

The Five “Love Languages”
(Chapman, 2011)

Love Language #1: Words of Affirmation

This form of expressing love involves parental verbalization of praise or affection. Guidelines for effective praise include the description of specific examples of behaviors or qualities, in a timely and sincere manner. Verbal expressions of affection would include parental comments regarding their positive feelings about the teen’s behavior or qualities. It is important to praise and express positive feelings not just about achievements or behaviors, but additionally about positive or virtuous qualities and abilities, so the message is conveyed that the teen as a person is valued and appreciated, regardless of their behavior or accomplishments.

Examples: “I admire your determination. You never give up!” “I appreciate your honesty—it took guts to admit the truth.” “I am so proud that you made the Honor Roll!”

Love Language #2: Physical Touch

Use of physical touch to express love and affection toward teens is a delicate maneuver, about which parents must be sensitive and thoughtful. For instance, physical affection typically will best be received in private and will be experienced as embarrassing and intrusive if performed in public, especially in front of peers. In addition, physical touch can take many different forms, and individual adolescents will typically prefer one form over another, such as hugs preferred over kisses, etc. Furthermore, teens will receive physical affection warmly only when in a positive, approachable mood. When angry or irritated, adolescents will likely escalate and express hostility if offered physical touch or affection and may interpret it as an effort by the parent to exert control.

Love Language #3: Quality Time

The provision of “quality time” implies that parents will give teens their undivided attention and listen without judging, lecturing, scolding, reassuring, or advising. The parents should be coached to use “The Empathy Formulas” and mirroring technique to increase the degree to which teens will feel accepted and inspired to talk in a candid, uncensored way. The connection and comfort level between parents and teens will be enhanced if parents schedule “quality time” that is recurring and predictable. For instance, they can negotiate standing appointments for 1:1 time with their teens, which revolve around recurring activities such as a tradition of having breakfast every Sunday morning or going for ice cream after every volleyball game. There will be moments when adolescents “refuse to talk,” depending on their mood and parents should respect their need for privacy and self-reflective time.

Love Language #4: Acts of Service

Acts of service imply that parent perform tasks or favors for teens that are not contingent on the teen saying or doing anything in return. The message is that the parent is simply performing an act of service to demonstrate their unconditional love to their teen, with no hidden agenda. Acts of service, from parent to teen, might include washing and folding a sports uniform, packing a lunch with the teen’s favorite foods and a note of encouragement, planning a weekend ski trip for the teen’s birthday to which they can invite a friend, or detailing the car prior to the teen’s use for travel to a school dance.

Love Language #5: Gifts

Gifts should be associated with a ceremony and emotional meaning. Gifts of cash or excessive material value, without associated ceremony or emotional meaning are experienced as empty and fail to keep the attention of youngsters. Examples of gifts which might effectively convey love and affection would be the purchase of tickets to a game of a favorite sports team, for an occasion that is memorable, such as a birthday or graduation. Another gift with emotional meaning might include a piece of jewelry, such as a charm bracelet or watch, with an engraved message commemorating a special day or containing charms reminiscent of a memorable occasion.