

CHAPTER 4

NURTURING THE YOUNG,  
THE RESTLESS, THE BOLD AND  
THE BEAUTIFUL

*“Educating the mind, without educating the heart is  
no education at all.”*

*Aristotle*

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From my experience of working with hundreds of parents over the years and raising three children, there appear to be two common threads that bind parents together in their role. The first is that the majority have expressed their desire to do what is in the best interest of their children, and want others to do the same. The second is that parents want their children to have a quality of life that is equal to or better than the one they are living. This tells me that most parents deeply love their children and have dreams for their future.

There have been studies done of children who come from loving homes. The children in the studies range in age from four to ten years. These children have been asked, “Do your parents love you?”

The hope was that a resounding chorus of children would respond, “Of course my parents love me.” But, this was not the case.

The greatest number of children answered, “I think they do,” or “I hope they do.” Others said, “I don’t know.” All of these responses leave room for uncertainty in the mind of the child. A small percentage said, “I don’t care if they do,” or “They don’t love me.” Those that knew without a shadow of a doubt that they were loved represented the minority.

So how do we start out as parents that deeply love our children and end up with children who question that love or do not feel loved at all? The answer is quite simple. There is a difference between being loved and feeling loved.

A valuable resource about expressing love is the book, *The Five Love Languages of Children* by Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell. These two men have found that there are several different love languages in the world, and they teach the reader that we must become “multilingual” in expressing love.<sup>10</sup> Their work has identified that every child and adult has a particular way of knowing that he or she is loved and cared for by others *and* a particular way of letting others know that he or she loves and cares for them. Often, in the dance of interaction, we do not stop to think that our personal preferences for giving love may not be what the other person needs from us. As a result, the individual, whether child or adult may feel unloved by us, because we are communicating in a style they do not understand. Let’s look more closely at these languages of love.

## THE FIVE LOVE LANGUAGES

### TOUCH

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There are five different love languages. The first one is physical touch.<sup>11</sup> Children, who understand the emotional connection with significant adults in their life through touch, may hug and kiss, cuddle, sit in your lap, engage in rough and tumble play or wrestling, ask for their back or shoulders to be rubbed or scratched, their hair to be brushed, or want to hold your hand. In contrast, there are children who prefer not to be touched unless they initiate the contact. These children have a three to five foot distance around them and do not want others entering into that imaginary space unless permission has been granted to do so.

#### *Kyle*

The dance of interaction gets out of sync when we, as adults, have the language of physical touch and the child does not or vice versa. For example, Kyle was a child who craved touch. Kyle would touch his classmates by giving them bear hugs as they entered the classroom - at times knocking them to the ground. While at morning meeting, Kyle would hug the child next to him or pat the child on the shoulder or back. Unfortunately, his teacher, would make physical contact with her students only on rare occasions. Her rule was, “Keep your hands to yourself!” Whenever Kyle touched another child, she stated the rule. Kyle and his teacher were not in step.

The rule would have been more accurately stated as “Keep your hands to yourself until the other person says you can touch them.” This implies that children must ask before touching and the consent is based on our respect for others. There are many positive behaviors that get eliminated when the rule is “Keep your hands to yourself.” Have you ever tried to greet someone by shaking hands while keeping your hands to yourself? Have you ever hugged someone without using your hands? How helpful is a pat on the back or a high five without hands? Touch is vital to the emotional well-being of children, and their emotional well-being is the foundation to social and intellectual growth.

According to Virginia Satir, children and adults need a minimum of twelve healing touches per day to maintain their emotional health. Children in multi-stressed environments may need more. Adults who do not have touch as their love language may be stretched beyond their comfort zone by children with high touch needs. One way to develop a comfort level with touch is to begin each day with twelve pennies in your left pocket. Every time touch is used to nurture a child who needs touch in his life, transfer one penny to your right pocket. The goal is to move all twelve pennies to the right pocket before the end of the day.

### AFFIRMATION

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The second language of love is affirmation.<sup>12</sup> A child may say, “I love you, Dad,” over and over again, or use praise often, “You’re the best mom in the whole world. I’m going to marry you!” Children who prefer affirmation may ask, “Am I being good? Will I get a sticker today?” Note that individuals who understand the emotional connection through affirmation tend to verbally celebrate the efforts and accomplishments of themselves and others. For example, “You are so good at what you do.”

We tend to do for others what we would want them to do for us. So children who are affirming to others, need affirmation. However, as with touch, there are some children that do not offer affirmation or seek it.

### *Michael*

An example of a student having the affirmation love language and his teacher having a different love language is illustrated in the following situation.

Michael ran out of the classroom and was running toward the road to go home. An adult stopped him as he was climbing the school-yard fence and returned him to the classroom. Upon his return, he was taken to an area to cool off. His teacher, Mrs. Corwin, gently spoke with Michael and then played a game with him. Her method of calming him down was textbook perfect.

Once Michael was finished with his game, he walked to the other side of the room and said to the other teacher, Miss Davis, “Your hair looks nice today.” Then he walked away and joined some children at the art center.

Miss Davis reacted by looking at me in confusion and then asking, “Why did he come up to me and say something about my hair?”

“He was trying to reconnect with you. He was trying to show you love.”

I could easily see the differences in the love language styles for Miss Davis and Michael. I realized that this was a missed opportunity, because Michael was communicating love through affirmation, and Miss Davis communicated love through service. All Michael was trying to do was to reconnect with her and ensure her unconditional love for him. The incident that led to him running from the classroom involved Miss Davis, and he was delivering a message to her that said, “I still love you. Do you still love me?” but it sounded like, “Your hair looks nice today.”

### *Mark*

We will now revisit Mark, the little boy with the unmet needs in the previous chapter. Mark is a child who seeks and communicates through affirmation. I knew that there would be a great likelihood that he would move toward emotional drought without affirmation. So I instructed his teacher to tell him every day, “Mark, you’re my hero! We’re glad you’re

here. This class would not be the same without you.” This was welcome affirmation for a child who probably was not going to receive much in his home. It did not matter that five minutes after entering the classroom he was involved in a full-blown tantrum. The class was not the same without him. On Fridays, Mark would leave hearing these words, “I know sometimes it is hard being a kid and life’s not fair, but we’ll be waiting for you and your smile on Monday.” Through these types of interactions, Mark was being loved and feeling loved.

### GIFTS

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The third language of love is gifts.<sup>13</sup> There are individuals who love to give and receive gifts. It seems that they enjoy the giving more than the receiving. A child with this style may walk up to you holding a picture and say, “I made this for you.” Or maybe it’s not a picture at all, but a rock she found, weeds...I mean flowers, she picked, or a worm.

Children who have gifts as their love language may ask, “Did you get me anything?” or “What did you buy me?” These children remember special occasions and make or buy cards or gifts for these occasions.

#### *Anthony*

Anthony was playing outside with his class. He bent over, picked up a rock and put it into his pocket. When the class went back inside for circle time, he took the rock out of his pocket and was fidgeting with it. Miss Fox told him to put the rock in his cubby. Anthony shook his head *no* and began to well up with tears. She told him if he did not put it in the cubby, she would take it from him and throw it outside. He burst into tears.

I whispered in his ear to put the rock back into his pocket, because he was interrupting the circle by playing with it. He put it in his pocket and the tears subsided. My assumption was that the rock was Anthony’s connection to his mother, who had dropped him off at the program four hours earlier.

When circle time was over, I asked him what he was going to do with his rock. As assumed, he said he was saving it for his mother. She was going to come pick him up at “free, free firty.” His mom arrived at 5:30 that

afternoon and sure enough, Anthony ran over to her as she entered. Her arms were outstretched as though waiting for him to jump into her arms for a hug and kiss. Instead, as he approached, he took out the rock and raised it into her eyes and said, "I got this for you!" To his mom's surprise and apparent disappointment, there was no hug or kiss, just a rock. To Anthony, the rock meant everything that the hug and kiss would have meant to his mother. They speak love in different languages.

I explained this to his mother and one tear streamed down her right cheek. She told me he gave her a rock every afternoon. She also told me that when they got outside, she asked him to leave it on the ground. The rock he gave her today was the same rock he had been leaving on the ground every day, because to Anthony it represented his love for his mother.

The caution, when working with children who understand they are loved through gifts, is do not nurture children with materialism. We have too many adults doing so. The child gets a thirty-dollar toy truck "because I love you." Then, that same child grows up to be of driving age and wants the thirty thousand-dollar truck, and we are not prepared to buy it. This child then says, "How come you don't love me anymore?"

### *Dean*

Dean showed a preference toward gifts. When he would arrive on Monday, he would find a handwritten card that his teacher had left in his cubby. These cards had different messages such as, "Love you no matter what happens," or "I know I can count on you to give your best." Other days, she would slip a written message into his backpack. The cards served as the gifts. Five years have passed, and to this day, Dean still carries some of those cards with him.

## QUALITY TIME

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The fourth language of love is quality time.<sup>14</sup> During quality time, the attention of the adult and child is focused on each other and what they are doing together. There can be no interruptions. A child who seeks quality

time may enjoy reading together or playing a game. She may say, “Come here; I have to show you something,” or she may pull at you for attention. She may say, “You never have any time to play with me,” or you may notice that she often asks for you to do something with her.

### *Mikayla*

Mikayla is playing with her dolls upstairs in her room. All of a sudden, her mother is startled by her shrieks, “Hurry Mom, hurry! Get up here now! Hurry!”

As the terrified mother runs up the thirteen oak stairs, she pictures her child dangling out the window, holding on by her fingertips or in some other kind of danger. As the door flies open, the out-of-breath mom manages to yell, “What’s wrong?”

Mikayla smiles and says, “I forgot!”

What Mikayla has done is brought her mother’s attention to her in a very effective manner. She has created a quality time interaction. It is best, however, not to put children in the position of demanding quality time. Instead, it is recommended that every child have quality time built into her day.

This paragraph contains a few quick thoughts about how to create quality time. As a parent, you may choose to schedule play dates with your child. A play date is time spent together doing something that does not cost money, like taking a walk, playing ball in the backyard or talking. As a teacher or provider, you may choose to use the strategy that is called Daily News. As the children enter into the classroom or home, you ask, “Do you have any daily news that you would like to share?”

## SERVICE

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The last, but not least, language of love is service.<sup>15</sup> Children who prefer this language may ask, “Can I help you?” Toddlers who are service children cannot tie their own shoes but will help another toddler tie his. He will sit there twisting the laces around and around, never tying the shoe but feeling great in his efforts to help. The service child wants and needs to help every day.

## *Abby*

Abby is a child who feels loved when she is asked to take the attendance card to the office. But, she is not asked to do so very often. Abby is a child many would describe as challenging. She does not complete her school work, and she makes bizarre noises while the teacher is trying to explain information to the class. Abby is the child that gets her name written on the chalkboard every day before 9:15 a.m., because she has already misbehaved. By 9:20 a.m., Abby is asked to go stand in the coatroom in the back of the class. The teacher does not realize that Abby likes the coatroom. Abby is a child that needs to move, and she can do that once she is in the coatroom. In addition, Abby likes to eat. She knows she is not going out for recess with her friends and have snack, because she will stay in to catch up on her work. In the children's coatroom are the children's backpacks. These backpacks have lunches in them. Abby rummages through the children's backpacks and chooses which one she will eat for lunch by 9:30 a.m. each day. She likes brownies and cupcakes and gets her fill. Then, she becomes disruptive again and is sent to the principal's office for further discipline.

Abby likes going to the principal's office, because the principal is rarely in the principal's office. Today, she has learned that the principal is away at a meeting. But Mrs. Oliver is in the principal's office, because she is his receptionist. Mrs. Oliver asks Abby, "Could you bring this lunch to Mr. Hernandez's room? John's mom brought it, because he forgot it." Abby is excited at this opportunity, because now she can have brunch and be of service.

Stories like this one would be minimal if adults understood Abby's need to be of service to others. This knowledge would allow adults to wisely create opportunities for her to be helpful. When adults give Abby chances to serve, they will notice that her behavior becomes less challenging.

The research of Daniel Goldman and others tells us that warm, emotional interactions help the central nervous system grow. We also know that children cannot live without a secure, positive attachment to at least one significant adult in their life. The developmental milestones cannot be reached without this "charismatic adult" or partner in the dance of interaction. When children do not have the experiences needed to master the developmental milestones that underlie their emotional well - being,

they may become overwhelmed and their behaviors become difficult to channel. Therefore, we cannot leave the nurturance of children to chance. We must give our undivided attention to the languages of love and know our children well enough to honor their language.

When I first learned this information, it made so much sense. I had just finished reading the book *Silver Boxes* by Florence Littauer. In the first chapter, Mrs. Littauer is explaining to her readers that she was charged with giving a children's sermon at an old New England style church. She decided her topic would be communication. In delivering this sermon, Mrs. Littauer explained to the congregation, "that when our words come out of our mouths, they should be like presents all wrapped up to be given away." And as the story continued, "One precious little girl stood up, stepped into the aisle, and said loudly to the whole congregation, as if serving as my interpreter, "What she means is that our words should be like little silver boxes with bows on top."<sup>16</sup>

Having been impressed with this story, I broadened the picture from words to my own behaviors and applied what I would need to do in order to honor the languages of love in my family. I asked myself, "If I could change one thing about my behavior that would lead to a stronger emotional connection with my husband and each of my children, what would I do?" On an index card, I wrote down four ways to adjust my actions – one for each person in my family. I then folded the index card and placed it inside a quarter - pound candy box. I wrapped the box in silver wrapping paper and placed a small silver bow on top. My idea was not to give the box to these individuals but to put the box in a place where I could see it when I was in their company. The box served as a visual reminder of what I committed to change about myself.

Naively, I thought my behaviors would change quickly. Seven years later, the boxes were still within sight and to this day, I am still working on these changes. It is not important how long it takes, but that we are working diligently and moving forward. Someday, these commitments will be met.