

Marriage Partnership

Series

ARTICLE

Language Lessons

To be a successful lover, you have to communicate with and without words.

By Gary D. Chapman, for the study “Communicate Love to Your Spouse“

“I’m desperate,” Mark told me when he entered my office. “My wife told me she doesn’t love me, and she wants me out of her life. I don’t understand. I’ve been a good husband. We have a nice house and wonderful children. I love Suzanne: I tell her how beautiful and special she is. How can she throw away 17 years of marriage?”

“Has Suzanne ever complained to you?” I asked.

“She says we don’t spend enough time together and that we don’t talk. But my business is demanding, and when I get home I need down time.”

I knew their problem: Suzanne’s love language (the way she best understands and receives love) was Quality Time, and Mark hadn’t spoken that language. His compliments weren’t enough; Suzanne needed his time and attention.

Feeling loved is our deepest emotional need. When that need goes unmet, it weakens our love for our spouse. Then the negative behavior patterns we once overlooked begin to annoy us. That’s why Suzanne could say, “I don’t love you.”

After 30 years of marriage counseling, I’m convinced there are only five languages of love. Each person uses all the languages, but really thrives on one. The better you speak your spouse’s love language, the stronger your emotional love life will be. For those unfamiliar with love languages, here’s a brief course:

Words of Affirmation. Proverbs 18:21 says, “The tongue has the power of life and death.” This language uses words to honor and appreciate your spouse. “You look nice in that outfit.” “Thanks for taking out the trash. I really appreciate all the hard work you do.”

Gifts. A gift says, *She was thinking about me. Look what she got for me.* Gifts don’t need to be expensive. Haven’t we always said, “It’s the thought that counts”? With gifts, it isn’t what you give, but how often you give that communicates love.

Acts of Service. The Bible tells us to love not only in word but in action (1 John 3:18). Acts of service include: washing the car, walking the dog, changing the baby, or whatever needs doing.



Quality Time. This means giving your spouse undivided attention. Maybe it's a picnic, a weekend away, or just muting the TV. The important thing is the two of you are focused on each other.

Physical Touch. We've long known the emotional power of physical touch. Holding hands; embracing; a back rub; even putting your hand on your mate's leg while you drive.

Revealing questions

So how do you discover your spouse's love language? Answer the following:

"How does my spouse most often express love to me?" If they give you words of affirmation, that may be their love language. They're giving you what they wish to receive.

"What does my spouse complain about most often?" Our complaints reveal our deepest desires. Suzanne complained, "We don't have time for each other. We don't talk." Quality Time was her love language.

"What does my spouse request most often?" If your spouse routinely asks, "Would you help me make the bed?" "Would you give the children a bath tonight?" then Acts of Service may be his or her primary love language.

You need three things to be a successful lover.

- 1. Information.** What is your spouse's love language?
- 2. Will.** Love is an active choice.
- 3. Frequency.** Use your spouse's primary language to express love regularly.

It took Suzanne nine months of counseling to work through the hurt, neglect, and lack of empathy she felt from Mark. But eventually their marriage was reborn.

"If anyone told me I could have loving feelings for him again, I would have never believed it," Suzanne told me. "But I do. He's speaking my language," she said, smiling. Learn to speak your spouse's love language and you too can live with a smiling mate!

—Gary D. Chapman, Ph.D., a marriage and relationship expert and best-selling author of numerous books, including The Five Love Languages (Moody) and Covenant Marriage (Broadman & Holman), lives in North Carolina.

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