful event has shaped who we are today or how it has prompted us to reevaluate what is really important to us. Life is tough, and it is unrealistic to deny its disappointments, frustrations, losses, and setbacks. Positive thinking can’t change that fact of our suffering, and **telling people to count their blessings and remember how much they still have to be grateful for is not at all helpful.**

To help reframe past unpleasant experiences through a lens of gratitude, ask yourself the following questions:

- **What lessons did the experience teach me?**
- **Can I find ways to be thankful for what happened to me even though I was not at the time it happened?**
- **What ability did the experience draw out of me that surprised me?**
- **How am I now more the person I want to be because of it?**

Processing life experiences through a grateful lens doesn’t deny the suffering, but it involves realizing the power you have to transform an obstacle into an opportunity. That’s resilience.

Happy Thanksgiving from the Staples Resilience Project. We are humbled and grateful to work with such a wonderful community of students, parents and teachers.

Victoria Capozzi, Leslie Hammer, and Deb Slocum

P.S. If you find yourself with six minutes to spare this weekend, we encourage you to treat yourself to this beautiful video meditation on gratitude:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nj2ofrX7jAk>