

Discovering your child's primary love language

As you begin to look for a child's primary love language it is better not to discuss your search with your children, and especially with teenagers. By nature, children are self-centered. If they see that the concept of love languages is important to you, they may well use it to manipulate you to satisfy their momentary desires.

You can employ the following methods as you seek to discover your child's primary love language:

1. Observe how your child expresses love to you.
2. Observe how your child expresses love to others.
3. Listen to what your child requests most often
4. Notice what your child most frequently complains about
5. Give your child a choice between two options.

Parenting Workshop

“Love is a Powerful Vitamin”

Each of us has probably read something about “failure-to-thrive babies” or “closet children.” These labels refer to children who are deprived of attention and affection to the point where it negatively influenced their physical growth. In this day and age, one of increased technology and expertise concerning childcare, it is upsetting to realize that some children simply fail to thrive because they lack the vitamin of love.

Physicians recognize failure-to-thrive syndrome where no apparent organic disease is present. The baby is much smaller in size, appears listless, has poor vital signs, poor muscle tone and skin color, and does not respond easily to stimulation. The baby may be living in an environment where physical needs are taken care of in a cold and detached manner. The parent seldom talks to or physically touches the child. The child spends most of the time alone with little or no access to affection. In fact, the failure-to-thrive syndrome was discovered because of experiments with children in institutions where caretaking was mechanical.

Closet children have been discovered after having spent years confined to an attic or other small space, where they have been tied to a bed or chair and given only enough food to barely subsist. Most, when discovered, were severely undersized. Their limbs were fore-shortened, and they had difficulty standing in an upright position. Their speech, language and intelligence were subnormal, as were other aspects of their developmental growth.

Certainly, these children are rare exceptions when you think of all of the children who do thrive and develop normally. However, we cannot dismiss these “exceptions” without realizing that there is an important message for all parents within these tragic circumstances. Loving care is a necessary vitamin for all children. The quality of this love influences the physical and mental growth of all children. Love gives all children the desire to grow, achieve and be hopeful about life. Love must be demonstrated by parents from the beginning when the child is helpless to receive love from other sources and is totally dependent on the family for all forms of nurture. Children are very dependent on others because they cannot satisfy most of their own needs themselves. They are dependent for a long time. Dependence is counting on others for life-giving support. The dependency needs changes with development. These needs can be addressed in different ways, according to the age and stage of the child’s development. Love and caring continue long after the child ceases to be dependent.

Children are precious, valuable beings. Their development must be guided with love. Whether or not they are our own, children are the future. Our own lives will eventually be affected by them. A wise man was recently heard to say:

“The only two things we must fear are the raising up of a generation of children with out love, and nuclear annihilation. If one of these things happens, we will not have to worry about the other.”

The point is that love is the primary responsibility of parents, but it must also become the responsibility of the total community. It will take the combined efforts of everyone in the community to ensure the growth of healthy, competent adults.

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Children learn how to love by direct teaching. They are born with the capacity to love, but the ways of expressing and demonstrating love are learned. Some parents unknowingly believe that taking care of the needs of a dependent child is the example of love that is required of them. It takes thinking about the ways that children receive that love to clarify the difference between love and dependence. Children, because they cannot satisfy most of their own needs for life-giving support, depend on their parents to take care of them. They do not automatically understand that the parent takes care of them because they are loved. In this workshop we are going to identify ways of teaching children that they are able to receive love, and in turn, they are able to give love in measurable ways to their parents, other family members and later, to those whom they wish to live with - all in different ways.”

This workshop is called “Love is a Powerful Vitamin”

Exercise

Think of an example of how you feel loved. Think quickly – don’t labor over your example. We will attempt to be spontaneous. It might help you to try to remember the last time you felt the love of another person, an adult or child. What happened? Why did you feel loved? Write down your example – being sure to include what happened and why this meant so much to you.

Each of us as adults has different ways in which we like to receive love. Our children are the same way. So, we are now going to discuss the “Five Love Languages” of children...this will allow us to look at the ways in which children (and adults) like to receive love. Then we will look at whether the way your child likes to receive love is the same as the ways you like to receive love...

LOVE LANGUAGE #1: Physical Touch

Hugs and kisses are the most common way of speaking this love language, but there are other ways, too. A dad tosses his year-old son in the air. He spins his seven-year-old daughter round and round, and she laughs wildly. A mom reads a story with her three-year-old on her lap.

Such touching activities happen between parents and children, but not as often as you think. Studies indicate that many parents touch their children only when it is necessary: when they are dressing or undressing them, putting them in the car, or carrying them to bed. It seems that many parents are unaware of how much their children need to be touched and how easily they can use this means to keep their children’s emotional tanks filled with unconditional love.

What are some other types of physical touch? High fives, wrestling, bear hugs.....

LOVE LANGUAGE #2: Words of Affirmation

In communicating love, words are powerful. Words of affection and endearment, words of praise and encouragement, words that give positive guidance all say, "I care about you." Such words are like a gentle, warm rain falling on the soul, they nurture the child's inner sense of worth and security. Even though such words are quickly said, they are not soon forgotten. A child reaps the benefits of affirming words for a lifetime.

Praise and affection are often combined in the messages we give to a child. We need to distinguish the two. Affection and love mean expressing appreciation for the very being of a child, for those characteristics and abilities are all part of the total package of the person. In contrast, we express praise for what the child does, either in achievements or behaviors or conscious attitudes. Praise, as we are using it here, is for something over which the child has a degree of control.

LOVE LANGUAGE #3: Quality Time

The most important factor in quality time is not the event itself but that you are doing something together, being together. Quality time does not require that you go somewhere special. You can provide focused attention almost anywhere, and your most nurturing quality times will often be at home, when you alone with a child. Finding time to be alone with each child is not easy, and yet it is essential. In a society where people are increasingly spectators rather than participants, focused attention from parents is all the more critical.

In many homes, children would miss their TV sets more than they would miss their parents. Children are more and more influenced by forces outside the family and they need the strengthening influences of personal time with their parents

Ways to have quality time: positive eye contact, sharing thoughts and feelings, quality conversations.

LOVE LANGUAGE #4: Gifts

The giving and receiving of gifts can be a powerful expression of love, at the time they are given and often extending into later years. The most meaningful gifts become symbols of love, and those that truly convey love are part of a love language. Yet, for parents to truly speak love language number four - gifts - the child must feel that his parents genuinely care. For this reason, the other love languages must be given along with a gift. The child's emotional love tank needs to be kept filled in order for the gift to express heartfelt love. This means that parents will use of combination of physical touch, words of affirmation, quality time and service to keep the love tank full.

LOVE LANGUAGE #5:

Some people speak acts of service as their primary love language. Even if your child does not, know this: parenting is a service-oriented vocation. The day you found out that you would have a child, you enrolled for full-time service. Your contract called for a minimum of 18 years of service with an understanding that you would be on "active reserve" for several years after that.

As a parent who must serve, you probably have discovered another truth about his love language: Acts of service are physically and emotionally demanding. Therefore, we parents must give attention to our own physical and emotional health.

Of course, as parents, you serve your children, but your primary motivation is not to please them. Your chief purpose is to do what is best. What would most please your children at

the moment is likely not the best way to express your love. Put three candy bars in your child's lunch and she will cheer, but you won't be giving her what's best. In serving your children, the main motive - doing what's best - means you are trying to fill their love tanks. And to supply that need for love, you should use your acts of service in conjunction with other languages of love.

SUMMARIZING THE WORKSHOP

“Today we talked about love as a necessary vitamin to be given with frequent and generous dosage to children as they grow. We mentioned that love, in its expression, is taught to children and is never to be taken for granted by parent or child. We considered the pain and devastation felt by parents who cannot find within themselves the love their child needs. We discussed ways of reassuring children that we love them, even when they do things which annoy us or cause us to disapprove of their behavior.

Each of us will leave today with a new list of ways to demonstrate our love. Now, let's take a few minutes to hear from you. Please do evaluation.”

Words of Affirmation

STORY

One Friday after a junior high math teacher asked her students at St. Mary's School in Morris Minnesota, to list the names of all the other students in the class, leaving a space between names. Then she told them to think of the nicest thing they could say about each of their classmates and write it down. At the end of the period she collected these sheets and over the weekend, she wrote the name of each student on a separate sheet of paper and listed what everyone had said about that person. On Monday, she gave each student his or her list.

As they began reading, they started whispering to each other, "I never knew that meant anything to anyone." or, "I didn't know other's liked me so much. The papers were never discussed in class, but the teacher knows the exercise was a success because it gave her students such a positive feeling about themselves.

Several years later, one of the students, Mark Eklund, was killed in Vietnam. After his body was returned to Minnesota, most of his classmates, along with the math teacher, attended the funeral. At the luncheon after the service, the father of the young man said to the teacher "I want to show you something," and took a wallet out of his pocket. "They found this with Mark when he was killed. We thought you might recognize it." Opening the billfold, he removed two worn sheets of notebook paper which had been taped, folded and refolded many times. It was the list of good things Mark's classmates had written about him.

"Thank you so much for doing that," Mark's mother told the teacher. "As you can see, our son treasured it." One by one, Mark's classmates began to reveal that each of them still had their sheet and that they read it often. Some carried it in a billfold; one had even put it in his wedding album. One man said, "I think we all saved our lists."

We would be interested in receiving your feedback on this parent workshop information. Please send comments to pkinnaird@elmiracityschools.com

For more information on this or any other parenting topic please contact the Elmira City School District Parent Child Resource Center at 607.735.3593.

Information for this workshop was excerpted from:
The Five Love Languages by Gary Chapman