

The Five Love Languages

Paraphrased from the book by Gary Chapman*

Have you ever been in a relationship where no matter what you did, the other person felt it just wasn't enough? Have you ever been told repeatedly that you are loved, yet inside you feel empty and separate? Did you wonder what you were doing wrong -- why you just couldn't effectively communicate your connection to someone? Through his counseling, Gary Chapman has found that there are five main love languages:

1. hearing words that affirm
2. quality time spent together
3. receiving gifts and tokens of caring
4. having things done for you
5. physical touch and connection

All of us need all five forms of love, but there is one (or perhaps two), that is our "primary language" and crucial to our feeling loved and cared for. If our partner doesn't speak to us in our "primary language" we feel as if something is missing, and we feel unloved, even if they are speaking to us in their own "primary language." The other person may love us totally and completely, but we don't experience what they say or do as being loving toward us. The same is true for them -- we can show great love for them but if we are not using their "primary language", then they feel abandoned and unloved. So, we need to learn to develop all five love languages, especially the love language of our primary life partner.

Your primary love language is evident in two ways: you usually speak it more often than the other languages, and you feel most loved when it is spoken to you. The languages are the same whether you're a romantic partner, friend or parent.

(1) Words of Affirmation: This is when you need to hear, "I love you," as well as other words of appreciation, words of encouragement, praise, kindness and words that build you up. If you don't hear them, you don't feel loved. How does this work? When we emphasize the positive, it encourages other people to be more positive in return. For example, a wife may always seem to be asking her husband to do one thing or another (see Acts of Service below). Let's say she repeatedly asks her husband to wash the cars. If instead, she tells him how much she appreciates how hard he works, and makes a point of commenting just on his positive qualities, magic can happen if this is his primary language. The next thing she knows, the cars are washed. Basically, her affirming comments helped him find the energy and desire to do the job.

Other examples include:

- Your spouse tells you how much his or her friends appreciate you.
- Your friend says, "Thank you! You really did a great job on that. I appreciate it!"
- Your partner shares about a recent success you had while talking to friends during a party.

(2) Quality Time: Spending time listening, sharing, teaching, reading in the same room, trips, movies, games, etc. Does your partner always want your undivided attention? Do they get upset when you don't stop what you are doing when they want to talk? Do they want to spend time alone with you without you doing some task or project? Quality time means giving others your undivided attention, being available. It's about talking about things that are important, a conversation or doing something that both enjoy. For example, you go to a symphony concert with me because you know I enjoy going, and you want to share in something I enjoy - even when that kind of music isn't your style.

Specific examples include:

- Your spouse kidnaps you for lunch and takes you to your favorite restaurant.
- Your friend invites you to go on a leisurely walk just to chat.
- Your partner plans a special night out for the two of you.

(3) Receiving Gifts: Does the person like to have surprise gifts that are totally unexpected? A personalized gift says that we cared enough to make the effort to bring pleasure to the other person. To be effective the gift must be something that will please the other person. You don't have to go out and spend a lot of money - we just need tangible little remembrances that you are thinking about us even when we are not with you. For example, a card, something you made, a carefully wrapped piece of fudge that you brought home from the office because someone brought it in to work for the group and you remembered how much I love fudge. It is especially impacting when the gift is something we have wanted, or is unique to one of our little quirks. You may need to give the gift with a bit of "ceremony", so that we know you meant it as a token of love. The gift has to be unconditional with no strings attached, rather than a bargaining tool to get something you want in return.

Other examples include:

- Your friend sends you something special through the mail just because it made them think of you.
- Your spouse brings you home a surprise treat from the store.
- Your partner surprises you with a membership to something you always wanted.

(4) Acts of Service: This is when you do things for the one you love. This could be mowing the lawn, building a house, keeping the house clean, folding the laundry, washing the car. Sometimes you just need to ask what it is you can do for us. Even if we don't need that particular act of service at that moment in time, we will feel loved because you offered. The act has to be unconditional: "If you do this for me then I'll do this for you" is not an act of love. Similarly, "Look at all I have done for you" is really just a disguised attempt at manipulation. You must give without expecting anything in return.

Other examples:

- Your spouse takes the time to fill out the long complicated applications that you had hoped to get to this evening.
- Your spouse volunteers to do a job around the house that is typically your job.
- Your spouse brings you breakfast in bed.

(5) Physical Touch: Physical touch is a basic human need. However, some of us need more of it than others to feel loved: a hug, a pat on the arm, a stroke on the cheek, a shoulder massage or our back scratched. Are they always reaching to hold your hand? Do they frequently put an arm around you? Do they stand physically close, maintaining loving eye contact, rest a hand on your arm or leg? Do you find them sitting in the same room with you even if you are doing different activities - just breathing in the silence together? In a romantic relationship physical love is most important, but we also need the touches and caresses during our daily lives to let us know you cherish us.

Other examples include:

- Your friend gives you a massage.
- Your spouse makes a point to embrace and kiss you before leaving the house.
- Your partner gives you a hug just because you are passing by him/her in the room.