

## The Five Love Languages of Children: Gifts and Acts of Service

Welcome back to our series of podcasts on the *Five Love Languages of Children* by Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell. If you're just joining us, this is our fourth podcast in this series, which is on the fourth and fifth love languages: gifts and acts of service. You can find the first three podcasts at [fbroswell.org/family](http://fbroswell.org/family) and on iTunes. Our final podcast in this series will be next week and will focus on discovering your child's primary love language and using the love languages to help your child express anger.

The giving and receiving of gifts can be a powerful expression of love, both at the time they are given and later on in life. The most meaningful gifts become symbols of love, and those that truly convey love are part of a love language. But for parents to truly speak this love language, the child must feel that their parents genuinely care. **For this reason, the other love languages must be given along with a gift.** The child's emotional tank needs to be kept filled in order for the gift to express heartfelt love. **This means that parents will use a combination of physical touch, words of affirmation, quality time, and service to keep the love tank full.** The book gives this scenario: Julie has two daughters, Mallory who is six, and Meredith who is eight. Julie and her husband often go on business trips, and while they are away, she always buys something for the girls. "Meredith is always much more excited about the gifts than Mallory is, talking about them as soon as we get home. She jumps up and down in excitement as we take out the presents and oohs and aahs as she opens her gift. Then she finds a special nook in her room for it and wants us to see where she put it. When her friends come over, she always shows them her latest gift." Chances are that Meredith's main love language is gifts.

- The Grace of Giving
  - We know that not all gifts are equal. For instance, when a parent gives a gift because a child did something like cleaned their room, then that's not a true gift but in essence a payment for cleaning their room. When a parent offers a gift for good grades, that's great, but it's not going to fill their emotional tank.
  - The grace of giving has little to do with the size and cost of the gift, and everything to do with love.
    - Today parents don't always think of necessities as gifts but as items they must supply, but these items are often given with loving hearts for the sincere benefit of our children
    - Celebrate these gifts- take time to wrap up new school clothes or school supplies and present them at dinner. In this way, you can demonstrate that every gift, whether a necessity or a luxury, is an expression of your love. **Such celebration of all kinds of gifts will also teach your children how to respond to others who give them present. As you give to them**

**with grace, you want them to respond with grace, whether a gift is large or small.**

- When buying toys as gifts: ask yourself questions like “Will this toy’s overall effect be positive or negative? Will my child play with it again and again? Is this a toy we can afford?”
  - Never buy a nonessential toy if you can’t afford it.
  - **Not every toy needs to be educational, but they should all serve some positive purpose in the life of your children.**
- Be sure to be cautious about gift giving, and to be careful of abusing it. For instance, if a child is living with a custodial parent following a separation or divorce, the noncustodial parent may be tempted to shower the child with kids, perhaps because of the pain of separation or feelings of guilt over leaving the family.
  - Children can learn that at least one parent regards gifts as a substitute for genuine love. This can make children materialistic and manipulative, as they learn to manage people’s feelings and behavior by the improper use of gifts (such as making people feel indebted to them by giving them expensive gifts).
- With gift giving, it is important to carefully choose gifts that will be meaningful, instead of always choosing gifts that seem impressive.
- So how can you be cautious about gift giving? Here are some guidelines:
- Guidelines for Giving
  - Gifts should be genuine expressions of love
  - Except for Christmas and birthdays, many gifts should be chosen both by you and your children- you want to consider their preferences, but you also need to discern whether their desire for nonessentials is momentary or lasting, healthy or unhealthy, and whether that toy will have a positive or negative effect.
- When Your Child’s Primary Love Language is Receiving Gifts
  - They will always make much of receiving a gift
  - They will want the present to be wrapped or at least given in a unique and creative way
  - Receiving gifts will seem like a big deal to them- they will ooh and aah over the paper, talk about the bow, etc.
  - They see this gift as an extension of you and your love
  - They will also make a special place in their room for it so that they can display it proudly, and will show it to their friends again and again.
  - Seeing this gift reminds them that they are loved.

- For them, gifts are more than material objects. They are tangible expressions of love that speak deeply. That is why it is especially traumatic if the gifts are destroyed or misplaced. And, if the parent who gave the gift moves or damages it, or, in a fit of rage says, “I’m sorry I gave that to you,” the child may be emotionally devastated.
- Ideas for speaking the love language of Gifts
  - Keep a small collection of inexpensive gifts packed away for your child. Then give them one at a time as you sense there is a need.
  - Select presents that fit the interest of your child.
  - Carry snacks or small candies you can give out as a “treat” when away from home.
  - Make a meal you know your child likes, go to a special restaurant, or make their favorite dessert.
  - Start a collection of unique gift boxes and wrapping papers that can be used to package even the most simple of presents.
  - When away from home, mail a small package to your child with their name on it.
  - Give personally made coupons for your child that are good for some of their favorite things, such as a free spaghetti dinner, an extra half hour of time with you before bedtime, or a small gift next time you are shopping together.
  - Keep a “gift bag” of small, inexpensive gifts your child can choose from as a reward for doing something positive.
  - Make after school snacks memorable by serving them on a special plate.
  - Be on the lookout for personalized gifts with your child’s name on them. Save them for a rainy or difficult day as an engaging surprise.
  - Give your child a “song,” either one you make up or a special song you select that reminds you of them.
  - Create a treasure hunt for a gift that includes a map and clues along the way.
  - Hide a small gift in your child’s lunchbox.
  - If you are away from your child a few days, leave a small package for each day with a special gift and note reminding them how much you love them.
  - Consider a gift that lasts, such as a tree you can plant together or a game you can play together in the future.
  - Buy or make your child a special ring or necklace that is just from you.
  - For young children, find “nature gifts” such as wildflowers or interesting stones wrapped in a special paper or box.
  - Create a “secret drawer” where your child can keep her small “treasures” — anything from a bird feather to a pack of gum

## The Fifth Love Language: Acts of Service

The fifth and final love language is Acts of Service. These are things like taking your children to their baseball games or ballet class, helping them with school projects, helping with homework, and cooking dinner for them. For some children, this is their primary love language. But even if it is not, parenting is a service-oriented vocation. I'm sure if you thought about the ways you helped your child this week, from taking them to school to helping with homework to getting lunches and dinner ready, you would find that you've performed a lot of acts of service already this week. And thinking about all of those times, you probably also recognize that acts of service are physically and emotionally demanding. As a result, it's really important that you give attention to your own physical and emotional health. You can help your children best when you look after your own health, from getting enough sleep (once your children begin sleeping through the night), eating right, and exercising. Your emotional health is just as important, which is why it's also important to take care of your marriage as well.

As parents, you serve your children, but it's important to note that your primary motivation is not to please your children but to do what's best. What would most please your child at the moment is likely not the best way to express your love. Your child would probably love having candy and ice cream for dinner every night, but that's definitely not what's best. **In serving your children, the main motive—doing what's best—means you are trying to fill their love tanks. And to supply that need for love, you should use your acts of service in conjunction with the other languages of love.** Be cautious about these final two love languages though. Young children desire gifts and services more than anything else. But if you give in to desires or demands for too many gifts and too much service, your children can remain childish self-centered and become selfish. Acts of service can become a model for your child's service and responsibility.

- Doing for Your Children what they Cannot do for Themselves
  - A big part of acts of service is doing for your children what they cannot do for themselves.
  - Acts of service also mean that when your children are ready, you teach them how to serve themselves and then others. By continuing to do things for your children that they are capable of doing themselves, you could cripple them as they enter adulthood. For instance, it's important to teach your high schooler to do laundry, because they will have to do their laundry on their own once they reach college. Will this take more time than you doing the laundry yourself? Of course. But it's necessary so that you can help your child learn how to be independent.

- It always takes more time to teach your child how to do things than if you were doing them yourself. But if your objective is to love your children and to look out for their best interests, then you will take the time to teach them.
- It's important to balance acts of service and teaching your child to be independent. For children whose primary love language is acts of service, it's important to continue to do something for them, and to help them when they ask for it. Otherwise they may feel unsure that you love them.
- Loving Service
  - Because service to a child is constant for so many years, and takes place in and around so many other obligations, parents can forget that the daily and mundane acts they perform are expressions of love with long-term effects. At times, they can feel more like slaves to the daily needs instead of loving servants.
  - When you look at those mundane activities that you do for your family as gifts that are done freely because you love them, then those acts of service will communicate love to your children instead of resentment.
- What's the purpose of Service?
  - The ultimate purpose for acts of service to children is to help them emerge as mature adults who are able to give love to others through acts of service.
  - This includes not only being helpful to cherished loved ones, but also serving people who cannot return or repay their kindness
  - It takes children a long time to be able to give love through selfless acts of service, because they are naturally immature and self-centered. Children cannot be expected to serve others with selfless motivation, because they want to be rewarded for their good behavior.
  - So how do you move to the ultimate goal of selflessly helping others?
    - First, you make sure your children feel genuinely loved and cared for. You keep their emotional tanks full.
    - Second, you are a role model for them. They first experience loving acts of service from you. And as they grow older and are able to show you appreciation (as they have watched you show that appreciation to others), you can gradually move from commands to requests.
    - As children mature, they begin to notice what is being done for them and are also aware of what has been done in the past. Eventually they notice that their parents do things for others. They will learn how to wait on a sick person or to give money to the less fortunate. They will want to participate in work projects that help others.
- Teaching by Example

- You must be careful in your acts of service to never show conditional love. When you give of yourself to your children only when you are pleased by their behavior, those acts of service are conditional. Your children may learn that a person should help others only if there is something in it for them.
  - **Your children need to see in you the traits you want them to develop. They need to experience your acts of service to them and be involved in your caring for other people. You can teach them by example to show concern for others.**
  - Make it your goal that your children will learn to be comfortable in serving others. They learn this as they watch you serve them and other people. **They will also learn as you give them small levels of responsibility for helping you serve. As they grow, you can increase what they do.**
- When your Child's Primary Love Language is Service...
  - Your acts of service will communicate deeply that you love them.
  - When parents recognize and respond to their requests and give help with a loving and positive attitude, the child will go away with a full love tank.
  - **If your child's primary love language is acts of service, this does not mean that you must jump at every request they make. It does mean that you should be extremely sensitive to those requests and recognize that your response will either help fill the child's love tank or puncture it.**
- Ideas for Acts of Service
  - Help your child practice for their sports team.
  - Sit down and help your child if they're having computer issues.
  - Instead of just telling younger children to go to bed, pick them up and gently carry them and tuck them in.
  - For school-age children, help them select their outfit for the day as they are waking up in the morning (or before they go to bed at night).
  - Occasionally wake up a half hour earlier to make a special surprise breakfast for your children.
  - Begin teaching your child the importance of serving others through regular involvement together in a local community group or church ministry.
  - When running late to an appointment or meeting, help your child quickly finish what they are doing so you can both be ready faster instead of just telling them to hurry.
  - During a time when your child is sick, set up their favorite movie or read them stories, or buy them a book in one of their favorite series.
  - Connect your child with a friend or family member who can help them in an area of interest like computer technology, soccer, piano playing, etc.

- Choose one area in which you determine to always serve your child above and beyond normal expectations. Examples could include making sure there are always marshmallows in your child's hot chocolate, making sure their favorite teddy bear is in their bed at bedtime, or having all the paint supplies ready when they are ready to paint.
- Start a birthday dinner tradition where you make your child any meal they want on their birthday.
- Make a list of several of your child's favorite things they do with you. Then periodically do one of their favorites when they least expect it.
- Create flash cards for your child's upcoming test or quiz. Work together with your child until they feel confident in the material.
- Assist your child in fixing a favorite broken toy or bicycle. Simply taking the time to repair it communicates love to a child whose love language is acts of service.

Next week's podcast is all about how to recognize what your child's primary love language is. We'll also be talking about helping your child deal with anger by using the love languages. Thanks for tuning in!