

Helping You Navigate Your Journey Through Parenting

The Five Love Languages *Part 1 of 2*



BY KIM DeMARCHI

We all love our children, but in the “busy-ness” of daily life how do we make sure they FEEL loved? In his book, *The 5 Love Languages of Children*, Gary Chapman distinguishes five ways that most people

(including children) prefer to be shown love. We might be able to identify our child’s preference early, or we might just use all the love languages with our children. The thinking can be compared to teaching something to children while keeping in mind that each child has their preferred learning style or styles (auditory, visual, kinesthetic). Children DO better when they FEEL better. The point needs to be made that usually we express love to others the way we prefer love to be expressed toward us. However, we need to express love to others the way THEY feel loved. There may be a difference. You’ll get a lot more bang for your buck if you take that into account.

The 5 Love Languages are: Quality Time, Gifts, Acts of Service, Physical Touch, and Words of Affirmation. The first three will be covered this month and the later two will be in next month’s article.

Quality Time

If your child’s love language is Quality Time, there is nothing they value more than your undivided attention. Put down the phone, get down on their level, look, listen, touch and BE with your child. Connection with our children is the most important part of parenting (or any other relationship). Quality time is a parent’s gift of presence to a child. It conveys the message “You are important. I like being with you.” It makes the child feel he is the most important person in the world. The most important part of quality time is not the event itself, but that you are being together. Quality time does not require that you go somewhere special and it doesn’t have to be a huge block of time. You will create memories that last a lifetime.

Some ideas:

- Loving eye contact and a smile - make the moment special.

- Sharing thoughts and feelings - get to know your child better.
- Bedtime rituals can be one of the best times to connect.
- Reading together can be a shared passion.
- Give your undivided attention - put down the phone and turn off all devices.
- Mealtimes can sometimes be great moments of connection. Prioritize family meals.
- Sit next to your child and watch him while he’s playing - get involved in the play.
- Running errands one on one can be a good time to connect.
- Put something on the calendar to make sure quality time doesn’t get pushed out by urgent tasks.
- Date nights where one parent takes one child out for a special evening.
- A walk around the neighborhood can be special time together.
- Ask about your child’s day at preschool. Play “Roses and Thorns”.
- Plan family outings or trips with JUST the family.
- Cook, bake or do an art project together.

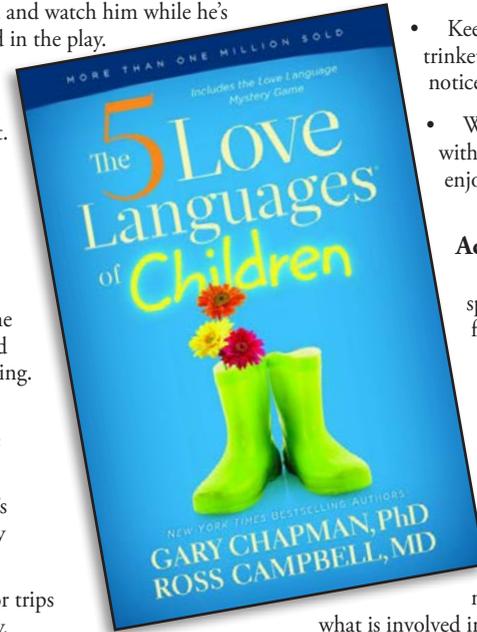
Gifts

There is a reason people have given and received gifts throughout history. There is something deep within people that says love is giving and sharing what you have with others. Gifts do not have to be expensive or even purchased, but for a child whose love language is gifts, a concrete reminder of your love is precious. It shouts to the child, “I love you!” Sometimes a person can’t admit how much they love receiving gifts, but gifts are regularly used across cultures to show love and honor occasions (wedding, new baby, Christmas, new house,

graduation). Gifts are visible symbols of love. It is an expression of love given freely by the donor.

Some ideas:

- Wildflowers, unusual stones, even driftwood can be gifts.
- Whether a gift is made or purchased is of little difference.
- Leave gifts/notes for them when you are apart - special treasures to find.
- Bring something home for them if you go out of town.
- Send them on a treasure hunt, clues that lead to a little reward at the end.
- Keep on hand a supply of little trinkets that can be given at a moment’s notice, ie: a sheet of stickers.
- Wrap and package the items with creativity; this child will enjoy that just as much.



Acts of Service

For some children actions speak louder than words and they feel most loved when you DO something for them. This can be a hard one, as we do so many things for our children, but this is something done specifically with the intention of expressing your love. One great thing about this love language is that the more we teach children to do for themselves, the more they learn to appreciate what is involved in giving an act of service and the more loved they feel when we do things for them. If you always do everything for your child, it is just expected – just what parents do. Loving service is a gift, not a necessity and is done freely. It is an internally motivated desire to give of oneself to others. Intention is key – serving with a giving heart. This isn’t doing things instead of teaching your child to do them, this is an act of love. There is a guideline for raising responsible children, recommended by Montessori author Elizabeth Hainstock, “Never do for your child what he is capable of doing for himself.” The Acts of Service love language says “I know you are capable of doing this for yourself, but this moment is special and I will do it for you to try to show you just how much I love you”.

Some ideas:

- Do something they are usually expected to do for themselves as a special treat.
- “Would you like me to fly you up to your seat at the dinner table?”
- Help them pick up toys - kids with this love language will appreciate your actions.
- “I’m happy to help you clean up your toys; would you like that?”
- Make their favorite meal as a treat.
- “I made you your favorite banana pancakes this morning because I love you so much!!”
- “You have a special “love snack” in your backpack today.”
- Offer to help with simple things when they are having a tough morning.
- “Would you like my help with getting your shoes on?” (if they are normally expected to do this by themselves.)

Children express and receive love in different ways – some through acts of service; others through affirming words; still others through gifts, quality time or physical touch. Each of these expressions of love represents a different “language.” If I were to give my son a bunch of gifts upon return from a business trip, he wouldn’t care. He’d be disappointed that I didn’t come in and hug him and sit down and have some time together to connect. I wouldn’t have been speaking his love language. Children are all different with individual needs. We must learn to speak our children’s love language if we want them to feel loved.

Part 2 will be next month.

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