The FIVE LOVE LANGUAGES of CHILDREN

By Dr. Gary Chapman

How can you learn to speak each of the five love languages with your children – and fill their love tank? This interactive guide includes study questions and exercises for you, for your spouse, and for group discussion.

Chapter One Love Is the Foundation

1. Of all the times you have felt love for or expressed love to your child, have there been occasions when that expression of love was conditional – that is, based on something she or he did, rather than who she or he is? Do you ever express love "just because"?

2. On a scale of 0 to 10, what is the average level of your child's love tank? What are some things you could do over the next week to fill up that tank? What takes away from it?

3. How did your parents fill your emotional love tank – or not? What can you learn from your childhood experience as you seek to love your own child?

4. Go back to Dr. Chapman's seven points about our expectations of our children. Which point may be a new idea to you? Which point is the most difficult to accept? Which point do you need to digest and act upon the most?

For Group Discussion

Invite the group to share times when their love toward their children has come across as conditional. Discuss how to love our children unconditionally – even when they've let us down in some way or we're not entirely happy with them.

Chapter Two Love Language #1: Physical Touch

Notes

1. Were your parents physically affectionate – or not? What effect does this have on you today?

2. Based on what you've learned in this chapter, do you provide enough touch to your children in appropriate circumstances? Why or why not? How could you improve?

3. What are some unusual signs of the desire for physical touch? How might unconventional physical contact like wrestling meet emotional needs? Where are the boundaries where physical touch might be harmful or excessive for each child?

4. Discuss ways to get involved in "low-key," age-appropriate forms of physical touch, in addition to the normal hugs and kisses your children need. Identify opportunities to put these other forms of touching into practice.

5. Over the next week increase your physical touch with your children, but make it age-appropriate as well as what fits each child's unique personality. Determine the effects of this and their response.

For Group Discussion

Reflect on whether physical touch might be the primary love language of any of your children. If it is, explain why you have drawn this conclusion. Invite group members to share their own childhood experiences with regard to physical touch, positive or negative. What can you learn from these experiences?

Chapter Three Love Language #2: Words of Affirmation

Notes

1. Think about positive and negative words from your childhood. What impact did they have, both at the time and over the long term?

2. Have you seen words spoken by you or your spouse have similar effects on your children, good and bad? How could you make up for negative or angry words?

3. We often assume our children understand our love, even if we don't always express it. But children are very literal and may need to hear an explicit expression of love from us. Over the next week, every time you feel love express it as directly as possible to your children. At the end of the week, ask them if they better understand your love for them.

4. A verbal expression of love in the ordinary routines of life is always appropriate but needs to be supplemented with special words. Take each of your children out to a favorite place of theirs and at the right moment tell your child all the reasons why you love him or her. Try to base your statements on who the child is, not on her performance.

For Group Discussion

Explore constructive ways of administering discipline and correction without the destructive effects of anger. Have the group share with each other successes and failures in handling their own anger. What can you learn from these past experiences?

Chapter Four Love Language #3: Quality Time

Notes

1. How much quality time, that is, time spent with your child beyond meeting his essential needs, have you given each of your children during the past week? What kind of quality time does each of your children desire? Ask each of them what they enjoy most with you and why it is meaningful.

2. Make a commitment to spend at least one hour alone with each of your children each week for the next twelve months. Try to set aside the same time each week in your calendar, but if you can't (or your child can't), set aside some time every weekend to make the date. Draw up a list of "discussion topics" for these appointments.

3. The "tyranny of the urgent" is a serious problem in our schedules. Review your schedule over the last month. What tentative or scheduled plans were canceled or cut short by lesser priorities? What wasted time in this same period could have been spent with your children?

4. How might you take daily or weekly chores or responsibilities on the part of your child and turn them into shared learning experiences? Can you help them do the task better while perhaps talking about other fun or interesting things?

For Group Discussion

Much of our best parenting takes place in quality-time encounters with our kids. Share some special memories of intimacy, learning, and sheer enjoyment from these times. Also, invite the group to tell stories of special times spent with their own parents.

Chapter Five Love Language #4: Gifts

 Think of a gift you've received, either as an adult or a child, that really meant a lot to you. Why? What does this tell you about yourself?

2. Think back carefully to a gift you've given with (be honest) mixed motives.

Has there ever been a hint of payback, bribery, or even materialism or personal vanity?

3. Examine the toys you have bought for your children recently, or recreational and entertainment items you gave to your teens. Determine which ones fell in the following categories:

• toys that served a positive and healthy purpose

• toys that "perished" as the passing fad or trend changed quickly

• toys you as a parent participated in, by either helping to create or use

4. Within the next month, give a gift to each of your children that is not tied to a special occasion. Note their responses – and what those responses tell you about their attitudes toward gifts.

For Group Discussion

Discuss ways in which we might teach our children to see all of life as a gift. Reflect on the "greatest gifts" – those that are free and of great value. Talk about ways we might teach our children a spirit of unconditional generosity.

Chapter Six Love Language #5: Acts of Service

Notes

1. Do your children ever see you serving someone else beyond the family?

2. Take inventory of everything you do for your child. Is it too much? Would your child be better off if you taught her some of these things? Depending on age, schedule some time to teach them how to do appropriate tasks. View this, in itself, as an act of loving service.

3. Together with each child, plan a project to help in a tangible way someone in your community (apart from a family member) who is less fortunate than you. Make sure your child plays a role, and afterward analyze what was most enjoyable and beneficial to all of you.

4. Examine areas of conflict when asking your children to perform acts of service. Are you at the advanced stage where only a request is necessary? Why or why not? What needs work in this area?

For Group Discussion

As parents, we all perform numerous acts of service. How can we better respond to our children's needs -- and combine our actions with both loving words and implicit teaching? Let the group share ideas as to how they have used acts of service as expressions of love to their children.

Chapter Seven Discovering Your Child's Primary Love Language

1. Think of three significant times in the recent past when your child or children expressed love to you. Which love languages are represented?

2. Our children ask for many things from us. Review the five love languages first and try to list as many requests as possible by specific love language category. Where do their requests tend to cluster?

3. Look at the pattern of complaints or expressions of unhappiness in the circumstances of each child's life. What do they reveal is most lacking? What does the child most crave? How can you more effectively "fill the tank" in the most crucial areas?

Over the next few months, allow your child to choose an "either/or" option among pairs of the five love languages. Keep a record of his or her responses. Seek to understand reasons for his/her choices and then determine the love language that was chosen most often. This is probably your child's primary love language.

Chapter Eight Discipline and the Love Languages

1. There are many positive ways to discipline your child. Think back on the recent past when you have used the following methods with your child: modeling, verbal instruction, requests, teaching, and learning experiences. What happened?

2. Look back on recent misbehavior from your child. Was it at least partially the result of an empty love tank, rather than will-ful rebellion? In what areas might your child be communicating a need for love, and how might you better fill the vacuum in the future?

3. Of the five ways to shape your child's behavior, requests are the most effective. List the benefits for both of you. Now look at commands, physical manipulation, punishment, and behavior modification. Though necessary, what are the drawbacks for each child? Give specific instances when a different way probably would work better.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

When it comes to disciplining children, most parents, often without realizing it, either lean toward being too strict or too permissive. Analyze the origins of your parenting style by answering the following questions: How did my parents discipline me?

What parenting books and experts have influenced me?

How have I been influenced by other parents?

How am I affected by the child himself or herself? (For example, a child you think of as "easy" might provoke less discipline – whether she needs it or not.)

Share your answers with group members and discuss the merits of these ideas. Through feedback from others, take steps to work on more effective ways to discipline your children.

Chapter Nine Learning and the Love Languages

Notes

1. What most motivates your child to learn? What most obstructs the learning process? Based on both of the above, how would you describe your child's overall strengths and weaknesses when it comes to learning?

2. How does the degree of communication you have with your child affect her confidence and security -- which in turn affects her motivation to learn? How does your emphasis on grades help or hinder your child's learning? What ideas did you learn from this chapter that will help you further motivate your child in the future?

4. Ask your child what skills he would like to learn. Make a list of every interest and plan how you might further it through some type of learning experience.

5. In what way may you be taking too much responsibility for your child's learning or too little? How can you encourage your child while at the same time making him/her accountable for homework, tests, and the like? Make a plan to aid and encourage without bearing the burden of their responsibility.

For Group Discussion

Learning succeeds best with a child who is emotionally stable. This stability is best achieved through filling your child's emotional love tank. Invite the group to share ideas on how parents can enhance their child's learning based on the child's primary love language. You may want to take notes as these ideas are shared.

CHAPTER TEN LOVE AND ANGER

1. Think of a righteous cause or issue that made you angry and motivated you to take action. How was your anger appropriate and channeled toward a positive result? How does this differ from destructive anger?

2. How good are you at handling your own anger – and how does this influence how your children deal with theirs? What could you change?

3. On a scale of 1 to 10, evaluate your child's integrity in the following areas: honesty, promise-keeping, and personal responsibility. How might his expression (or lack of expression) of anger relate to his behavior in these areas? How could you help?

4. Take your child aside after doing something nice for her or having fun together. Tell her it's a "gripe session" and encourage her to share anything that she's angry, sad, disappointed, or disillusioned about. Allow her to be as vehement and honest as possible, using strong words and feelings. Promise that you'll work together to resolve these issues.

For Group Discussion

Explore how you can better understand and love your child during times of conflict -- while maintaining your authority as parents. Devise strategies for active listening, properly evaluating your judgments, and carefully explaining your decisions. Ask the group to share stories of successes and failures in this area.

Chapter Eleven Speaking the Love Languages in Single-Parent Families

1. Make a list of all the challenges of single parenting that can add stress to your love relationship with your child – time pressures, financial difficulties, personal stress. How can you improve the situation?

2. Now list some of the feelings your child has experienced because of a missing or distant parent: fear, anger, anxiety, denial, blame. How can you use your child's primary love language to help alleviate the pain?

3. Single-parent children need special care, and that means giving more of yourself in certain areas. Consider ways you can facilitate the grief process by listening, acknowledging pain, and letting emotions be expressed and accepted.

4. Many single-parent children succeed quite well in the long run—through hard work, dedication, and a positive attitude. Celebrate the positive things you've done over the years in coping with the difficult task of single parenting. How can you better play off your strengths? Make a resolution to improve in at least one weak area.

5. Your children need role models and surrogate parents. What other extended family members or friends can help fill the void in your child's life? What suggestions from this chapter can you use to locate adults who can make a positive impact on their lives?

For Group Discussion

Discuss how you as a single parent can be taken advantage of in your own need for love, acceptance, achievement, and so on. How might you be taken advantage of by your employer, parents, friends, or even your children? What can you do to prevent this?

Then let group members share ways in which speaking their child's primary love language has made a difference in their child's attitude or behavior.

Chapter Twelve Speaking the Love Languages in Marriage

Notes

1. Based on the information in this chapter, what is your own love language? What is your spouse's? Share with each other how you might better fill each other's love tank.

2. Examine the ways you may have been speaking your own love language when trying to please your spouse. Make a list of specific ways that you could speak your spouse's primary love language. Practice this new language as much as possible over the next month.

3. How might your areas of difficulty with your spouse revolve around conflicting love languages? Consider the impact of not understanding each other's primary love language, failing to speak it regularly, or using that language in a negative way, such as verbally criticizing when words of affirmation is your spouse's primary love language. How can both of your needs be met in a harmonious manner?

4. Be honest with your spouse about times past when your love tank was less than full. Explain why this may not have been neglect but simply a misunderstanding of your needs. Describe more completely how you experience love as related to your primary love language.

5. Think about your spouse's needs. Then make suggestions and let your mate react to make sure you have gotten the correct feedback as to what would make him or her feel loved. Select three ways that you will seek to meet your spouse's needs in the next week.

For Group Discussion

Talk with other couples about unique and creative ways of addressing your spouse's primary love language. Allow couples to share illustrations of how speaking each other's love language has made a difference in their relationship. Encourage couples to share efforts they took to learn how to speak their spouse's love language.