

# A Way to Improve Family Relationships\*

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“I have heard that giving family members regular appreciations can be helpful. Can you give me any ideas about this?” - Frustrated Mom

A client who was hoping to improve her relationship with her husband recently emailed the above question to me. It got me to thinking about the value of giving appreciations daily. This article is in response to Frustrated Mom’s question.

## What is a personal appreciation?

A personal appreciation is a simple statement, verbal or written, of something specific about the other person’s character, or what they do, that you find supportive and/or loving. Just saying “I love you!” is NOT an appreciation. General comments like “Nice work” or “Thanks for everything” or “I appreciate all you do” are much too general to be effective. For an appreciation to hit the mark, it needs to clearly convey the message that something about the other person, or about what they do/have done is seen and valued by you. In giving an appreciation, your intention should be to help the other person feel noticed, understood, respected and valued.

Developing the on-going habit of giving those you love daily appreciations can benefit the entire family. One of the positive benefits of this practice is that giving appreciations can be contagious. Dr. Phil McGraw likes to say, “We teach others how to treat us.” This is very true in family dynamics. When you, as a parent, practice noticing little positive behaviors and giving heart-felt appreciations to other members of the family, your actions teach others to become more self-aware of positive behaviors. Moreover, family members become more aware of the good feelings generated when appreciations are shared. This will also encourage the development of healthy self-esteem.

## What are some good examples of effective appreciations?

I want to encourage you to develop your own list of things family members do that you appreciate. Just generating the list will help you realize many of the little (often taken for granted) things family members do that you enjoy and appreciate.



### Examples of **appreciations you might give a spouse:**

- “I appreciate you taking care of our monthly bill-paying task.”
- “Thank you for bringing me a coffee.”
- “I appreciate you being frugal, even when I know it is easy to spend more money on stuff.”
- “I feel lucky to have a wife who is so gracious when we have company.”
- “I am thankful for how you find ways to ‘let-go’ of disagreements we have.”
- “I appreciate how you keep our home clean and organized.”
- “I appreciate how you are willing to set aside time for us to negotiate our differences.”
- “I appreciate how hard you have been working to support our family!”
- “I appreciate the love and energy you put into our garden/project.”
- “I appreciate it when you sit near me, or hold my hand.”



- “I love the way you stay connected regularly with our friends.”

### Some simple **appreciations you might give to your child:**

- “I appreciate how you helped with the dishes.”
- “Thank you for helping out with your brother yesterday.”
- “I feel lucky as a Mom/Dad when I see how hard you worked on that chore.”
- “I appreciate how you thanked me for driving you to your friend’s house.”
- “Thank you for bringing in the groceries.”
- “Thank you for doing your chores without needing to be nagged.”
- “I appreciate how you turned your phone off while we were eating. I know it is not easy for you to disconnect from your friends.”
- “I really like the way you cleaned up your room.”
- “I appreciate you sharing your toys. I know it is not always an easy thing to do.”
- “I am proud of you, and very much appreciate how you did not complain on the long drive we took.”



### Examples of using your **appreciations to highlight positive characteristics** in family members:

- “ I appreciate having a son who is brave enough to tell the truth, even though it may get you into trouble.”
- “I appreciate how you get ready for school by yourself.”
- “I appreciate how you have learned to handle arguments without fighting.”
- “I appreciate how kind you were with your friend.”
- “I appreciate how polite you were with Grandmother.”
- “I want to acknowledge the maturity you showed when you apologized.”

One way to find the best language to use when acknowledging another person is to simply ask them what words you might use that would really let them know how much you appreciate them. Write down their ideas and use them when you appreciate them. Making it a practice (like brushing one’s teeth) to give family member’s daily appreciations can make a world of difference. You can actually appreciate a family member even when you are annoyed or upset with some of their behaviors. Just focus on the positive to encourage more of what it is that you hope to have.

**Note: Never give an appreciation that contains a ‘but’ in it. For example, “I appreciated your efforts but you can certainly do a lot better!”**

Making giving appreciations a habit can improve the feeling-level in your home. We made it a regular practice to share appreciations with other family members before we would eat dinner. Doing this models positive behaviors for the entire family and helps develop the all-important ‘ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE’ about life in our real – our imperfect – world.