

Showing Appreciation, Giving Thanks, and Expressing Your Gratitude.

Relevant to: Depression:  Anxiety:  Irritability/Anger:  General emotional control: 

This is a wonderfully simple cognitive-behavioural technique that combines action with mental focus to produce big emotional benefits for yourself and those around you. In fact, it is more than a technique, it is more fundamental than that. And yet it is so simple: all you do is to express your gratitude.

So how can this be so effective? Mainly because, by doing this, it encourages you to focus on what you have to be genuinely grateful for. Sometimes it is very easy to take for granted all those things around us that would be so noticeable if they weren't there. We can become blasé, complacent, ungrateful for all the good things we have. Even to the extent that we may deny that we have good things.

Who should you thank?

Anybody and everybody you want to. Some people give thanks for the food they eat, before each meal. The thanks they give in that case is to a power higher than themselves. People of faith generally find this easier to do than others, and yet that need not be the case. It simply requires a certain 'spirituality' rather than a specific faith, so no-one need be excluded from giving thanks for such fundamentals. Once over that hurdle, it becomes possible to show appreciation for other 'basics' such as light, warmth, art, attractive scenery, water - the list can be as long as you want it to be.

But there are lots of others you can thank, too. Colleagues at work, without whom your job would be more difficult or impossible. Your friends, good neighbours, your partner if you have one, people you meet in shops. Again, it can be a very long list, but it raises the question how to do it - after all, no-one wants others to think they have suddenly turned 'strange'!



How to do it.

Rule One is only ever to thank people genuinely, and don't 'go over the top'. If you do, then people may suspect you of being sarcastic, or having ulterior motives of some sort. Anyway, people only appreciate genuineness, not falseness.

Subtlety can be good. Some people will say 'Thanks' only just audibly, and with almost no explanation, so the recipient may wonder what they are being thanked for. That's fine; after all, it's for the benefit of the giver as much as the recipient. On the other hand, I have a warm, extrovert Irish friend who has no trouble in thanking people, loudly, directly, and in detail. That's his natural way, and people like it in him; but we can all go with what is natural for us.

Indirect thanks can be good too. This is where you ask, for example, Alan to thank Ben, for you. That way Ben gets to hear of your appreciation without any of the embarrassment some people feel when they are thanked or praised. What's more he has the bonus of knowing that Alan knows how great he's been too!

What should you thank people for?

Whatever you like, but don't wait for massively good 'out of the ordinary' things to happen. The reason that expressing gratitude benefits you as well as those around you is that it teaches you to appreciate 'everyday things' - to realise just how many good things there are about.

When do you do it?

There's never a wrong time. Would there ever be a wrong time for someone to tell you that they appreciated what you do (so long as they don't embarrass you)? No, of course not. And never think you've 'missed your opportunity' - it's never too late.

In session:

Please address the following questions, either as a large group or start in pairs or threes:

- Why is 'giving thanks' likely to benefit the giver as much or more than the recipient?
- Bus drivers appear to work alone. What colleagues do they have in fact, without whom their job would be difficult or impossible?
- Fritha rather likes the idea of thanking a power higher than herself for 'good things' like food and countryside (she enjoys walking). But she has no specific faith, so how might she do this?
- Chris meets up with his old friend Dave every few months, in York. Chris appreciates Dave's friendship a lot, and would like to

thank him for it without embarrassing him. How might he do that?

- Edith says there is never anything worth thanking anybody for. How might you get her to see that there is?

Project:

The project is in two stages:

- Notice what you can give thanks for.
- Do it: show your appreciation for things, in a way that is genuine, cause no-one embarrassment, and is not 'over the top'.