



Helping Children Count Their Blessings

By Wilson McCaskill

In the pursuit of optimism and happiness it may help to have children count their blessings before they make complaints.

So, when a student approaches a teacher all fired up and upset about something, it can help to calm emotions down and put things into perspective by first asking the child to tell the teacher of two or three things they are thankful for today. These can range from the minor to the magnificent.

EXAMPLES:

- Mum made me a special breakfast this morning.
- John & Richard helped me in class.
- I could see everything at assembly.
- My new shirt feels good.
- We have sport today.
- After school I'm off to a birthday party.

After sharing the things for which they can be thankful the children can proceed to make their complaint.

Invariably the enormity and intensity of the complaint has been reduced by the simple process of being made aware of what's good in the world.

Of course, teachers must use their judgement and if the child has an urgent and pressing story to tell they must be allowed to tell it straight away.

Making this judgement call is not too difficult as it's usually the same people who have complaints to make and it can be assessed fairly easily (before they even speak) if the complaint is of any great consequence.

If more than one student approaches a teacher to complain, then one-after-another each should in turn advise the teacher of the things for which they are thankful. Astute questions by the teacher can prolong this process and get the children to focus on the good things that have happened before they express their complaint.

Should the teacher misread the signals and invite the child to make the complaint without first sharing the good things, then the teacher can ask for the good things to be shared after the complaint has been made.



Counting our blessings and being encouraged to find them no matter how small, helps us all to see the cup as half full and not half empty.

SCENARIO:

Mary and Tom run towards the teacher on playground duty. They obviously have a bee in their bonnet.

Mary: Excuse me Miss Jones.

Miss Jones: Yes Mary, you both look upset.

Tom: When we had the ball....

Miss Jones: Please stop for a second, Tom. Do you want to tell me what has upset you?

Tom & Mary: Yes.

Miss Jones: Alright, but first I'll need to know about what has pleased you.

Tom: When we had the ball, Joshua came up and....

Miss Jones: Did it please you?

Tom: What?

Miss Jones: What Joshua did. Did it please you?

Tom & Mary: No.

Miss Jones: Then, that's not what you need to tell me first. I would like each of you to tell me about two good things that have happened to you today.

Tom & Mary: (SILENCE)

Miss Jones: (Continuing) They don't have to be big things. In fact they can be tiny, just so long as they were good things that pleased you. You start Mary.

Mary: (After a few seconds) Umm, I got to sit next to April this morning.

Miss Jones: And that made you happy?

Mary: Yes.

Miss Jones: Because?



- Mary: Because she's the new girl and I got a chance to help her.
- Miss Jones: I'm sure April was very glad to have you sitting next to her. Your turn Tom.
- Tom: I can't think of anything.
- Miss Jones: Then you must try harder. Take a few seconds to think.
- Tom: (THINKS)
- Miss Jones: Let me help. Did anything happen at home, before you got to school, that pleased you?
- Tom: No.
- Miss Jones: Did you have breakfast?
- Tom: Yea.
- Miss Jones: Would you have preferred to have no breakfast – to come to school hungry?
- Tom: Na.
- Miss Jones: Then you're pleased you had breakfast?
- Tom: Yea.
- Miss Jones: So, that's something that pleased you.
- Tom: But that happens every day.
- Miss Jones: Not for everyone, Tom. How lucky you are to start everyday with something that pleases you. Now, I thought of that one, the next one you need to think of yourself. Your second one please Mary.
- Mary: Standing here talking to you.
- Miss Jones: (Without judgement and in a neutral tone of voice) Interesting. Are you being sincere, cracking a joke or making fun of me?
- Mary: Being sincere.
- Miss Jones: Then I believe you and I'm glad you're enjoying our moment together. Tom?
- Tom: I got to help Mrs Blossom hand out the art materials.



Miss Jones: And you were happy to help?

Tom: Yea.

Miss Jones: So, do you think you could both find quite a few things to feel pleased about today if you thought hard about it?

Tom & Mary: Yes.

Miss Jones: I'm sure you can and it's important that you can. Now, this complaint you wanted to make about Joshua. Let me ask you a question. Is it sort of important, important or extremely important.

Tom & Mary: (Consider their choices)

Mary: Sort of important.

Miss Jones: Do you agree Tom?

Tom: (Nods his head)

Miss Jones: Do you both think you can sort it out yourselves or do you need me to help you with a problem that's "sort of important."

Tom: We can sort it out ourselves.

Miss Jones: It's good you know that. If you do you'll have another thing to add to your list of things to be pleased about.

Mary: Sorry?

Miss Jones: Soon you'll be able to say, "Today we sorted a problem out ourselves." That's something to be pleased about. Off you go and find Joshua.

Tom & Mary: (Walk off muttering under their breath that Miss Jones is a little mad but they like her!)