



Greater Good in Education  
SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

## TAKE-HOME SKILL: HUMILITY REFLECTION FOR TEENS

*"We come nearest to the great when we are great in humility."*

— Rabindranath Tagore

### OVERVIEW

Parents and caregivers reflect with their teen about a time when they either demonstrated humility or experienced it from another person. They then discuss opportunities for practicing more humility towards others.

### PLANNING FOR IT

#### WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- To help your child cultivate strong relationships with others
- When your child seems a bit too self-preoccupied

#### TIME REQUIRED

- 15-45 minutes

#### LEVEL

- Middle School
- High School

#### MATERIALS

- Journal or paper (optional)
- Pencil/Pen (optional)

## LEARNING OBJECTIVE

- Understand the value of humility
- Recognize when they have been gifted the gift of humility
- Create a plan for practicing humility

## ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

## SEL COMPETENCIES

- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills
- Responsible Decision-Making

## HOW TO DO IT

### REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

For parents/caregivers: Take a moment to think about a time when you kept an open mind towards another person's perspective, or when you put aside your needs to help someone who was suffering. Next, think of an experience when someone did one of these things for you. How did both of these moments feel? How might you practice more humility in the next few days?

### INSTRUCTIONS

Humility is about being able to see and accept your strengths and limitations without defensiveness or judgment, as well as being open-minded to others' perspectives and to new information. This practice can help teens bolster their humility in that second sense—by orienting them toward others and helping them become more flexible and adaptable.

- Ask your teen to consider a time when they acted humbly toward someone by doing something that put that person's interests first and their own second, such as inviting a lonely new student to be their science lab partner rather than pairing up with their usual classmate. Inquire what they did and how they felt during and after.
- Encourage your teen to reflect on a time when someone humbled themselves to them so that your teen could decide on the agenda for a shared experience, such as when their older sibling scrapped her weekend plans in order to hang out with them, because they were sad that their best friend moved away. Ask them: How did it feel when someone put aside their opinion or agenda and followed you so that you could take the lead? What were your feelings when you recognized that someone humbled themselves before you? Why do you think this person gave you this gift of humility?

- Help your teen consider an upcoming occasion when they can be the gift-giver of humility to someone. Ask them how they plan to be open and adaptable to another person's opinions, needs, or wishes in a helpful way. Encourage them to think back to a time they fell short of being humble and consider what they could do differently to show humility.

## SPECIAL ADAPTATIONS

- Age: In one study, this exercise helped college students as young as 17 years old cultivate humility when they did it on their own as part of a workbook. For younger teens, parents can help by providing both examples and encouragement. You can model how to do the exercise in front of your teen—reflecting on your own life—and encourage your teen to try it with you.
- Reflection Method: You can have this conversation with your teen during dinner, your commute, or a nature hike. You might write your reflections as letters or emails to each other, or your teen can do it privately in their journal.

## REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Have you noticed your child practicing a bit more humility? Do they take others' perspectives when they express different desires?

## THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Researchers randomly assigned a diverse group of college undergraduates to either a workbook with humility exercises, including the reflections in this practice, or alternative workbooks about forgiveness, patience, or self-control. The [study](#) found that participants in the humility group were more humble and had fewer negative emotions after the humility exercises compared to the other groups.

### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

As children grow, they become better able to [notice](#) and appreciate humility, making them gravitate toward others who are humble. But in the age of social media, older children and teens can be bombarded by social pressure to self-promote and be self-absorbed. Humility offers a buffer against this.

Humility is also a [common trait](#) in purposeful young people, suggesting that it might support children in achieving their long-term life goals. Over time, children who grow into humble adults will tend to have [stronger relationships](#) and [better health](#).

## SOURCE

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