

The 5 love languages of children: Words of Affirmation

- Words are powerful- words of affection and endearment, words of praise and encouragement, words that give positive guidance all say “I care about you.” A child reaps the benefit of affirming words for a lifetime. Cutting words, spoken out of short-lived frustration, can hurt a child’s self-esteem and cast doubts about his/her abilities. Children think we deeply believe everything we say
- Understanding “I Love You”
 - Even as infants, children receive emotional messages- the tone of voice, gentleness of mood, the sense of caring all communicate emotional warmth and love
 - Love is an abstract concept and young children think concretely, so they learn to associate what love means by how we express it- the words “I love you” take on greater meaning when the child can associate them with your affectionate feelings (often this means physical closeness)- for young children, the words “I love you” need to be combined with the love language of physical touch so that they can learn to understand what it means
 - Once your child begins to understand what your “I love you” means, you can use these words in different ways and times, so that they become connected to regular events like sending your child off to play or to school. Also, you can combine your words of love with genuine praise for something about your child
- The Right Kind of Praise
 - Praise and affection are often combined in the messages we give to a child, but it’s important to distinguish the two. Affection and love mean expressing appreciation for who the child is. In contrast, we express praise for what the child does, either achievements or behavior or conscious attitudes- **Praise is for something over which the child has some control**
 - It is more effective to praise a child when they have done something for which they feel good and expect a compliment about. **Children known when praise is given for justified reasons and when it is simply given to make them feel good, and they may interpret the latter as insincere.**
 - Frequent praise is risky because some children become so accustomed to praise all the time that they assume that it is natural and come to expect it. When they are in situations in which praise is not given, they may assume that something is wrong with them and become anxious.
 - Make sure praise is both true and justified
- The Power of Encouragement
 - Encourage- to instill courage; we are seeking to give children the courage to attempt more

- Children learn to speak by mimicking adults, but that process is enhanced if adults give verbal encouragement as the child tries to speak the words correctly; in the same way, children do a better job learning social skills when we provide verbal encouragement (such as encouraging a child to share)
- When parents feel encouraged, it's much easier for them to encourage their children. For two parent households, the parents should encourage one another; for single parents, it's important to have trusted friends or relatives who can encourage you
- **The greatest enemy of encouraging our children is anger**
 - The more anger a parent harbors, the more anger the parent will dump on the children
 - When you are angry, the volume of your voice tends to raise; The volume of a parent's voice has great influence over a child's reaction to what the parent says, so do your best to speak calmly
 - Ask questions whenever possible instead of issuing commands (for instance, "will you please take out the garbage for me?" Works much better than "take out the garbage now!")
- Right Message, Wrong Manner
 - **Encouraging words are most effective when they are focused on a specific effort your child has made. The goal is to catch your child doing something good and then commend him/her for it**
 - Children need guidance- it's how they learn. All children are guided by someone. It's important to ask yourself "Are my children receiving positive and loving guidance?"
 - The purpose of loving guidance is to help children develop the qualities that will serve them well in the future
 - Affirming words that offer your child guidance for the future are a powerful part of Words of Affirmation
 - **Words of guidance must be given in a positive way, because a positive message delivered in a negative manner will always reap negative results-** for instance, if parents yell and scream at children telling them not to yell and scream, that's not going to be effective at all
 - another difficulty is that many parents view parental guidance as an exercise in prohibition- it's always don't do this or don't do that instead of positive words of guidance
 - Negatives are sometimes necessary but they shouldn't be all of the guidance we give kids. If we can use positive, loving guidance, they are less likely to fall prey to the perils we want them to avoid
 - When your son or daughter is a teen: Instead of condemning their friends who are making poor choices, it is far better to take a loving approach that expresses concern for those friends-when your child hears your loving expressions of concerns for his/her friends, he/she

is far more likely to identify with you than if he/she hears you condemning them

- When Your Child's Primary Love Language is Words of Affirmation
 - The words "I love you" should **never** be diluted with conditional statements- true for all children, but especially those for whom words of affirmation is their primary love language
 - It is possible to use a child's love language wrongly- for instance, if you use words of condemnation on a child whose love language is words of affirmation, it is extremely destructive
 - If you think this is your child's love language and you have a hard time saying affirming things, try keeping a notebook of "Words of Affirmation"- when you hear other parents giving affirmation to their children, write their statements in your notebook. Look for books on parent-child relationships and write down all the words of affirmation you discover. Then practice saying these, and then consciously look for opportunities to say these affirming things to your child, at least three times a day.
 - When you say words of condemnation, apologize to your child and tell him/her that you realize words are hurtful and that this is not how you feel about him/her
 - For children whose primary love language is words of affirmation, nothing is more important to their sense of being loved than to hear parents and other adults verbally affirm them
 - It is essential for parents and other significant adults in a child's life to quickly apologize for negative, critical, or harsh remarks
- Ideas for if your child's love language is words of affirmation
 - Put a post-it note in their lunchbox with encouraging words
 - Make a habit of mentioning something specific you've observed that highlights your child's accomplishments
 - Ask what your child wants to do or be when he/she grows up, then encourage them in ways that help them pursue these dreams
 - Send your older child a text telling them how much they mean to you- make this a habit, particularly when you have to go out of town
 - If you are artistic, create a painting or drawing that shows how much you love your child
 - Take a picture or something else your child has made and frame it with a note of why it means so much to you
 - Call your child at home just to say "I love you"
 - Create a special name of affection for your child that is only used between the two of you
 - When you have to be out of town without your child, leave a series of short notes for him/her
 - Make it a habit to say "I love you" to your child whenever you tuck him/her in or when you have to leave one another

- Place their artwork in areas they recognize as important (the fridge, etc)
- When your child is feeling down, share five reasons why you are proud of them
- Leave a note in a place where you know your child will look
- Create an encouragement jar that you and your child can use to drop in notes of praise and read together on a regular basis
- When a child makes a mistake trying to do something helpful, first use words to recognize that you knew of their good intentions

Next week's podcast is all about the love language of Quality Time.