



Learning Languages of Love in Marriage

Love is more than words. It is more than an occasional gift. Love is a commitment to another person that shows itself in our willingness to adapt to and cooperate with another person. It is hard work.

When we are first courting a person we are delighted that someone notices us and cares about us. Every gift is cherished. As the years pass, it requires more than any old-gift to show genuine love. But, if we have been paying attention, we know more about what is important to our partner. We are better at loving.

Loving is the most rewarding thing a person can do. It is rewarding not only in that it provides us companionship with another person, it is also rewarding because, in the process of coming to understand and work with another person, we become more sensitive, more tender, and more unselfish. It makes us into better humans.

Some people may think that the great evidence of love is the oft-repeated words: "I love you." But love is more than words. It requires us to **notice what is important to our partners**. For example, if you were to give a very expensive dog to your partner as a gift, it would only be an effective evidence of love if your partner wanted a dog. For many partners such a gift would be a sign of insensitivity.

People like to be shown love in different ways. These different ways might be thought of as different languages of love. When we really love another person we study what is important to him or her. We customize our messages of love to fit our partner's preferences.

One language of love is telling. Some people love to hear words of affection. "I love you." "I enjoy being with you." "You mean so much to me." Some people want to hear such words every day, maybe even several times every day. Yet some people think that words are not enough or not a meaningful demonstration of love.

Another language is showing. Some people want to see love in action. "If you love me, help me around the house." "If you love me, make time to be with me." "Show me your love by the way you help with the children." For some people, actions speak much louder than words.

Another language is touching. Some people love to hug and cuddle. They appreciate a partner who holds his or her hand. They may like to sit close. Physical closeness is important to them.

Most people do not want love in just one language; we all have a combination of languages of love. One may prefer showing with occasional telling. Another may want lots of hugging with regular doses of showing. We may discover another person's language of love by noticing how

that person shows love, by noticing how that person has preferred to receive love, or by asking what that person enjoys.

There are other powerful languages of love: taking time and showing understanding. These two languages are so important that a separate unit is dedicated to each of them. Since languages of love are also important in our relationships with our children, there are units on that subject in this series.

Gladly accept your partner's efforts to show you love while sending clear messages about your preferences. Sometimes we become impatient with our partner's efforts to show us love. Sometimes our languages are so different from each other that it is hard for either of us to get the message through. We can choose to appreciate our partners' best efforts and we can keep trying to be more effective in our own efforts to show love.

Loving takes effort. That is good news! Real love requires a real commitment and it leads to real growth. You can never show love perfectly but you can keep trying. The willingness to keep trying is part of the message of love.

Applications:

As you try to discover how to best show your love for your partner, think over your relationship history. When have you felt closest to each other? When has each of you felt most loved by the other? How can you build such relationship-building time into your relationship now? Discuss this with your partner.

What are the ways that your partner can best show love to you? What are the clearest signs of his or her love? What additional ways would you like your partner to show you love? Let your partner know what your preferences are.

Sometimes we make ourselves unavailable for love to our partner by ignoring or discounting the ways he or she shows love. "He says he loves me but he never shows it." "If she really cared she would understand my feelings." If we do not accept our partner's best effort we may discourage him or her from trying. What are some ways that your partner tries to show his or her love.