Love Languages

Valentine’s Day is a great opportunity to let people know how much you care about them. But don’t leave it to one day per year. Expressions of care, adoration, and affection are important all year long.

Do you let your partner know how much you care about them? Do you wrap your family members in a hug and say “I Love You”? Do you reach out to colleagues to let them know they’re valued? We have people in our lives who we care deeply about, yet displaying affection through words or gestures can sometimes be difficult! Why is that?

When we express affection, we’re making ourselves vulnerable. We’re letting others know that we are emotionally invested in them, which can feel like we’re giving them power over us. If that affection is not returned, we feel rejected. To minimize the risk of rejection, some people withhold affection entirely, putting the goal of minimizing pain above developing satisfying relationships.

Avoiding expressing affection is a behavior that can become entrenched. When we continually withhold affection, the prospect of expressing it becomes even scarier over time. Also, we may have grown up in a household where affection was not expressed, so doing so feels totally alien.

Expressing affection has been proven in scientific research to be a key component of healthy romantic relationships. The frequency of expressed affection is directly related to each partner’s level of commitment and satisfaction, which can determine the relationship’s long-term health. In short, the more affection expressed, the healthier the relationship.

We know that expressing affection is very important, but can also be very hard. The good news is that expressions of affection, often called “love languages,” can take different forms:

- **Giving gifts.** Little things like buying a candy bar during your weekly grocery trip, or big gestures like giving a new car or expensive jewelry, both demonstrate that your partner is on your mind.
- **Carrying out acts of kindness.** This could be something like cleaning the car for your partner or picking up the groceries. Big and little gestures alike go a long way.
- **Spending quality time together.** This could be putting aside a whole evening to spend with each other or five minutes on the phone each day just to check in.
- **Physical touch.** Holding hands, giving hugs, draping your leg over your partner’s lap as you watch TV. Physical touch can take many forms, but always sends the same message: I want to be close to you.
- **Saying nice things to each other.** Paying your partner a compliment (“you look great”), pointing out the things you love about them, or even asking their opinion shows them that you value them.

Unfortunately, we don’t all speak the same love language. But don’t worry. It’s very normal to be in a relationship with somebody who communicates affection differently. It just takes a little effort to understand your different needs. Understanding what your partner needs means you can make sure to give it to them, and vice versa. As usual, it’s all about communication!

If you are struggling to give or get the affection you crave, give Family Services EAP a call for free, confidential counseling at 978-327-6666 or info@FamilyServicesEAP.org.