

An Introduction to the Five Love Languages of Children and the First Love Language: Physical Touch, based on *The Five Love Languages of Children* by Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell

1. Love is the Foundation: Why Love Languages are Important

- a. Every child has an emotional tank, a place of emotional strength that fuels them through the challenging days of childhood and adolescence. When your child feels loved, he or she is much easier to discipline and train than when his or her emotional tank is empty
- b. Does this mean he or she will never rebel? Of course not, but it does mean your child will know that you love them, and that can bring them security and hope. Speaking your child's love language can help you rear your child to be a responsible adult, because love is the foundation
- c. Only a child who feels genuinely loved and cared for can do his or her best. You truly love your child, but unless you speak their love language, that is the language that best communicates to him or her that you love them, he or she will not feel loved. Let that sink in for a second: you love your child, but your love language may not be theirs. If you only use your love language and refuse to speak theirs, then your child may not feel like you love them.
- d. What are the love languages? The five ways that children and all people speak and understand emotional love are: Physical touch, words of affirmation, quality time, gifts, and acts of service
- e. Whatever love language your child understands best, he or she needs that love experienced unconditionally- it's extremely important that you show love to your child no matter what, including how he/she acts
- f. **We must give and show love to our child all the time, even when his/her behavior is poor, because a child with a full love tank can respond to parental guidance without resentment**
- g. Important to remember that:
 - i. Children are children
 - ii. They tend to act like children
 - iii. A lot of childish behavior is unpleasant
 - iv. If you do your part as a parent and love them, despite their childish behavior, they will mature and give up their childish ways
- o If you love them only when they please you (conditional love), and if you express your 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. Their development and behavior is as much your responsibility as it is theirs.

- If you love them only when they meet your requirements or expectations, they will feel incompetent and will believe it is pointless to do their best, since it is never enough. They will be plagued by insecurity, anxiety, low self-esteem, and anger
 - If you 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
 - h. Children are not mature adults, so we can expect them to fail at times, but it's important to show patience with them as they learn and grow
 - i. Children have a universal need for safety and security; speaking to them in their love language shows them that they are safe and loved
 - j. Children need to develop relational skills so that they will treat all persons as having equal value- they develop these skills by giving and receiving love
2. Loving Your Child as They Grow
- a. The early years: the emotional foundation of life is laid in the first 18 months of life, particularly in the mother and child relationship. The “food” for future emotional health is physical touch, kind words, and tender care
 - i. The foundation of love laid in the early years affects a child's ability to learn and largely determines when he or she is able to grasp new information
 - b. Adolescence
 - i. Children raised with conditional love learn how to love that way- they will often manipulate and control their parents. When they are pleased, they please their parents. When they aren't pleased, they frustrate their parents. This cycle usually turns into anger, resentment, and acting out by teens
 - c. Children are extremely sensitive to the emotional state of their parents because children are primarily emotional beings. They are keenly aware of parents' displays of love to them, and this is also why they are afraid of their parents' anger
 - d. Parents often assume that their kids just know that they love them, or that saying “I love you” is enough- Children are behaviorally motivated, so they respond to action—what you do with them. So to reach them, you must love them on their terms
 - e. Children know when you don't feel loving, and yet when you respond to them with loving actions, they are even more grateful and appreciative when you're able to be loving, no matter how you feel inside

- By now you're probably trying to figure out which love language your child speaks: If your child is under the age of 5, don't expect to figure out his/her primary love language, just speak all 5 love languages: tender touch, supporting words, quality time, gifts, and acts of service all converge to meet your child's need for love
- Because you want your children to grow into full maturity, you will want to show them love in all the languages and teach them how to use these for themselves- 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). But here's the thing: you don't know what love language your child's eventual spouse will speak, or what love languages their children will speak, so it's very important to work to show them love in all languages and teach them how to use all five.

3. Physical Touch

- a. This is the first love language and one of the most commonly known ones. Hugs and kisses are the most common way to speak this love language, but there are other ways too: for instance, a dad tossing his one year old son in the air, spinning his seven year old daughter round and round, a mom reading a story with her three year old on her lap- these are all ways to speak the love language of physical touch
- b. There are studies that indicate that many parents only touch their children when absolutely necessary: when dressing/undressing them, putting them in the car, or carrying them to bed. It seems that parents are **unaware of how much their children need to be touched and how easily they can use this means to keep their child's emotional tanks filled with unconditional love**
- c. Physical touch is the EASIEST love language to use unconditionally, because parents don't need a special occasion or excuse to make physical contact—even when they are busy, parents can gently touch a child on the back, arm, or shoulder
- d. A Young child's need for touch:
 - i. Babies who are held, caressed, and kissed develop a healthier emotional life than those who are left for long periods of time without physical contact
 - ii. Physical touch is one of love's strongest voices
 - iii. Even if physical touch is not your child's primary love language, **ALL CHILDREN NEED TO BE TOUCHED**
- e. Infants and toddlers
 - i. Children need plenty of touches during their first few years

- ii. In childcare, a baby deserves loving and gentle touches whether in changing diapers or during feeding or carrying- Parents should make every effort to ensure the loving treatment of their children during the hours they are apart
 - iii. Children need many meaningful touches every day, and parents should make every effort to provide these expressions of love. If you're not naturally a hugger, you may feel that you're going against your natural tendency, but you can learn
 - iv. Boys and girls alike need physical affection- the more parents keep the emotional tank full, the healthier the child's self-esteem and identity will be
- f. School-age children
- i. Preschoolers and elementary children have a strong need for touch
 - ii. A hug given as he/she leaves each morning may be the difference between emotional security and insecurity throughout the day
 - iii. A hug when your child returns home may determine whether your child has a quiet evening of positive mental and physical activity or if he/she makes a rambunctious effort to get your attention- home should be a haven, the place where love is secure
 - iv. All children need physical contact throughout their childhood and adolescence- **many boys from age seven to nine go through a stage when they are resistant to affectionate touch, and yet they still need physical contact. They tend to be responsive to more vigorous contact such as wrestling, jostling, playful hitting, bear hugs, high fives, etc. Girls also enjoy this type of physical touch, but they do not resist the softer touches as well, because they don't go through the affection-resistant stage like boys**
 - v. Much physical touch at this stage in a child's life will come through playing games – when you play games together in the backyard, you combine both quality time and physical touch
 - vi. Hold a small child while reading a story, run your fingers through your child's hair, pat him/her on the back or leg, touch their shoulder or arm, etc.
 - vii. Other times when physical touch is important for both boys and girls: when a child is sick, hurt physically or emotionally, tired, or when something funny or sad has taken place
 - viii. **Important to give boys the physical touch they need, even if they act as if they don't want it**

- g. Tweens to Teens
 - i. Continue to fuel their tanks with love, even when they may not give you signs of their needs
 - ii. While boys approaching adolescence may pull back from touch, fearing it's too feminine, girls may find their fathers pulling back- **Dads, don't pull back from your daughters**, because during the preteen stage, girls have a particular need for expressions of love from their fathers. **Unlike boys, the importance of being assured of unconditional love increases for girls and seems to reach its peak around the age of 11.** One reason for this is that mothers generally provide more physical affection at this stage than fathers do
 - 1. Girls with healthy self-esteem and sexual identity can simply be themselves- their behavioral patterns are consistent and stable, and they can better withstand peer pressure
 - a. Many of these girls have this because of a full emotional love tank- many of them have fathers or father substitutes in their lives who take part in keeping the emotional tank full
 - h. Your Teenager and Touch
 - i. Important to show your love in positive ways and at the right times and places when your child is a teen (aka moms don't hug your sons in front of his friends)
 - ii. At the end of the day, at home, you can totally hug him
 - iii. A teen girl needs hugs and kisses from her father- if he withdraws, she will likely seek physical touch from another male; time and place is important- unless she initiates a hug in public, don't hug her in public
 - iv. Fathers hugging sons and mothers hugging daughters are appropriate at every stage of a child's development
 - v. You don't want to force physical touch on a teenager- sometimes they just don't want to be touched- you need to honor their feelings
 - vi. **You are a role model for your children; they will be watching the way you practice physical touch**
4. When Your Child's Primary Love Language is Touch
- a. Physical touches communicates more deeply than the words "I love you" or giving a present, fixing a bicycle, or spending time with them
 - b. Without hugs, kisses, pats on the back, and other physical expressions of love, their love tanks remain less than full

- c. **If you use physical touch as an expression of anger or hostility, you will hurt these children very deeply. A slap in the face is detrimental to any child, but it is devastating to children whose primary love language is touch**
 - d. Even if you don't feel comfortable with physical touch, it's important to give your children physical touch- and by practicing it (even before you feel comfortable), your children will reap the benefits of it
 - e. For many children, physical touch speaks louder than words, gifts, quality time, or acts of service
 - f. If you find touching (hugging, etc.) uncomfortable, practice touching your arm or giving yourself a shoulder rub so that you can break down your barriers and give your children what they need
5. Ideas for Practicing Physical Touch
- a. When you greet or say good-bye to your young child, gather them into your arms and hold them. Kneel down for small children.
 - b. Let your child hold or cuddle a soft item, such as a blanket to soothe them.
 - c. Hug and kiss your child every day when they leave and return from school, as well as when you tuck them in at night for younger children.
 - d. Stroke your child's hair or rub their back when they tell you about a difficult day or are upset.
 - e. **Shortly after disciplining your child, take a moment to give them a hug to show them the discipline was based on the consequences of their wrongful choices but that you still love and cherish them as your child.**
 - f. Snuggle closely together on the couch when watching TV together.
 - g. Give each other a high five when you catch your child doing something positive
 - h. Purchase a gift for your child that is touch-oriented, such as a soft pillow, blanket, or sweater
 - i. Occasionally yell out "group hug" for your entire family
 - j. Play games or sports together that require physical touch
 - k. Sing action songs together with your children that require touching and things like clapping hands, spinning, or jumping
 - l. Have tickle fights with your children, but be sure to listen when they say stop
 - m. Read stories together with younger children on your lap
 - n. Spend extra time providing comfort to a sick or hurt child
 - o. Hold hands during family prayers

Next week we'll be talking about Words of Affirmation and ideas for practicing them. Thanks for tuning in! If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to email me at Jessica@fbroswell.org