

How to avoid raising a materialistic child

October 12 2018



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If you're a parent, you may be concerned that materialism among children has been on the rise. According to research, materialism has been linked to a variety of mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression, as well as selfish attitudes and behaviors.

But there's some good news. A new University of Illinois at Chicago study published in the *Journal of Positive Psychology* suggests that some parenting tactics can curb kids' materialistic tendencies.

"Our findings show that it is possible to reduce materialism among young consumers, as well as one of its most common negative consequences (nongenerosity) using a simple strategy—fostering [gratitude](#) for the things and people in their lives," writes researcher Lan Nguyen Chaplin, UIC associate professor of marketing and lead author of the study.

After studying a nationwide sample of more than 900 [adolescents](#) ages 11 to 17, Chaplin's team found a link between fostering gratitude and its effects on materialism, suggesting that having and expressing gratitude may possibly decrease materialism and increase generosity among adolescents.

The team surveyed 870 adolescents and asked them to complete an online eight-item measure of materialism assessing the value placed on money and material goods, and a four-item measure of gratitude assessing how thankful they are for people and possessions in their lives.

The researchers then conducted an experiment among 61 adolescents and asked them to complete the same four-item gratitude measure from the first study and an eight-item materialism measure. The adolescents were randomly assigned to keep a daily journal for two weeks. One group was asked to record who and what they were thankful for each day by keeping a gratitude journal, and the [control group](#) was asked to record their daily activities.

After two weeks, the journals were collected and the participants completed the same gratitude and materialism measures as before. The kids were then given 10 \$1 bills for participating and told they could

keep all the money or donate some or all of it to charity.

Results showed that participants who were encouraged to keep a gratitude journal showed a significant decrease in materialism and increase in gratitude. The control group, which kept the daily activity journal, retained their pre-journal levels of gratitude and materialism.

In addition, the group that kept a gratitude journal was more generous than the control group. Adolescents, who were in the experimental group, wrote about who and what they were thankful for and donated more than two-thirds of their earnings. Those who were in the control group and simply wrote about their daily activities donated less than half of their earnings.

"The results of this survey study indicate that higher levels of gratitude are associated with lower levels of materialism in adolescents across a wide range of demographic groups," Chaplin noted.

The authors also suggest that materialism can be curbed and feelings of gratitude can be enhanced by a daily gratitude reflection around the dinner table, having children and adolescents make posters of what they are grateful for, or keeping a "gratitude jar" where children and teens write down something they are grateful for each week, while countering [materialism](#).

More information: Lan Nguyen Chaplin et al. The impact of gratitude on adolescent materialism and generosity, *The Journal of Positive Psychology* (2018). [DOI: 10.1080/17439760.2018.1497688](https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2018.1497688)

Provided by University of Illinois at Chicago

Citation: How to avoid raising a materialistic child (2018, October 12) retrieved 18 January 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-10-materialistic-child.html>

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