

Contents

Introduction: Speaking Your Child's Love Language	9
1. Love Is the Foundation	15
2. Love Language #1: Physical Touch	29
3. Love Language #2: Words of Affirmation	45
4. Love Language #3: Quality Time	61
5. Love Language #4: Gifts	77
6. Love Language #5: Acts of Service	91
7. How to Discover Your Child's Primary Love Language	109
8. Discipline and the Love Languages	125
9. Learning and the Love Languages	145
10. Anger and Love	159
11. Speaking the Love Languages in Single-Parent Families	177
12. Speaking the Love Languages in Marriage	191
Epilogue: What Might Be Is Still Ahead	207
Notes	213
More Help for Parents	215
The Love Languages Mystery Game	217

Love Is the Foundation

Brad and Emily couldn't figure out what was wrong with Caleb, their eight-year-old son. He had been an above-average learner and still did his homework, but this year he was struggling in school. He would go to the teacher after she had given an exercise and ask her to explain it again. He'd visit her desk up to eight times a day, asking for further instructions. Was it poor hearing or a comprehension problem? Brad and Emily had Caleb's hearing tested, and a school counselor gave him a comprehension test. His hearing was normal and his understanding typical for a third-grader.

Other things about their son puzzled them. At times, Caleb's behavior seemed almost antisocial. The teacher would take turns eating with her third-grade students during lunch, but Caleb would sometimes push other children aside so he could be near her. During recess, he would leave other children whenever the teacher appeared on the playground, running to her to ask an insignificant question

and escape the others. If the teacher participated in a game during recess, Caleb would try to hold the teacher's hand during the game.

His parents had met with the teacher three times already, and neither they nor the teacher could find the problem. Independent and happy in grades one and two, Caleb now seemed to show "clinging behavior" that made no sense. He also was fighting much more with his older sister, Hannah, although Emily and Brad assumed that was just a stage he was passing through.

When this couple came to my "The Marriage You've Always Wanted" seminar and told me about Caleb, they were worried, wondering if they had a budding rebel on their hands, or maybe a kid with psychological problems. "Dr. Chapman, we know this is a marriage seminar and maybe our question is out of place," Emily said, "but Brad and I thought that perhaps you could give us some guidance." Then she described her son's worrisome behavior.

I asked these parents whether their own lifestyle had changed this year. Brad said he was a salesman, out on calls two nights a week, but home between 6:00 and 7:30 p.m. on the other weeknights. Those nights were spent catching up on emails and texts and watching a little TV. On weekends, he used to go to football games, often taking Caleb. But he hadn't done that in a year. "It's just too much of a hassle. I'd rather watch the games on TV."

"How about you, Emily?" I asked. "Have there been any changes in your lifestyle over the last few months?"

"Definitely," she said. "I've been working part-time at the college for the last three years since Caleb entered kindergarten. But this year I took a full-time job there, so I get home later than usual. Actually my mom picks him up at school, and Caleb stays with her for about an hour and a half until I pick him up. On the evenings

that Brad is out of town, Caleb and I usually have dinner with my folks and then come home.”

It was almost time for the seminar session to begin, yet I sensed I was beginning to understand what was going on inside of Caleb. So I made a suggestion. “I’m going to be talking about marriage, but I want each of you to be thinking about how the principles I am sharing might apply to your relationship with Caleb. At the end of the seminar, I’d like to know what conclusions you have drawn.” They seemed a little surprised that I was ending our conversation without making any suggestions, but they both were willing to go along with my request.

At the end of the day, as other participants at our seminar were filing out, Brad and Emily hurried up to me with that look of fresh discovery. “Dr. Chapman, I think we have just gained some insight into what’s going on with Caleb,” Emily said. “When you were discussing the five love languages, we both agreed that Caleb’s primary love language is *quality time*. Looking back over the last four or five months, we realized that we have given him less quality time than we had before.

“When I was working part-time, I’d pick him up from school every day, and we would usually do something together on the way home, maybe run an errand or stop by the park or get ice cream together. When we got home, Caleb would play games on his tablet for a while. Then after dinner, I would often help him with his homework or we’d watch something on Netflix, especially on the nights Brad was away. All that has changed since I started my new job, and I realize I’m spending less time with Caleb.”

I glanced at Brad, and he said, “For my part, I realize I used to take Caleb with me to football games, but since I stopped going, I haven’t replaced that father-son time with anything. He and I haven’t really spent a great deal of time together the last few months. I need to think

about ways I can ‘check in’ with him when I’m traveling, too.”

“I think you may have discovered some real insight into Caleb’s emotional need,” I told them. “If you can meet his need for love, I think there is a good chance you will see a change in his behavior.” I suggested some key ways to express love through quality time and challenged Brad to build time with Caleb into his schedule, even “long-distance” time. I encouraged Emily to look for ways she and Caleb could once more do some of the things they did before she started her full-time job. They both seemed eager to translate their insight into action.

“There may be other factors involved,” I said, “but if you will give your son large doses of quality time and then sprinkle in the other four love languages, I think you will see a radical change in his behavior.”

We said goodbye. I never heard from Emily and Brad, and to be honest, I forgot about them. But about two years later I returned to Wisconsin for another seminar, and they walked in and reminded me of our conversation. They were all smiles; we hugged each other, and they introduced me to friends they had invited to the seminar.

“Tell me about Caleb,” I said.

They both smiled and said, “He’s doing great. We meant to write you many times but never got around to it. We went home and did what you suggested. We consciously gave Caleb lots of quality time over the next few months. Within two or three weeks, really, we saw a dramatic change in his behavior at school. In fact, the teacher asked us to come in again, and we were worried. But this time, she wanted to ask what we had done that had brought about such a change in Caleb.”

The teacher told them that Caleb’s inappropriate behavior had stopped: no more pushing other children away from her in the lunchroom; no more coming to her desk to ask question after question.

Then Emily explained that her husband and she had begun to speak Caleb's "love language" after attending a seminar. "We told her how we had started giving him overdoses of quality time," said Emily.

This couple had learned to speak their son's love language, to say, "I love you" in a way that Caleb could understand. His story encouraged me to write this book.

Speaking your child's primary love language does not mean he or she will not rebel later. It does mean your child will know you love him, and that can bring him security and hope; it can help you to rear your child to responsible adulthood. Love is the foundation.

In raising children, everything depends on the love relationship between the parent and child. Nothing works well if a child's love needs are not met. Only the child who *feels* genuinely loved and cared for can do her best. You may truly love your child, but unless she feels it—unless you speak the love language that communicates to her your love—she will not feel loved.

FILLING THE EMOTIONAL TANK

By speaking your child's own love language, you can fill his "emotional tank" with love. When your child feels loved, he is much easier to discipline and train than when his "emotional tank" is running near empty.

Every child has an emotional tank, a place of emotional strength that can fuel him through the challenging days of childhood and adolescence. Just as cars are powered by reserves in the gas tank, our children are fueled from their emotional tanks. We must fill our children's emotional tanks for them to operate as they should and reach their potential.

But with what do we fill these tanks? Love, of course, but love of

a particular kind that will enable our children to grow and function properly.

We need to fill our children's emotional tanks with unconditional love, because real love is always unconditional. Unconditional love is a full love that accepts and affirms a child for who he is, not for what he does. No matter what he does (or does not do), the parent still loves him. Sadly, some parents display a love that is conditional; it depends on something other than their children just being. Conditional love is based on performance and is often associated with training techniques that offer gifts, rewards, and privileges to children who behave or perform in desired ways.

Of course, it is necessary to train and discipline our children—but only after their emotional tanks have been filled (and refilled—they can deplete regularly). Only unconditional love can prevent problems such as resentment, feelings of being unloved, guilt, fear, and insecurity. Only as we give our children unconditional love will we be able to deeply understand them and deal with their behaviors, whether good or bad.

Ana remembers growing up in a home of modest financial resources. Her father was employed at a plant nearby and her mother was a homemaker, except for occasionally working at Target. Both parents were hardworking people who took pride in their house and family. Ana helped her mom cook the evening meal, and later she, her dad, and brothers would pitch in on cleanup and then watch some TV. Saturday was a day for weekly chores and the occasional youth soccer game, and Saturday nights they sent out for pizza. On Sunday mornings, the family went to church and that evening they would spend time with relatives.

When Ana and her brothers were younger, their parents would

listen to them practice their reading almost every night. They always encouraged them in their studies because they wanted all three children to attend college, even though they did not have this opportunity themselves.

In middle school, Ana spent a lot of time with Sophia. The two had most classes together, often shared lunch, texted one another. But the girls didn't visit each other at home. If they had, they would have seen vast differences. Sophia's father was a successful executive who was away from home most of the time. Sophia's mother was a doctor with a busy practice. An older sister was out of college and living out of state. The family did take vacations to places like London and LA, which Sophia loved. Her mother did her best to make time for her younger daughter and understood the dangers of lavishing her with things rather than simple attention. . . .

The girls were good friends until the ninth grade, when Sophia went off to a college-prep school near her grandparents. The first year, the girls kept in touch on social media; after that, Sophia began dating and communicated less. Ana got busy with her studies and other friendships. After Sophia's family moved away, Ana never heard from her again.

If she had, she would have been sad to know that after marrying and having one child, Sophia struggled with alcoholism and the breakup of her marriage. In contrast, Ana was in grad school studying advanced biology.

What made the difference in the outcome of two childhood friends? Although there is no one answer, we can see part of the reason in what Sophia once told her therapist: "I never felt loved by my parents. I first got involved in drinking because I wanted my friends to like me." In saying this, she wasn't trying to lay blame on her parents

as much as she was trying to understand herself.

Did you notice what Sophia said? It wasn't that her parents didn't love her but that she did not feel loved. Most parents love their children and also want their children to feel loved, but few know *how* to adequately convey that feeling. It is only as they learn how to love unconditionally that they will let their children know how much they are truly loved.

A WORD OF HOPE

Raising emotionally healthy children is an increasingly difficult task these days. The influence of media (including our ever-present screens), the rise in psychological issues like narcissism, the violence and hopelessness that plague some communities, the decline in the influence of the church, even simple middle-class busyness—these things challenge families daily.

It is into such reality that we speak a word of hope to parents. We

want you to enjoy a loving relationship with your children.

Our focus in this book is on one exceedingly

important aspect of parenting—meeting your

children's need for love. We have written this

book to help you give your children a greater

experience of the love you have for them.

This will happen as you speak the love lan-

guages they understand and can respond to.

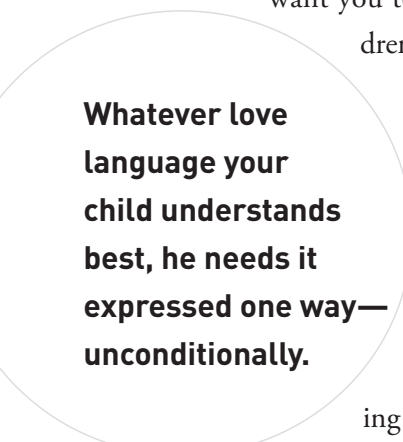
Every child has a special way of perceiv-

ing love. There are five ways children (indeed, all

people) speak and understand emotional love. They are

physical touch, words of affirmation, quality time, gifts, and acts of service.

If you have several children in your family, chances are they speak



Whatever love language your child understands best, he needs it expressed one way—unconditionally.

different languages, for just as children often have different personalities, they may hear in different love languages. Typically, two children need to be loved in different ways.

Whatever love language your child understands best, he needs it expressed in one way—unconditionally. Unconditional love is a guiding light, illuminating the darkness and enabling us as parents to know where we are and what we need to do as we raise our child. Without this kind of love, parenting is bewildering and confusing.

We can best define unconditional love by showing what it does. Unconditional love shows love to a child *no matter what*. We love regardless of what the child looks like; regardless of her assets, liabilities, or handicaps; regardless of what we expect her to be; and, most difficult of all, regardless of how she acts. This does not mean that we like all of her behavior. It does mean that we give and show love to our child all the time, even when her behavior is poor.

Does this sound like permissiveness? It is not. Rather, it is doing first things first. A child with a full love tank can respond to parental guidance without resentment.

Some people fear that this may lead to “spoiling” a child, but that is a misconception. No child can receive too much appropriate unconditional love. A child may be “spoiled” by a lack of training or by inappropriate love that gives or trains incorrectly. True unconditional love will never spoil a child because it is impossible for parents to give too much of it.

If you have not loved your children in this way, you may find it difficult at first. But as you practice unconditional love, you will find it has a wonderful effect, as you become a more giving and loving person in all your relationships. No one is perfect, of course, and you cannot expect yourself to love unconditionally all of the time. But as

you move toward that goal, you will find that you are more consistent in your ability to love, no matter what.

You may find it helpful to frequently remind yourself of some rather obvious things about your children:

- 1** They are children.
- 2** They will tend to act like children.
- 3** Much childish behavior is unpleasant.
- 4** If I do my part as a parent and love them, despite their childish behavior, they will mature and give up their childish ways.
- 5** If I love them only when they please me (conditional love), and if I express my love to them only at those times, they will not feel genuinely loved. This will damage their self-image, make them feel insecure, and actually prevent them from moving into better self-control and more mature behavior. Therefore, their development and behavior is as much my responsibility as it is theirs.
- 6** If I love them only when they meet my requirements or expectations, they will feel incompetent and will believe it is pointless to do their best, since it is never enough. They will always be plagued by insecurity, anxiety, low self-esteem, and anger. To guard against this, I need to often remind myself of my responsibility for their total growth.
- 7** If I love them unconditionally, they will feel comfortable about themselves and will be able to control their anxiety and their behavior as they grow to adulthood.

Of course, there are age-appropriate behaviors with our sons and daughters. Teens act differently than little children, and a thirteen-

year-old will respond differently than a seven-year-old. But we must remember they are still minors, not mature adults, so we can expect them to fail at times. Show patience with them as they learn to grow.

WHAT YOUR CHILD NEEDS FROM YOU

This book focuses primarily on our children's need for love and how to provide it. That's because it is their greatest emotional need and greatly affects our relationship with them. Other needs, especially physical needs, are easier to recognize and usually easier to fulfill, but they are not as satisfying or life-changing. Yes, we need to provide our children shelter, food, and clothing. But we are also responsible to foster the mental and emotional growth and health of our children.

We used to worry about "self-esteem." Then we sought to provide it in parenting, schooling, sports, all areas where adults were interacting with kids. Perhaps we were too successful! The child with an embellished sense of self will see himself as superior to others—as God's gift to the world and deserving of whatever he wants. Studies show this inflated sense of self-esteem is rampant among the young today. Psychology professor Jean Twenge notes that measures of self-esteem have risen consistently since the 1980s among children of all ages—and "what starts off as healthy self-esteem can quickly morph into an inflated view of oneself."¹

But equally damaging, the child who underestimates his worth will struggle with thoughts such as, "I am not as smart, athletic, or beautiful as others." "I can't" is his theme song, and "I didn't" is his reality. It is worthy of our best efforts as parents to see that our children develop appropriate self-esteem so that they will view themselves as important members of society with special talents and abilities and will feel a desire to be productive.

Children also have a universal need for *security and safety*. In our world of uncertainties, at home and “out there,” it is increasingly difficult for parents to provide this sense of security. At the same time, parents can’t hover like the “helicopter parents” we’ve all heard of (and may worry we’re turning into). As we said earlier, our task as parents is to raise mature adults capable of functioning and flourishing in the world.

A child needs to develop relational skills so that she will treat all persons as having equal value and will be able to build friendships through a balanced flow of giving and receiving. Without these skills, a child is in danger of becoming withdrawn and remaining that way into adulthood. A child lacking essential relational skills might also become a controlling bully who lacks empathy and treats others cruelly. Finally, a child must learn to relate properly to authority. Without this, no other abilities will mean very much.

Parents need to help their children nurture their special gifts and talents so that the children will feel the inner satisfaction and sense of accomplishment that come from using one’s innate abilities. Conscientious parents must maintain the delicate balance between pushing and encouraging. (See *8 Great Smarts*, by Kathy Koch, PhD, for more on this.)

Your children will sense how you feel about them by how you behave toward them. If you began to list all the behavioral ways to love a child, I doubt that you could fill more than one page. There just aren’t that many ways, and that is fine, because you want to keep it simple. What matters is to keep your children’s love tanks full. You can simply remember that behavioral expressions of love can be divided into physical touch, quality time, gifts, acts of service, and words of affirmation.

Beginning with chapter 2, we will help you uncover your child's primary love language. If your child is under age four, speak all five languages. Tender touch, supporting words, quality time, gifts, and acts of service all converge to meet your child's need for love. If that need is met and your child genuinely feels loved, it will be far easier for him to learn and respond in other areas. This love interfaces with all other needs a child has. Speak all five languages when your child is older, too, for he needs all five to grow, even though he craves one more than the others.

When you discover your child's love language and thus she receives the love she needs, don't assume everything in her life will be problem-free. There will still be setbacks and misunderstandings. But your child, like a flower, will benefit from your love. When the water of love is given, your child will bloom and bless the world with beauty. Without that love, she will become a wilted flower, begging for water.

Because you want your children to grow into full maturity, you will want to show them love in all the languages and then teach them how to use these for themselves. The value is not only for your children but for the people with whom they will live and associate. One mark of a mature adult is the ability to give and receive appreciation through all the love languages—physical touch, quality time, words of affirmation, gifts, and acts of service. Few adults are able to do this; most of them give or receive love in one or two ways.

If this is not something you have done in the past, you may find that you too are changing and growing in understanding and in the quality of your relationships. In time, you will have a truly multi-lingual family.