

# Improving Family Relationships

Most of us recognize that we need constant exercise to remain fit and healthy. What we often overlook is that we also need to “work out” daily at strengthening relationships. Here are ideas to help improve your relationships with family members.

” Spend five minutes each day thinking positive thoughts about your family. Instead of complaining about things you’d like to change about your children or spouse, focus on their positive accomplishments.

” Express a genuine compliment everyday to every family member.

” Show appreciation. Often, important daily tasks become so routine that they go unnoticed. Be sure to tell each child and your spouse that you appreciate what he or she is doing.

” Give a gesture of love everyday. Don’t be too busy to give extra attention. Write a simple note to each child and sneak it into their lunch box telling them that you are thinking of them. Show physical affection to family members - a hug or kiss goes a long way in communicating.

” Spend at least ten minutes each day sharing feelings with each child. When you talk to them, pay attention to what they are saying. Look them in the eyes and try not to interrupt or finish statements for them.

” Be courteous. Try to set a good example for your children. Name calling, ridiculing, complaining, or losing your temper only causes bad feelings. When you “keep your cool”, you are modeling self control and your children will learn to do the same.

” Be supportive of your children’s interests. It’s important for them to know that you respect their ideas and values. When something goes wrong, they need to know that they have someone to lean on. When events are overwhelming, they need to know there is a shoulder to cry on.

” Give children a chance to grow daily. Give each child room to grow intellectually, emotionally, and socially. Make sure they have the opportunity to be involved in extracurricular activities, their own projects, and with their own friends.

” Plan regular one-on-one “dates” with each child and your spouse. Make plans to spend an afternoon together, just the two of you. Be creative and take turns planning something new.

” Recognize that children need time to relax and unwind from their day. Trying to have that “quality time” when children are too hungry, tired, or upset will only lead to feelings of frustration. Many adults need time to relax, also.

” Practice “constructive criticism.” Have a family agreement not to use negative or destructive comments. Instead focus on comments that are direct and to the point. This will help limit feelings of anger, alienation and other barriers to communication.

” Work on a project together to show a feeling of unity and common purpose. Activities such as redecorating a room, working on school projects, baking cookies, or making crafts are some ideas.

” Remember that it is OK to admit your mistakes. This will actually build your credibility with your children and helps build respect. They will see that you are not perfect and they can relate to you.

Source: Hadley, Dee W., *The Daily Dozen of Marriage*, The Ensign, March, 1990.

# Love Languages

In his book, The Five Love Languages, Gary Chapman identifies “love languages” he observes in his counseling of couples and families. He noticed in his work that many people who truly loved each other were speaking different love languages. As a result, they had difficulty communicating with and appreciating each other. These love languages can be a tool for helping families better understand each other and for overcoming communication barriers. Understanding and using the five love languages can help parents to better express their love, which is essential for a child’s normal development.

## #1. Words of Affirmation

Compliments and words of appreciation are strong expressions of love. Encouraging words inspire a child to make progress in learning new skills. We build up and encourage very young children but often forget how important our words are when children are older. Shower your family with kinds words daily.

## #2. Quality Time

Quality time means giving someone your undivided attention. According to Chapman, this is not sitting on the couch watching TV. It’s sitting on the couch with the TV off, looking at each other and talking. Quality time includes:

### **Togetherness and Focused Attention.**

The type of activity is not the important thing. By giving full attention to the child, the parent helps create an emotional bond.

**Quality Conversation.** The best quality conversations include eye contact, not doing something else at the same time, listening for feelings, observing body language, and resisting the urge to interrupt.

**Quality Activities.** Parents can join in when a child wants to do something fun to show the child that you care about him or her. In a quality activity, at least one of you wants to do it, the other is willing to do it, and you both do it to express love by being together.

## #3. Giving and Receiving Gifts

Gifts are symbols that say, “I’m thinking of you.” The cost is not the important thing, in fact, many great gifts cost nothing at all. Many parents and grandparents find that giving gifts is a favorite way to express love to children. Those with plenty of cash or credit cards can over-do the gift-giving. At a young age, children begin giving simple gifts to their parents. Although it may be a rock or leaf, or even a flower you didn’t want picked, you know that it’s a true expression of love!

## #4. Acts of Service

From day one with your new baby, acts of service became a regular and necessary part of life. All the routine household chores you do is an expression of love for your family. When you stop what you are doing to help your child, this is love as an act of service. Allowing your child to help around the house is teaching him responsibility and helping him or her develop this important love language, also.

## #5. Physical Touch

Physical touch is a very strong communicator of emotional love. Research consistently shows that babies who are held, hugged, and kissed develop healthier emotional lives than those who are left with a minimum of physical contact. The same is true of adults. What does a toddler need most when she trips and falls? A hug and a kiss! Good physical touch, as an expression of affection, can include sitting close to talk, holding hands, giving a piggyback ride, even arm wrestling with a teenager.

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