

# THANK YOU NOTES FROM KIDS: THE ULTIMATE GUIDE

Getting kids to write thank you notes can be challenging, to put it mildly. Most children don't give a hoot about etiquette, especially when it involves doing something that smells an awful lot like homework. All in all, they'd much rather be *playing* with their shiny new birthday or Christmas presents rather than expressing gratitude for them.

Still, most parents understand the importance of this custom. It forces kids to recognize that gifts and other acts of kindness aren't their birthright. And, if some of us would rather dispense with this ritual ourselves, there are plenty of *other* people (all family included) for whom it is still important. Finally, many people genuinely want to feel appreciated and know that their gift was well-received.

# HELPING KIDS WRITE THANK YOU NOTES

*Unfortunately, you can't just put a stack of blank thank you cards in front of a kid and say, "Get to it!" Most kids need some assistance, whether it's doing the actual writing, setting guidelines, or just being there when questions come up. The key is to offer just enough help to get the job done, without taking over completely.*

*Here are some different levels of involvement to consider. The older your child is, the less you generally need to do. That said, your kid's personality, mood, and the amount of work to be done are all big factors as well.*

## **LEVEL 4: YOU DO THE WRITING, YOUR CHILD DOES THE SCRIBBLING.**

If your child can't write, then the burden of writing thank you notes obviously falls to you. Your child should participate in other ways, such as by drawing a picture or putting stickers on the note.

One question that often comes up is whether you should write the thank you note from your kid's perspective ("I really like the toy you gave me...") or your own ("Evan really likes the toy you gave him..."). As a rule of thumb, write the note from your child's perspective *if it's addressed to another child*. Write from your own perspective if the note is going to another adult.

## **LEVEL 3: YOU DO THE WRITING WITH INPUT FROM YOUR CHILD.**

Once they can articulate their thoughts, you can get input on what to write on the thank you note. This could range from getting their impression of a gift, to transcribing their actual words. At this stage, kids can often write their own names on the note, adding an important personal touch.

## **LEVEL 2: YOU COACH YOUR CHILD.**

Even if your child knows how to write complete sentences, they will likely need guidance in figuring out what to say. You might sit down with your child to work through the exact wording of each note, or just help with the first couple. Don't be surprised if your kid runs out of steam at some point, forcing you to take a break or get more involved (see Level 3).

## **LEVEL 1: YOUR CHILD DOES THE WRITING, YOU SUPERVISE.**

Eventually the day will come with your child doesn't need your active involvement in writing the notes. You may still want to look at the thank you notes (at least the first few) to make sure your child isn't just going through the motions. You can also support your child by creating a positive atmosphere. Put on some music, help keep stationary organized, prepare a yummy snack - whatever it takes to make it less of a chore.

## GENERAL WORDING TIPS

*Here are a few key points to consider when coming up with the actual wording of a thank you note. They apply whether you're writing the notes yourself or just supervising.*

**1. KEEP IT SHORT.** Thank you notes don't have to be long (that's why they're called "notes" and not "letters"). Contrary to what some may believe, more words do not equate to more gratitude. Unless the gift or favor is extraordinary, *three or four sentences* should suffice.

**2. BE SPECIFIC.** The problem with many thank you notes is that they come across as canned. The best way to avoid this is to address the person by name, mention the specific gift or favor you're thanking them for, and leave out those generic statements that tend to creep in when you're writing a bunch of notes.

**3. BE SINCERE.** Another way to avoid *Canned Thank You Note Syndrome* is to make sure the words actually reflect your child's feelings. This is a lot easier said than done, especially in those tricky cases where your child actually *isn't* all that thrilled with what they got. This "teachable moment" is a good opportunity to get your child to think about the effort of the gift-giver rather than focusing on the gift itself.

