

The 5 Love Languages

Gary Chapman

In his classic book *“The 5 Love Languages”*, psychologist and speaker Gary Chapman argues that dysfunction in marriages is largely rooted in the fact that we all speak different love languages, and people fail to learn and speak their partner’s. This leads to couples running on empty emotional tanks. Chapman explains the five love languages (words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service, and physical touch), and then shows how the discovery of your spouse’s love language can lead to a more loving, lasting marriage.

1. Marriages fall apart when spouses do not learn the other’s love language.

A common pattern for lovers is exciting, loving, romantic relationships that disintegrate after marriage. Many conclude that there are only two paths one can take in the face of an unraveling marriage: endure the emotional emptiness or give up. Are these the only options for people who get married?

For all the advice available through books, articles, and seminars, why are loving, lasting marriages so rare? This book is an attempt to answer that question. Most remedies that people come across have some truth in them, but do not address the root of the problem. Ultimately, we have lost sight of a fundamental truth: we speak different love languages.

If someone speaks a different primary language than you do, say, Mandarin, but you still try to speak in English, communication will be difficult, halting, and awkward. You could say the kindest, sincerest words in English, but they will be lost on the Mandarin speaker. Learning a second language is the best way to improve communication and connection. So, it is with love languages: if you are speaking a love language that your spouse does not understand, the meaning will be lost. Discovering which of the five emotional love languages your spouse speaks and learning to speak it well is the key to improving and sustaining your marriage.

2. Hoping for uninterrupted romantic bliss with “the right one” will leave you running on an empty emotional tank.

Love is an essential human longing, but the word is as confusing as it is vital. It has been the subject of songs, movies, literature, poems, magazine articles, religions and philosophies. We use the word to describe how we feel about family, friends, ice cream, films, and music. People do all sorts of things—destructive things, sometimes—in the name of love.

In each of us is an emotional “love tank” that needs to be filled. It is a need we have had since childhood that persists throughout our lives. When kids “act out” during childhood and adolescence, it is often the result of unmet emotional needs. If there is no love in the emotional tank, we will carry those problematic patterns into adulthood and marriage.

The romantic feeling of “being in love” is a temporary fix that, by itself, fails to meet the deep-seated emotional need for love. Running on an empty love tank could be the reason for the dysfunction in our

marriages: the hurtful words, the apathy, or the avoidance. If people find a way to get their tanks filled, it will keep their marriages going for miles and miles. But first, we need to take a closer look at the phenomenon of “falling in love” because it requires some untangling.

3. Loving your spouse when infatuation has faded requires conscious, deliberate effort.

Falling in love is a beautiful thing, an essential building block for any healthy, lasting marriage. But the hidden—and utterly false—assumption we carry is that the euphoria we experience in those moments will last forever. In this state of love, a smitten pair sees troubled marriages or tension and disagreement as the result of people failing to “find the right one.” This assumption is toxic.

A recent study concluded that this period of romantic obsession lasts an average of two years. Then the lenses lose their rosy tint, quirks become flaws, and the reality becomes disillusioning. The sensation of being in love is lost amidst the minutia and monotony of life: bills, grocery lists, hosting in-laws, and raising kids. This can lead to resentment and a creeping separateness.

The euphoria often generates a surge of goodwill towards another person, but this cannot keep human nature and egocentrism at bay indefinitely. Eventually, our selfishness surfaces and we assert our preferences. This transition can be bewildering and isolating. When the spark fizzles out, many couples resign themselves to emotional deprivation or file for a divorce.

There is, however, a third response to the end of infatuation: a real love that meets the deep existential need of being genuinely, unconditionally loved. This takes work, discipline, and a willingness to honestly assess and acknowledge our own flaws. This real love is more a conscious, rational choice than a burst of emotion. It might sound drab and unromantic but learning how to meaningfully love your spouse will unlock a depth of feeling and acceptance far surpassing what you thought you had during the period of obsession.

4. There are five distinct love languages, and not everyone speaks the same language.

The first love language is *Words of Affirmation*. Words have the power to build up or tear down. They can create a climate of love and acceptance or of bitterness and isolation. Our areas of insecurity are opportunities to give courage to a loved one. Who knows what potential lies dormant in your spouse that your encouragement could unlock? This is different than using your words manipulatively to get your way. Encouraging words require empathy and an ability to see the world through your spouse’s eyes.

It is not just what we say, but how we say it. Our tone matters. In a marriage, the spouses are equals, and must treat each other as such. Therefore, we do not make demands of our spouse, but requests. Requests are an acknowledgement of the value, autonomy, and capacity to do something that we deem important or helpful. Demands are demeaning. Requests are empowering.

The second love language is *Quality Time*. Quality time is intentional time spent together, giving undivided attention to each other. Mark and Andrea’s marriage was improving when they began to use words of affirmation. Mark said he felt like a man again because of Andrea’s words of encouragement. But Andrea’s feedback for the counselor was less glowing. The disconnect was that her love language was quality time—

not words of affirmation. She was speaking his love language, but he was not speaking hers. Mark was a workaholic who did not make time for Andrea. If he did not start filling her emotional love tank by spending more time with her, he would likely end up successful, but alone.

Proximity is a necessary but not a enough condition for quality time. If you and your spouse are in the same room, but doing different activities or watching TV, that is not quality time. The activity you do is far less important than your spouse receiving your undivided attention.

The revealing of self to your spouse is another act of love. Unlike quality conversation, which requires the participation of both spouses, the gift of presence or self is something that requires just you. Showing yourself to your spouse is a way he or she might experience intimacy. People who speak this dialect feel closest to their spouse when they know their spouse's thoughts and feelings.

The third love language is *Receiving Gifts*. Across the globe, gift giving is part of every culture where love-marriages (as opposed to arranged marriages) are customary. A gift serves as a reminder of someone's love and thoughtfulness. The cost does not matter; what is important is the thought and sentiment behind it. Visual, tangible symbols are powerful reminders and affirmations, but they mean more to some than to others. If you were not accustomed to giving or receiving gifts growing up, this may not come naturally, but, if receiving gifts is your spouse's love language, it is the best way to fill the love tank.

Here are some suggestions: if your spouse has expressed excitement over certain items, make a note of it. Your spouse's family and friends can also give good suggestions. Try giving gifts spontaneously instead of waiting for birthdays or anniversaries.

The fourth love language is *Acts of Service*. These are deeds—even small ones—that demonstrate care and thoughtfulness for your spouse. They could be acts like cooking a meal, cleaning, folding laundry, cutting the grass, or running errands so that your spouse can rest. It is worth mentioning that a doormat is not a lover. Doing acts of service out of guilt, fear, or resentment is not love. If your spouse's love language is acts of service, speaking that language effectively may mean revising your understanding of gender roles. As with the previous languages, be sure to identify your spouse's dialect. If you do acts of service, but not the ones that make your spouse feel loved, you are pouring out energy and love without putting a drop in the love tank.

The fifth and final love language is *Physical Touch*. From a young age, physical touch communicates love. This continues into adulthood and marriage. It gives many a sense of security. For a person, whose love language is touch, a slap is not just hurtful but devastating; a tender hug, on the other hand, is not simply reassuring, but deeply comforting. In times of grief and crisis, physical touch can communicate powerfully, in ways that words cannot. Love helps us survive the hard times in life.

Neurologically, we have receptors in our skin all over our bodies that are sensitive to touch. As a suggestion, find the places where your spouse particularly enjoys being touched. Find the dialect to which your spouse is receptive. If he or she likes back rubs, be the best massage therapist you can be. If it is sexual intercourse, keep learning new techniques. Your spouse is the best person to teach you how to love through touch.

A common dysfunctional dynamic is when a husband whose primary love language is physical touch withdraws from his wife because she ignores or refuses his advances. Fearing further rejection, he avoids her, which hurts her and deprives her of the quality time (or gifts or words of affirmation) that she longs for. Like the husband in this scenario, people who speak the language of physical touch yearn for their spouse to initiate intimate physical contact.

5. Your hurts, frequent requests, and displays of affection will tell you what your primary language is.

When presented with the five love languages for the first time, some people immediately know what their language is. Others cannot identify one as readily but find that two or even three resonate. This can be especially confusing for some men, who are unsure whether their primary language is physical touch or another. For men who think physical touch is their love language, the litmus test is whether you also enjoy the non-intimate touches, even when you are not “in the mood.” For women, sexual drive is fueled more by a sense of emotional intimacy, security and acceptance, whereas the male drive is more physiological, the body pushing for a release as sperm builds up.

Here are three questions that can help clarify your love language:

1. What does your spouse do or say (or not do or say) that leaves you feeling hurt and isolated?
2. What do you find yourself asking of your spouse most frequently?
3. What are the common ways in which you attempt to show love to your spouse?

If you are still unsure after reflecting on these questions, it is possible that you are bilingual, which is great news for your spouse because it opens more opportunities for showing you love.

6. Failure to learn your spouse’s love language could lead to them seeking fulfillment from someone else.

How do you love someone when you are full of resentment and hatred? The answer resides at the core of the human experience: our ability to make choices. During the euphoric obsession phase, it is an easy choice to make, one we do not make consciously most of the time. But when the infatuation fades, it is a more difficult, but necessary choice to seek our spouse’s good. Learning and choosing to speak your spouse’s love language is essential for the emotional health of your spouse and marriage.

If the love language is not learned and spoken well, it is just a matter of time before a spouse begins looking outside the marriage for the fulfillment of emotional needs. When that spouse finds another person outside the marriage to give something not found within the marriage, the experience brings on the euphoria of falling in love again. Sobering statistics about the damaging psychological effects divorce has on children or the high rates of divorce for second marriages rarely dissuade those who are enjoying affairs. A rational presentation of facts and figures stands a poor chance against infatuation. Oftentimes, it is only when there is a rupture in the affair that the spouse is willing to work towards improving the marriage.

7. Your comfort is less important than your spouse's fulfillment.

Another common question that people pose is, "What if I don't feel comfortable showing love in the way that resonates with my spouse?" The most appropriate answer is this: "So what?" This is where choice comes in. Whether we feel comfortable or are adept at showing love in a certain way is not the question. Whether we are willing to choose to become fluent in a second love language is the question. It is not about what comes naturally to you or makes you comfortable precisely because showing love to your spouse is not about you—it is about him or her.

8. Love does not solve all our problems, but it meets critical needs like sense of security and self-worth.

We all have other longings besides love, like our need for security, self-worth, and significance. Love, however, interacts with all these dimensions of our existence. Knowing your spouse loves you makes you feel safe and secure in the trust that your spouse wants good things for you. To be the object of someone's love affirms that you are a person worth loving, which strengthens your sense of self-worth. When someone devotes time, energy, and emotion to you, you feel significant.

Love does not solve all our problems, but it does create an atmosphere in which we can address other problems more meaningfully. With the needs of security, self-worth, and significance more fully met in our relationship, we can stop obsessing over how to get our own needs met and can start thinking more about how to meet the needs of others. Love sets us free to love others.

Genuine, fulfilling love really can return to your marriage—all you must do is learn to speak each other's love language.