



In this wise, warm, practical guide, you'll learn how the five love languages can help strengthen your marriage and family life—whatever your needs. Sharing dozens of stories from parents of children with special needs, the authors teach you how to love every member of your family without exhausting yourself.

Interested in the whole book?
Select your preferred book seller:

[MOODY PUBLISHERS](#) [AMAZON](#) [APPLE BOOKS](#) [GOOGLE PLAY](#) [WALMART](#) [BARNES & NOBLE](#) [CHRISTIANBOOK.COM](#) 

Contents

About the Authors	11
Foreword	13
Introduction	17
A Note to Family and Friends	21
1. How a Baby with Special Needs Changed the Way We Love	23
2. Special Needs Parenting and the Challenges of Loving	47
3. Communication and Connection:	
Sharing Love with Your Spouse	59
4. Love Is a Child's First Language	75
5. Loving Your Child with Special Needs:	
Words of Affirmation and Quality Time	89
6. Loving Your Child with Special Needs:	
Gifts, Acts of Service, and Physical Touch	99
7. Sharing Love with Siblings	111
8. How Extended Family and Friends Can Support	
Caregiving Families	123
9. Communicating about the Love Languages	
with Professionals	133
10. Voices of Experience	145
Epilogue: Keeping Love Alive in Special Needs Families	153
Appendix	155
Recommended Resources	163
Acknowledgments	169
Notes	171

How a Baby with Special Needs Changed the Way We Love

MY HUSBAND AND I were elated in the fall of 1981 when we learned I was pregnant with our first child. Hiram and I had met seven years earlier at Westmar, a tiny Christian college in Iowa. He had been raised in Alaska by an airplane mechanic father and schoolteacher mother. I was raised in a small northwest Iowa town by a dad diagnosed with multiple sclerosis at age twenty-nine and a schoolteacher mom. Hiram was an athlete; I was a theater geek. He was quiet; I was not. He hated to read; I inhaled books. He was logical; I was creative. He was a romantic; I was practical. In many ways, we could have been poster children for the “opposites attract” school of romance.

But we had more in common than was evident at first glance. We had both been raised to work hard. We both valued family and education. Most importantly, we both shared similar faith commitments. Later Hiram said that fact, more than anything else, led him to call and ask me to be his date to homecoming. He was so nervous his tongue tripped over his words repeatedly before he got the question out. Once I deciphered what he was saying, I said yes without hesitation.

Three years later, in July 1977, we got married. A year after that, we graduated and moved to Camp Crook, a town of ninety-two people in the very northwest corner of South Dakota. We had accepted jobs, Hiram as a caseworker and me as a teacher at Sky Ranch for Boys, a facility for troubled youth. After two years at the ranch, I accepted a job at the public school in Camp Crook.

Many of the town's activities revolved around the school. Therefore, when we announced our first child was on the way, the baby's impending arrival was a community affair. My husband and I, as well as my students and their families, waited eagerly for Baby Philo's appearance in late May. I went into labor one Saturday evening, and Allen Craig Philo was born shortly after midnight on May 23, 1982 at the hospital in Spearfish, South Dakota.

We called our parents immediately with the good news but waited until morning to phone our friends in Camp Crook. By morning, the news wasn't all good. Our baby's breathing had become increasingly labored during the night, and the doctor ordered an X-ray. When the results proved inconclusive, he asked to transfer our son to Rapid City Regional Hospital for more tests. Stunned, Hiram and I gave our consent. There wasn't even time to see our baby and kiss him goodbye.

A little before noon, a pediatrician from Rapid City called with a diagnosis. Hiram was showering at a friend's house when the doctor explained what the tests had revealed. "Your son has a tracheoesophageal fistula. That means his esophagus comes down from the throat and forms a blind pouch. It comes up from his stomach and hooks into his trachea. He needs immediate surgery to save his life." The doctor cleared his throat. "The good news is that the success rate for this surgery is 92 percent, the highest for any major birth anomaly. The bad news is that closest hospi-

tals equipped to do this surgery are the University of Nebraska in Omaha or the University of Colorado in Denver.” The doctor paused. “Where do you want him sent?” he asked.

My heart was breaking, my hormones were raging, and I desperately wanted to talk to my husband before deciding. But the doctor said there was no time to waste.

“Omaha,” I whispered, knowing it was only a few hours from where my parents lived. “Take him to Omaha.” With those words my heart cracked in two.

On that day we began our lives as parents of a child with special needs. From birth until shortly after his fourth birthday, Allen endured seven corrective surgeries, dozens of invasive medical tests and procedures, and innumerable doctors’ appointments. He had a final surgery at age fifteen. As a young adult, he was treated for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) caused by the early invasive surgeries and procedures that saved his life. He’s an adult now, a husband, a dad, and a valued employee.

Raising a child with special needs changed the dynamics of our family, touching all of us in significant ways. The experience defined the way we parented our son. It strained and changed our marriage. It altered our relationship with our daughter, Anne, who is six years younger than Allen. And it impacted our daughter’s relationship with her older brother. In many ways, we are who we are because of our son’s special needs.

DISCOVERING THE 5 LOVE LANGUAGES

We were changed by our parenting experience, but once our son’s health stabilized, our lives became more predictable. We once again became active in our church, and we were excited when

it offered a Sunday school class based on a brand-new book by Gary Chapman called *The 5 Love Languages*. Communication between Hiram and me had been a struggle since the beginning of our marriage. Four years of emergency surgeries and sleepless nights with a very sick child had only exacerbated the problem. We signed up for the class and read the book eagerly.

In it Gary described how difficult it would be for someone from China who didn't know a word of English to communicate with you or me, or vice versa. Even if you drew pictures, used gestures, and paid attention to facial expressions, effective communication would be almost impossible. He used the metaphor of literal language to help readers understand the different ways individuals perceive emotional love. The perceptions are so distinct they comprise five different "languages" or channels of communication. We all have at least one language that communicates emotional love to us more than the others. Understanding each other's love language, and choosing to speak it, greatly enhances our relationships.¹

A QUICK GUIDE TO THE FIVE LOVE LANGUAGES

I (Gary) never tire of hearing how the love languages enhance a marriage. Let me give a brief summary of the five love languages.

Words of Affirmation: Unsolicited compliments, whether verbal or written, or words of appreciation. Examples: "I love you." "You did an amazing job!" "You look great in that dress." "I really appreciate your attention to details." Dialects include words of encouragement, humble words, and words of kindness. Saying nice things about a person to others counts too because the message often travels back to him or her as others repeat the compliment.

A “*Words of Affirmation* person” can be emotionally devastated by insults and harsh words.

Quality Time: Giving someone your full, undivided attention. Dialects are quality conversation (sharing thoughts, feelings, desires, and experiences with the emphasis on really listening to another person) and quality activities (sharing memory-making experiences). A “*Quality Time* person” can be hurt by halfhearted or distracted listening, or by repeatedly postponing promised time together.

Gifts (or “Receiving Gifts”): Any purchased, handmade, or found tangible gift to let someone know you care. A gift is a visible symbol of love. Price is irrelevant: meaningful gifts can range from costly to having no monetary value at all. It is the thoughtfulness and effort behind a gift that send the “I love you” message. Being physically present, the gift of your time, is an intangible gift that is very precious to some people, especially in times of crisis, illness, or celebration. A “*Gifts* person” can be hurt by a forgotten anniversary or birthday, or left feeling empty in a relationship void of tangible tokens of love.

Acts of Service: Doing helpful things for another person, such as setting the table, walking the dog, washing dishes, vacuuming, or grocery shopping. The purpose of *Acts of Service* is to lighten the load of the other person. Acts of service require thought, planning, time, and effort. The idea is not simply to stay busy, or to do the tasks *you* enjoy most, but to do the things that are most meaningful and helpful to the *other* person. An “*Acts of Service* person” can be hurt by laziness, someone leaving a mess for them to clean up, or a forgotten promise to help.

Physical Touch: Deliberate touch that requires your full attention to deliver, such as a back rub, a foot massage, a hug, a high five, or a kiss; incidental touch that requires little or no extra investment of time, such as sitting close to a person on the sofa or touching their shoulder as you walk by. For a “*Physical Touch* person,” touch sends the clearest “I love you” message. For a “*Physical Touch* person,” a slap or any kind of abuse or neglect can cause extreme emotional pain.

Each of us has a primary love language. One of the five speaks more deeply to us than the other four. Husbands and wives, parents and children, and even good friends, usually don’t speak the same love

language. The language that comes naturally to each of us and makes us feel loved is the one we use instead of speaking in the other person’s language—the one that makes *them* feel loved. Even when both people speak their love language loudly and often, if they aren’t speaking in the other person’s language, neither one will feel loved. Some people also have a secondary love language that speaks loudly to them. Heavy doses of the primary and secondary love languages will keep the emotional love tank full.

THE 5 LOVE LANGUAGES



Words of Affirmation



Quality Time



Receiving Gifts



Acts of Service



Physical Touch

Once people know about the five love languages and discover the primary languages of the significant people in their lives, the next step is to make a concerted effort to speak to each person in *that person's* love language. When couples, and indeed whole families, mutually embrace the concept and communicate love the way that's most meaningful to another person, both people feel emotionally loved. Intentional love, spoken consistently, fluently, and in the right language, deepens a relationship and equips it to weather the storms of life that will inevitably come.

Gary's description of the five love languages and how to employ them resonated with Hiram and me. We took the quiz in the book to discover our own love languages. Our communication struggles lessened after I learned to speak his (physical touch and quality time) and he learned to speak mine (acts of service and words of affirmation). As Gary explained, speaking in each other's love language was a way to fill the other person's love tank.

KEEPING LOVE TANKS FULL

My experiences as a mom and my training as an elementary teacher made me suspect that the love languages could deepen our relationships with our children. We intentionally tried all five love languages with our kids and observed how they responded. When we began speaking their languages, family life got a whole lot easier and way more fun because everyone's love tank was being filled.

Child psychologists affirm that children have certain basic emotional needs that must be met if they are to be emotionally stable. One of those basic needs is for love and affection, which creates a sense of belonging and being wanted.² Every time Hiram

and I spoke to our kids in their love languages, we were filling their little love tanks. Since full love tanks mean less isolation between spouses and improved behavior in kids, it was no wonder life was easier and more fun the more we used love languages at home.

I wish *The 5 Love Languages* had been available when Allen was born and during the years when our lives were a chaotic mix of health concerns for our baby and unending surgeries. If we'd known about the love languages then, Hiram and I could have spoken them to one another during the long drives to our son's medical procedures and doctors' appointments. We could have lavished all five languages on our little boy—until we figured out his preferred ones—so he could enter the doctor's office or hospital with his love tank full, and so we could replenish it as he recovered from surgeries or tests.

But instead of brooding about what I couldn't change, I looked for ways to use the love languages to create healthier relationships in our family circle and beyond. I started to use the languages with students at school. Resources hadn't yet been created for determining kids' primary languages, so I injected all five whenever feasible during the school day. All my students responded, perhaps because they heard me talking their language or perhaps because my intentional efforts created a more positive classroom climate.

The students who benefited most were those with special learning needs, children whose primary love language was probably not the one used most frequently by teachers: words of affirmation. When these students heard their language spoken in our classroom through a pat on the shoulder (physical touch), me sitting down and listening to them read (quality time), lending a hand with the pesky classroom pencil sharpener (acts of service),

or receiving gifts (a sticker or pencil), our classroom became a place where they felt like they belonged.

DETERMINING EVERYONE'S LOVE LANGUAGE

These experiences proved, at least to me, that the five love languages are a powerful tool to use with children. After Gary wrote books about using the love languages with children and teens, parents were better equipped to use them with typically developing kids of all ages. But until now, there has been no resource devoted to the unique challenge of using the love languages with kids who have special needs. We (Gary and Jolene) wrote this book to equip every member of special needs families—parents, typical siblings, and children with special needs—to do two things: discover their love languages and to use the languages effectively with one another.

Gary's love language quiz for couples and single parents is located at the end of this chapter. His Love Languages Mystery Game for younger children and a quiz for teens, both of which can be used with typical siblings, are also found there. Strategies parents can use to determine the love languages of their children who are babies or toddlers, nonverbal, developmentally delayed, or medically fragile are explained in chapter 5.

You can take the quiz now or wait until you've finished the entire book. In future chapters, you'll hear stories of how other families caring for kids with a variety of special needs use the love languages. But first, chapter 2 looks at how the challenges of caring for kids with special needs can stress a marriage.

Interested in the whole book?
Select your preferred book seller:

MOODY PUBLISHERS 

AMAZON 

APPLE BOOKS 

GOOGLE PLAY 

WALMART 

BARNES & NOBLE 

CHRISTIANBOOK.COM 