

languages of love

ARE YOU FRUSTRATED BY UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPTS AT CONNECTING WITH YOUR CHILD? SOMETIMES IT CAN SEEM LIKE YOU'RE BOTH SPEAKING A DIFFERENT LANGUAGE – WELL MAYBE YOU ARE...

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Sometimes parents find there is one child in their family who they just don't "click" with, or one with whom it seems more difficult to bond and interact. In addition, they just don't seem to know how to make that child happy any more. They can't figure out where, and when, it went wrong. It may seem like they come from different planets, or speak different languages.

In the early 1990s a book was released that highlighted why couples, parents or families may find that they just don't feel loved any more by an important other.

The book, *The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment To Your Mate* by Gary Chapman, focuses on the notion of love languages. It suggests that all of us "speak" one or two main love languages when we interact with another person, including children. When our child does not speak our main love language, we can fall out of sync with them.

The answer, then, might lie in learning what

others – and we all tend to give love in the language we are most fluent in. This is similar to the actual language you speak on a daily basis.

Chapman suggests that in order to be content, happy and fulfilled we need to have someone else communicate love to us in our own love language. He suggests that we all, children included, have a love tank that essentially needs filling with the right fuel, and if it isn't regularly topped up, we become unhappy and empty.

HOW DO LOVE LANGUAGES WORK?

Following is a brief overview of how the languages work and of how they can be at discord in someone's life: *Bessie described her eldest daughter, Justine, as a helpful child but was concerned that she never seemed to like being cuddled or seemed overly happy. Justine was a five-year-old and the eldest in a family of three children. She was always described as the "good" child – she was polite, well mannered and no trouble at all. Her mother Bessie was well aware of how helpful Justine was around the home. Even at the age of five she had learnt to help tidy up her room without having to be asked (acts of service).*

Bessie rarely spent much one-on-one time with Justine (quality time) because her two-year-old was such a handful. Bessie never got around to it and Justine never demanded it; she didn't complain much.

Bessie liked to shower her kids with presents (gifts) to show them how proud she was of them. Justine got a lot of presents because she had an impeccable school record, but she didn't really respond to this. She was always polite and thankful but never really asked for anything, or got overly excited about the gifts.

Justine was not a particularly emotionally needy child (physical touch) – she often withdrew from hugs

and cuddles, and was content just to be in the same room with the family, unlike her sister who demanded time and affection daily. While Justine was accepting of compliments and appropriately grateful if someone made a kind comment to her, she did not readily offer them in return (words of affirmation).

This example highlights the essence of each love language and how easy it is to relate to someone who "speaks" the same language. However, it also shows how hard it can be to relate to someone who doesn't. It can be as if you speak two entirely different languages, like English and Chinese!

YOU & YOUR YOUNG CHILD

Children start to display their primary love language from a very early age – even as young as two. It's a matter of detective work to discover which one they prefer. While some of the love languages require verbal communication skills – words of affirmation for example – and might take longer to identify as a primary love language, the others may surface earlier and be easily identified.

It is important to remember, babies in the first couple of years need all five of the love languages to be performed for them in order to help them develop emotionally. Beyond that, you can begin to observe your child and how they relate to you, and significant others, in order to identify, and then fulfil their main love language.

Watching your toddler or child over the next few weeks and "listening" to them will give you the insight you need. If your child frequently says phrases like 'I love you' and 'Thanks for dinner', you may presume they prefer words of affirmation to make them feel loved. If they frequently touch you, request cuddles and sit with their body close to you (for example while reading a book), they may be seeking love through physical touch.

Children whose primary love language is gifts

BABIES IN THEIR FIRST FEW YEARS NEED ALL FIVE OF THE LOVE LANGUAGES TO BE PERFORMED

your child's main love language is so that you can consciously choose to communicate in this way.

Chapman notes that there are five main love languages: the giving of gifts, engaging in physical touch, spending quality time, speaking words of affirmation and doing acts of service.

For both adults and children, one or two of the above languages is our primary way of relating to





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will often take great pleasure in giving and making something for you or receiving a gift; while those who want quality time with you will be at their most content when it is just you and them doing something they enjoy.

Children who give love as acts of service might not show this until they are two to three, but will come across as helpful and considerate children, eager to do things for you and others.

Another easy way to find out your child's love language is to listen to what they complain about. It will possibly be because their love language is not being fulfilled. Quality-time children who get little one-on-one time (perhaps because of other siblings in the family) may try to get your attention all the time. Physical touch children might incessantly demand cuddles and want to be all over you, regardless of what you're doing!

The key to listening to complaints is to watch for patterns and frequency (for example, they complain daily). If you think you have identified their language, it's a matter of offering that in the next few days to see if it makes a difference to their mood and level of complaints.

Finally, giving children a choice between two love languages may help to identify which they speak (for example asking them if they would like to read a story with you or go shopping for new shoes). They will invariably choose the language that appeals to them the most.

HOW TO COMMUNICATE

Here are some ideas of how to communicate with toddlers and children in each language:

- **Acts of service** Do something for them – cook their favourite meal, for example, or involve them in a task such as baking.
- **Gifts** Give them a gift such as new paints and make a fuss of it (make the wrapping special).
- **Words of affirmation** Tell your child several times a day how much you love them and how they are very special in your family.
- **Quality time** Spend one-on-one time with this child. You can read stories, make crafts, go shopping, or watch their favourite TV show together.
- **Physical touch** Offer many hugs and stroke their arm or hair when they sit next to you.

By choosing to fulfil your child's love language, over time, you will find they begin to warm and respond to you – and life will seem easier and less demanding as far as this child is concerned.

WHAT ABOUT YOUR PARTNER?

An extension of these concepts is to identify your partner's primary love language and implement it where you can, because, again, life will flow more harmoniously if everyone is being fulfilled.

The irony of identifying your partner's love language is that they will, in turn, fulfil your love tank without even knowing it. This is one way to rectify a relationship without the other person's knowledge and still get what you need!

Please note, a troubled adult relationship probably took some time to disintegrate, and so, too, will the healing phase. You may have to spend a few weeks consistently doing another person's language to see a response from them. ●

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BREAKING DOWN THE LANGUAGE BARRIER

- 1 Choose one child with whom you would like to fulfil their love language.
- 2 Make sure you engage in enough interaction with them over the next week to ascertain which love language might be their main one. Listen for anything they complain about as this might give you clues.
- 3 If you think you have isolated one or two of their languages, spend the following week trying to do something in line with that language (at least three to four times).
- 4 If you're unsure of your child's main language, choose one of the languages and do it a few times to see if you get a response. If you don't notice an improvement in their mood towards you, try another language. One of them will have an impact – try all five.

RESOURCES FURTHER READING

- *The Five Love Languages Of Children* by Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell (Moody Press, \$19.95). Available online from dymocks.com.au.