

## **Anxiety, Attachment, and the Power of Love Languages**

By Tamara Menzies, BSW, RSW

Healthy attachment has become increasingly recognized as a crucial part of healthy development. Concurrently, anxiety is now considered one of the biggest health issues in children and teens worldwide. Parents sometimes look to professionals to alleviate their child's anxiety or to calm them down. However, one of the most important sources of rest for a child is usually overlooked – a strong caring attachment with an adult who is responsible for them. The challenge with anxiety is it can displace a parent from seeing they can still be the answer to their child's needs.

Dr Gary Chapman has articulated what he calls the 5 love languages, and I believe herein lies a key for parents! Communicating love and care simultaneously communicates value, worth and belonging, strengthening attachment. The problem is, not everyone speaks the same "love language". For example, my stepson's primary love language is physical touch. He feels loved with hugs, cuddles, wrestling, and so on. Even at 13 years old, he is as hug-y as ever. Now this is not my main love language – it's not my natural way of expressing love. I am more inclined to make him a nutritious snack or clean his bathroom for him. However, if this was the only way I showed love for him, he would feel completely disconnected from me. I have had to learn how to speak his love language.

As a Family School Liaison Counsellor, this topic comes up regularly in my office. At times I feel like a translator as I help parents understand what their youth needs. Some youth are starving for *words* of love and affirmation, and their parents are putting all their energy into loving through thoughtful *gifts* and fun *activities*.

What follows is an article Dr Chapman wrote for parents, simply breaking down the different love languages and how they can be expressed. I strongly encourage you to take a read, and see what jumps out!

Oh, and Happy Valentines!



### **The 5 Love Languages and Your Teen**

Dr Gordon Chapman

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/teens/love-languages-and-your-teen>

On a 0-to-10 scale, how much do your parents love you?" That was the question posed to 13-year-old Mark. Without batting an eye, he answered, "Ten."

When asked how he knew they loved him that much, he said, "By the way they treat me. Dad is always bumping me when he walks by, and we wrestle on the floor, and Mom's always hugging and kissing me."

Mark feels loved by his parents' warm, caring touches, revealing that his primary love language is physical touch.

After more than 20 years of marriage and family counseling, I am convinced there are only five basic languages of love. Of these five, each teen has a primary love language, one that speaks more loudly and deeply to him or her. If a parent fails to speak this language adequately, the teen will not feel loved, regardless of other expressions of love. (View Dr. Chapman's free quiz at [Love Languages and Your Teen.](#))

Visualize that inside every teen is an emotional love tank. When the teen's love tank is full — that is, she genuinely feels loved by her parents — the teen can make her way through adolescence with minimal trauma. But when the teen's love tank is empty, she will grapple with many internal struggles and will typically look for love in all the wrong places. Therefore, discerning your teen's love language is essential.

Here is a brief description of each of the five love languages.

### **Physical touch**

Hugs, kisses and tender touches are given in abundance when a child is young. However, some parents feel more awkward about touching as their child enters adolescence. If a teen's primary love language is physical touch, those appropriate touches are no less important during the teen years than they were in the earlier years.

### **Words of affirmation**

Using words to encourage and affirm is at the heart of this language. When a toddler is learning to walk, we stand just two feet away and say, "That's right! Come on; you can do it." And when that toddler falls, we encourage her to get up and try again. Why do we forget the power of affirming words when kids become teens?

When 14-year-old Melissa broke her arm, words of affirmation gave her the assurance she needed. "I know that my parents love me because while I was having such a hard time keeping up with my school work, they encouraged me. They said they were proud that I was trying so hard."

### **Quality time**

This love language involves giving your teen undivided attention. For some teens, regardless of what you're doing together, nothing is more important than when a parent gives focused attention.

Mindy's primary love language is quality time, and at 17 she still feels secure in her parents' love. "They are always there for me," Mindy says. "I can discuss anything with them. I know they will be understanding and try to help me make wise decisions. I enjoy doing things with them, and I am going to miss them when I go to college."

### **Giving and receiving gifts**

Some parents speak this language almost exclusively and are often shocked to find that their teen does not feel loved. Although gift giving is not the love language of all teens, gifts speak loudly for many.

When asked how she knew her parents loved her, Michelle, 15, pointed to her blouse, skirt and shoes. She said, "Everything I have, they gave me. In my mind, that's love. Because they have given me far

more than I need, I share things with my friends." Michelle not only feels loved from receiving gifts, but she also expresses love to others by giving gifts.

### **Acts of service**

Parents are continually doing actions designed to assist their kids, but if these acts of service are to be expressions of love, they must be done with a positive, caring attitude.

Brady, 13, lives with his mother and brother. It's apparent that Brady's primary love language is acts of service when he says, "I know my mom loves me because she sews the buttons on my shirt when they fall off and she also helps me with my homework. She works hard so we can have food and clothes."

Few things are more important for parents than discovering and speaking their teen's primary love language. The teen needs to receive love in all five languages, but focusing on the primary love language will fill the love tank much faster and more effectively. Consider your teen's love language. If his language is not obvious, my online assessment quiz may help you. To find this free quiz, search "Love Languages and Your Teen" on ThrivingFamily.com.

We love God because He first loved us. The same principle is true in human relationships. Our children are far more likely to love us, and others, if we have effectively communicated love to them.

<http://www.5lovelanguages.com/profile/teens/>

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