

Activity 5: Expressing Gratitude

A major goal of encouraging students to explore the concept of gratitude is to enable them to feel gratitude frequently, in appropriate ways and in appropriate circumstances. Another powerful and important step is to encourage students to express their gratitude frequently, in appropriate ways and in appropriate circumstances. Students can express their gratitude verbally, through brief notes, through formal letters and importantly through their actions. This activity describes a method for asking students to write (and deliver) their own heartfelt gratitude letter.

A helpful gratitude exercise to prime students for writing a gratitude letter is to invite students to share with a partner someone who is important to them. The person they select could be a family member, friend, coach, mentor, teacher with the only criteria the person has had a positive impact on their life.

After the partner conversations, you may like to ask the following questions:

- In what ways have you ever expressed your thanks and appreciation to this person?
- How does it feel when people express their gratitude towards you?
- How does it feel when people are ungrateful?
- What do you think would be the impact on this person if they received a gratitude letter from you?

Provide time and a safe, comfortable space to allow the students to go about writing a gratitude letter to a person of their choice. By all means allow flexibility in style and approach and encourage creativity (for example: students may like to add drawings). A good letter will often take some time to write, and may even require several sittings. The following questions may be helpful in guiding students' writing:

- Why are you thankful this person is in your life?
- How has this person impacted you?
- How have you grown as a result of knowing this person?
- What would be different if this person wasn't in your life?

Students should also consider the following points when writing a gratitude letter:

- Is your letter personal and personalised, with various specific examples?
- Is your letter genuine and heartfelt?
- Would your letter have more impact if it was hand-written?
- Does your letter indicate that love, care and time have gone into writing it?

Once the letter is written, the next important step is delivering the letter. If possible, the student should aim to personally hand-deliver the letter. To add to the impact for both the student and the recipient, the student should aim to read the letter out loud to the person.

Remind students that the beauty for the recipient in receiving a gratitude letter is that it can become a treasured item that can be reread time and time again. Students should write a summary of their experiences of this activity from the initial stages of writing the letter to the feelings and emotions experienced on delivering and reading the letter.