

LEARN YOUR CHILD'S LANGUAGE OF LOVE

Do you love your child? I'm sure that most of the time you would quickly answer, "Of course!" Nearly all parents truly love their children. However, it has been my experience through 20 years of working with parents, children and teens in seminars and private counseling settings that many youngsters do not feel loved. How can that be? Evidently, loving our kids is not enough. We must show love to them in ways that help them to feel loved.

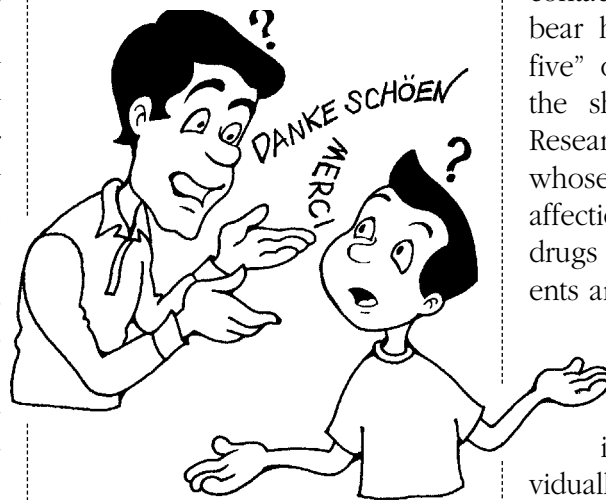
The love we show to our kids must imitate the love God has shown to us. God loves us no matter what; His love is unconditional. A well-known college football coach was once asked to comment on his son who was a star on his football team. His response was remarkable: "I think that my son has done an outstanding job on this team, but I would be just as proud of him if he had never played the game at all." That is the challenge we all face as parents; how can we demonstrate unconditional love to our kids so they feel loved, no matter what they do?

WAYS TO SHOW LOVE

Three simple ways to show

love are through **eye contact**, **physical contact** and **focused attention**.

When you talk to your child, look at him or her. Our words mean very little if our body lan-



guage does not convey the same message. For instance, if you are reading the newspaper while you ask your kid how her day was, you will probably not get a very positive response. I remember a teenager telling his parents that when they stood at his door and said "good night" to him, it wasn't as special as when they sat down by the side of his bed, at his eye level.

A second way to show love to your child is through physical contact. Some youngsters are

more receptive to physical contact than others. Don't give up if your preteen seems unresponsive; use moments when he might be tired or have a headache and give him a back rub. Physical contact does not have to be a big bear hug; giving a kid a "high-five" or simply touching her on the shoulder will register, too. Research shows that teenagers whose parents are warm and affectionate are less likely to use drugs than children whose parents are cold and distant.

A third way to show love to your child is through focused attention. Spending time with a child individually is one of the most effective ways to show love. Examples can include working on a project together, taking a walk, going to the movies, taking a train trip, going shopping, or hundreds of other ideas.

CONVEY A CHILD'S VALUE

Eye contact, physical contact and focused attention, when given in abundance, will help to keep your child's feelings of worth at a high level. When a child feels valued, his or her behavior will be much more positive than if he or

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she feels valueless. Sometimes preteens' behavior may be so bad that we feel like ignoring them or sending them to their rooms; but sometimes, sitting down with them, looking at them, talking to them and touching them will result in a much happier evening.

LEARN THE LANGUAGE

Another very important way to show love to your child is to **convey love in his or her language of love**. Once when I was taking my daughter to the show, I asked

her what show she wanted to see. Her choice was not appealing to me, and I tried to talk her out of it; but then I realized that if my aim was to show love to her, the love needed to be in her language of love. A teenager I counseled once complained that her father would take her out for pizza, but he wouldn't let her order Canadian bacon and pineapple because he didn't like it. The time and money he spent was not having the impact he had hoped for because he was not showing his daughter love in her language. When you

show an interest in your child's language of love, you are being sympathetic to his or her needs.

Many parents have trouble showing love in ways their kids understand because they did not receive love in these same ways from their own parents. We all tend (consciously or subconsciously) to turn our current homes into a replica of the home we came from. Consider the ways in which you received love, and then consider whether you may have to work extra hard to show love in ways your kids understand.

A CHALLENGE TO YOU:

1. Which of the three ways to show love (eye contact, physical contact and focused attention) did you receive as a child? Which did you not receive?
2. Which of the three ways to show love (eye contact, physical contact and focused attention) do you need to display more of? How do you plan to do it?
3. What activities does your child recognize as his or her language of love?