

Speaking Your Child's Love Language

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In Gary Chapman's, [The Five Love Languages](#) and related books, he writes that we each express our love with certain 'languages', and there are certain 'languages' that we hear love in. If someone speaks a different language than we hear, they might be saying "I love you" over and over, but it is hard to hear the love coming through. The love languages he describes are: Physical Touch, Words of Affirmation, Gifts, Acts of Service, Quality Time.

Let's explore how knowing what love language your child hears can help you connect with them better. Children like all kinds of positive attention from their parents, but if you're speaking their love language, they'll be extra thrilled, glowing with the excitement of it. If you don't speak to them in their love language, you may have a harder time connecting. If you "fail" them in their love language area or give negative attention in that area, they'll be especially hurt.

If your child's love language is _____, here's what you should know:

Physical Touch: All children benefit from loving touch and most like it a great deal. But for some kids, it's *the best thing*. If touch is your child's language, try: stroking hair, holding their hand, letting them sit in your lap, hugging, snuggling up... Be in physical contact whenever possible.

Physical discipline, such as spanking, is not the best way for any child to learn how to do better. If your child's love language is touch, physical discipline can be especially distressing.

Even being set down, pushed away or having a parent stop snuggling is upsetting. If you're not a physical touch person yourself, their need for so much touch can feel overwhelming. It's OK to set limits, but do it lovingly: "I love you so much and I KNOW you love lots of snuggles. So, I'm going to give you a GREAT BIG hug, and then I'm going to put you down so I can cook."

Words of Affirmation: Some children thrive on praise and verbal encouragement. When they reach out for it, respond! ("Look mommy!" "Oh, I see what a beautiful painting you made!") It can be especially powerful to praise their accomplishments to other people within their hearing.

For all children, praise can sometimes feel like empty words – it is more meaningful to give specific praise that shows them you really notice them and their skills instead of generic praise. Instead of "good job", say "you cut nice straight lines with the scissors. Well done." For all children, instead of praising things they have no control over ("you have beautiful eyes") or a natural talent ("you are smart"), praise things they control, have worked on and can continue to work hard on to keep getting better. ("You worked hard on learning how to walk on the balance beam, and look how good you are at it now!")

Children whose love language is words of affirmation are especially sensitive to verbal criticism, to insensitive words and to harsh voices. Speak gently to them.

Gifts: All children like to get stuff. But for some kids, a gift is a clear sign that they are *loved*. But this doesn't mean that you need to continuously buy them new things and wrap them up with a bow. They just like it when things feel special and feel especially for them. Some parents when they travel or are away from their child, they look for little surprises to bring home: a postcard, a coaster from a restaurant, the little ketchup bottle that came with room service. Some will come home from the grocery store with items any of us might buy in our regular groceries, but treat it as a special present: "Look what I got just for you today!!"

Some kids would be OK with it if you forgot to get them a present on their birthday, but not these kids! Remember that gift giving occasions may have special importance to them.

Gifts tie into the idea of a love map. Children like it when parents know details about what they do each day, what they like, what they're excited about. Instead of just getting generic gifts, try to be tuned into something your child is especially interested in at the moment and tailor the gift to that.

Acts of Service: All kids like to have you take care of stuff so their needs are met and they don't have to work too hard. And many of them take it for granted and forget to say thank you!

But there are some kids who do notice it (and may thank you for it) and show you that they feel loved when you take care of things like the laundry or making their bed or making them a sandwich. Your work on their behalf signals to them that you value them. You can talk about it that way to them, and they'll get it. ("I don't love doing laundry, but I do love you. So, I take good care of your clothes for you, making sure you always have what you need.")

For all kids, it's important to meet their basic needs (to the best of your ability and means) and keep your promises by doing the things you said you would do. For kids whose love language is acts of service, it's especially important. If you don't do something when you promised, they may seem unusually upset to you, but that is because not only are they disappointed something didn't happen as expected, it also makes them worry that you don't love them.

Quality Time: Kids who feel loved by their parents often love to spend time with their parents. (Well... maybe not when they're teenagers...) For some kids, quality time is especially important. That means time where they have your full attention, and especially when you're doing things together that they enjoy.

To help them feel loved, set aside time each day and specifically call it out as "special time" when you hang out with them, give them your attention and follow their lead in choosing an activity to do together. This is especially important if you have more than one child or a job that pulls a lot of your time and energy away from the family.

This child is very focused on getting their planned times to be with you, and will be particularly upset if you have to cancel planned time together. So, if you have to do so, couch it in language that reinforces your love and desire to spend time with them and establishes when you *will* have special time together. "You know how much I love our Sunday walks together. This week we'll need to do it on Saturday instead because of this other activity that needs to happen on Sunday."

Learning about what love languages you naturally speak, and what love languages the people around you hear best can help you to more clearly communicate your love to them.

If you're feeling less loved by someone than you wish, it's worth looking at love languages. Sometimes you may discover that they have been expressing their love to you but they just have been using a language that's hard for you to understand. One new dad was expressing love through acts of service (fixing a door) when his partner wanted him to just sit with her and talk (quality time). When she was able to use this common idea to express that to him, it helped him understand. Another parent did not speak Gifts and didn't hear Gifts well, but had a child whose love language was gifts – the parent had to learn a new language to best communicate their love. And when they would forget a gift, luckily the child remembered to look for all the other things that parent was doing to communicate their love.