

# The Five Love Languages of Children

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**D**o your children feel loved? I didn't ask, "Do you love your children?" I asked something far more important: "Do your children feel loved?" Most parents love their children, but thousands of children do not feel loved. Few things are more important in parenting than learning to meet your child's emotional need for love.

Dr. Ross Campbell, Christian psychiatrist who is the co-author of my book *The Five Love Languages of Children*, says that inside every child there is an emotional love tank. When the child's love tank is full, the child grows up normally. But when the love tank is empty, the child grows up with many internal struggles and in the teenager years, the child will go looking for love in all the wrong places. But that need not happen. You can learn to effectively love your children. You can keep their love tanks full.

After thirty-plus years of counseling, I am convinced that there are only five basic languages of love. All of them can be

used to communicate love to a child, but one of them will be more important than the other four. Each child has a primary love language. If you discover this language and speak it often, your child will genuinely feel loved. Let me briefly share the five love languages.

**Number one: Physical Touch.** We have long known the emotional power of physical touch. That's why parents are encouraged to pick up babies, hold, and cuddle them. Long before the child understands the meaning of love, the child will feel loved by physical touch.

You may remember that Jesus demonstrated this love language when he said to his followers in Mark 10, "Let the little children come to me...and he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them." Physical touch includes hugs and kisses, but it also involves a pat on the back, a hand on the shoulder, holding hands as you cross the street, wrestling on the floor, or touching a child as you walk out of the room.

Eleven-year-old Matt was asked, "On a 0-10 scale, how much do your parents love you?" Without blinking an eye, he answered, "10." When we asked why he felt so strongly he said, "Dad is always bumping me when he walks by and we wrestle on the floor. And Mom's always hugging and kissing me, although she has stopped doing it in front of my friends." Physical touch is a powerful communicator of emotional love.

**Love language number two is Words of Affirmation**—using words to build up the child. "I love you; you look nice in that dress; you did a good job making your bed; great catch; thanks for helping me wash the car"—these are words of affirmation.

The writer of Proverbs said, "The tongue has the power of life and death" (Proverbs 18:21). Nowhere is that demonstrated more than in the words that are exchanged between parent and child. "I love you" is like gentle rain falling on the soul of a child, while harsh cutting words spoken out of short-lived frustration can damage a child's self esteem and be remembered for a lifetime. Record the words you speak to your chil-

dren for one week and see if you are giving them life or death.

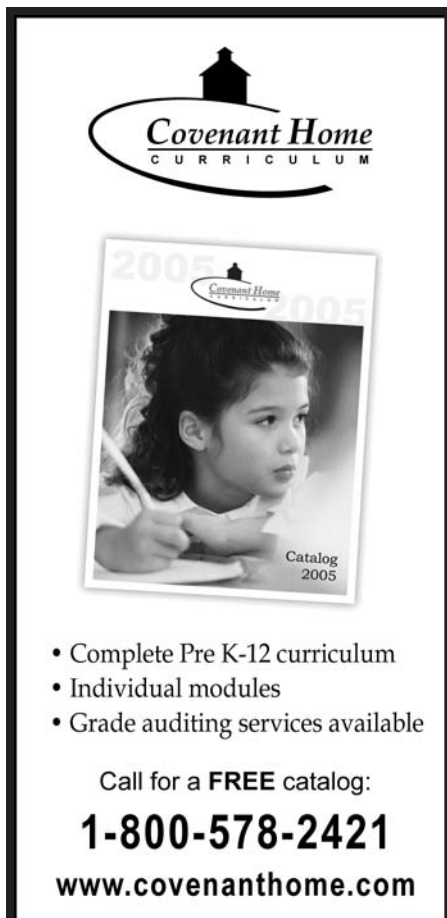
**Quality Time is the third love language.** By quality time, I mean giving the child your undivided attention. With the small child, it is sitting on the couch reading a book or lying on the floor wrestling. With the older child, it may be taking a walk through the woods where the two of you look, listen, and talk. Sitting on the floor rolling a ball back and forth to a three-year-old is quality time, as is taking a teenager on a camping trip or to a ball game, or playing ball in the backyard. The activity is not as important as the fact that the two of you are together, focusing on each other.

Twelve-year-old Jeremy said, "I know my dad loves me because he spends time with me. We do lots of things together." Eight-year-old Bethany said, "I know my dad loves me. He took me fishing last week. I don't know if I like fishing, but I like being with my daddy."

**Love language number four is Giving Gifts.** A gift says, "Daddy was thinking about me. Look what he got for me." Gifts need not be expensive; they can be as simple as a stone you picked up walking down the street or a flower you picked in the front yard. Obviously we cannot give our children everything they request. In our consumer-based society, children are bombarded with "things they should have." Saying 'NO' can also be an expression of love, but a carefully selected gift, given with the spirit of excitement and love, can speak deeply to a child.

To make the most of gifts as an expression of love, even school clothes should be wrapped and presented as a gift from parents. A true gift is never given because a child makes up his bed or kept his room clean. Such a gift is actually payment for services rendered, and not a true gift at all. Gifts are given because parents love—not because a child deserves.

Fifteen-year-old Michelle said, "I know my parents love me because of all that they provide for me. They have given me not only the essentials but far more than I needed. In fact, I share things with my friends whose parents can't afford them."



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