

# GRATITUDE

from ACORN November 20, 2023

*We are immensely grateful at Granby Nature Preschool and Kindergarten. We are grateful for our town, our spectacular location at Holcomb Farm, our students and our families. These past weeks have been challenging with staff turnover and our search for replacements. We are so grateful for our families! You have been understanding and supportive. Thank you for all you do!*

Gratitude is a big concept for young children. It involves being mindful and being reflective. It requires awareness and language.

At Granby Nature Preschool and Kindergarten we find ways to make our environment safe for children to explore this concept and learn ways to feel and express gratitude.

For the past few weeks we have been breaking down the components of gratitude. We have been setting the foundation by giving children opportunities to be aware of their feelings. We give words to feelings and acknowledge difficult feelings. Our feelings board provides a way for children to express feelings, to know they can have more than one feeling at a time and to validate those feelings. Children go to the feelings board where they are supported by an adult by looking at facial icons of feelings which are associated with a color. Children think about how they are feeling, find the icon and color that represents that feeling and color it in their daily chart. We also allow children to process those feelings and help them make choices on how to handle them (more on self-regulation in a later post).

We also model to show children the endless possibilities of feelings and experiences. Recently we have been focusing on what makes us happy. For children this is a great starting point, as it focuses on their immediate world and the joy they feel. We begin by modeling and telling children we are happy that they have come to school, happy that we can be outside in the fields, meadows and forests, and happy for our families and friends. Over time we guide children with queries such as:

What makes you happy?

Over time we ask children to name things they do at home, as school, inside, outside, and things they do with family and friends that they like and that make them happy.

Who makes you happy?

We ask children to think of someone in their family, school or neighborhood that they like and that makes them happy.

Where are you happy?

We do this every day to practice and strengthen the foundation of mindfulness, to hear what others say, to find words for our feelings, and to find new ways to express ourselves.

Over time we repeat these happiness thoughts while transforming them into feelings of gratitude. "I like playing on the logs in the forest. I am grateful for the logs".

Mindfulness and being aware of ourselves, our feelings, and our surroundings leads seamlessly into helping children be thankful for who and what makes them happy and safe. We also practice saying "thank you", and "I am thankful for..." Gratitude in early childhood education (and in all ages) is a lifelong practice. For us it will lead us into the holidays with another practice - that of giving.