

How Do I Love Thee?

Exploring what 'speaks' love to children

I first heard of *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman several years ago. A client of mine raved about how useful Chapman's best selling book was for her and her fiancé as they prepared for their upcoming wedding.

I kept meaning to get a copy and see what all the fuss was about. But it never made it to my bookshelf until this summer when my husband and I were presenting at a workshop. We found ourselves sitting in on a fellow presenter who was teaching the basics from the book. After taking the assessment I realized that I just had discovered brand

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new information about what kind of attention makes me feel loved.

Then recently I was having lunch with a fellow coach who had just returned from a cross-country trip to visit her parents. Usually filled with emotional upset after such a visit, she raved at how positive and different her experience was this time.

What made the difference? A book she read on the plane, *The Five Love Languages of Children*, co-written by Chapman and child psychiatrist Ross Campbell.

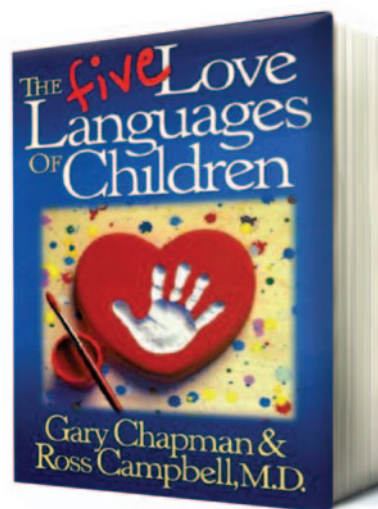
According to Chapman, a Christian minister, there are five basic love languages: Words of Affirmation, Acts of

Service, Gifts, Quality Time and Physical Touch. While we constantly navigate all five, we crave one of these languages more than the others. It becomes our preference, our language. However, we often assume that everyone else speaks this language too. Much of the pain and frustration we experience in relationships comes from this assumption.

As in *The Five Love Languages*, which focuses on married couples, *The Five Love Languages of Children* focuses on the importance of practicing unconditional love, paying attention, asking questions and starting where you are, a philosophy I found easily aligned with my own work in the area of family relationships.

The book is packed with information on how children develop and has an easy-to-follow layout. Each love language is described using stories of real children. This makes it an enjoyable read and also brings the point home. Chapman and Ross map out the different ways to assess a child's primary love language. Not surprisingly, children often tell us outright their preferred way to express and receive love. We just have to be conscious and look out for the clues.

The authors explain how children receive love in all five languages. As they grow, their preferred language starts to emerge. They need all languages to grow as full, confident people and also to understand how to communicate in all five of the languages. Not surprisingly, when we withhold love in the child's love language or lash out in that language, the impact is much greater than if it had been in a different language.



What I loved most about this book was how the lens was always focused on paying attention to what was going on with our children rather than making assumptions based on what other people say or thinking other people are just like us.

Chapman and Ross also explore some very specific territory including discipline, learning, and how to deal with divorce and other life circumstances around which parents and children may need guidance.

The Five Love Languages of Children is a practical and handy guide for coaching children directly, working with parents around family relationships, or even simply for adults looking to explore their own personal love language to better understand themselves. The assessment in the back of the book is delightful and useful for children of all ages.

At the book's heart is a loving message paired with real life situations. It is a book full of down to earth insights that remind me, both at work and at home, to listen closely and tune in to what is *really* being said. ●

Kat Kehres Knecht, PCC, is an author and a relationship coach working with couples and business partners in Hollywood, CA.