Languages of Love: Hugging

There are many customized ways to love. There is showing. There is telling. And there is hugging. Every person prefers a little different combination of messages of love. For people who like to be hugged, a caring touch is very important. Babies love to be held close - they thrive on hours of it. Small children love to snuggle - they draw a feeling of safety from closeness with trusted adults. Most children like to be hugged - especially when they are lonely. Even in adulthood, some people thrive on hugs from family and friends.

People vary in how much they like to be hugged. Notice your child's reaction. Does she lean into hugs or fight them? Would he rather push and shove as a way of being in touch? When we pay attention to our children, we discover how much and what way they like to be hugged.

There are many ways to be in touch with children.

Sit close when you are riding together in the car or watching TV.
Give the child a back rub.
Sit near a child and talk.
Wrestle, arm-wrestle, thumb-wrestle.
Rub noses.
Put an arm around him or her.
Rub feet.
Play basketball or soccer together.
Brush her hair.

Take cues from your child. As children become teenagers, we may feel more awkward about hugging them. Some of them still want to snuggle. Some may want you to find different ways of showing your love. If they are uncomfortable with hugging, don’t stop loving, just stop hugging. Ask them how they prefer to be loved. Be sure to send clear messages of love in a way that each child understands.

Sometimes a child likes to be hugged more than a parent likes to hug. The parent can be glad that the child wants to connect. And the parent can prepare for hug time. If, for example, a daughter likes to hang on her mother for several minutes after school, rather than feel frustrated and resentful, the mother can prepare mentally to set aside 5, 10, or 15 minutes of time after school for hugging her daughter.

When our children know we are available for them, they may actually demand less attention. When we always seem anxious to get away, they may feel that they have to pursue us. When we respond gladly and readily to their needs, they learn to feel safe and strong.
Applications.

Think of each of your children individually.

What are some ways that the child likes to be in touch with you?

If you are not sure, ask your child how much he or she likes to be hugged.

Babies thrive on close contact with a loving person. Hold the child close. Watch the child. Talk. Respond to the child. Imitate the baby’s actions and noises. When they are tired of interacting, give them a rest.

Some school age children may want to sit for a while after school or in the evening and hug. Set aside time. Talk if the child likes to talk. If they don’t want to talk, just relax together.