

What Love Language does your elderly parent speak?

By Kate McCarthy

There has been a lot of talk about understanding different expressions of love since Gary Chapman came out with his book, "Five Love Languages." Dr. Chapman's concept is that people generally have a primary and preferred way of expressing and comprehending love. Knowing how your loved one perceives love is important to how you get your love message across so it actually received.



*Know how to express love
so your elderly parent can receive it.*

Take that idea and apply it to relationships between grown children and their aging parents. Typically as parents age there tends to be a lot of strain on their relationships with their adult

children. The aging parent may feel embarrassed, depressed or frustrated by having to depend on their children for assistance and care. Grown children often experience a sense of loss as they see a parent age and become frail. Caregiving demands coupled with the role reversal of parent and child all cause relationship tension. It can be very helpful to understand how to communicate love and affection to an elderly parent that transcends even the most trying circumstances.

What are the Love Languages?



Words of Affirmation - This language uses words to affirm people. Some elderly parents need to hear the words, "I love you," as well as other verbal reassurances of appreciation and encouragement. Seniors who crave words of love will not get the message just through gifts, hugs and time spent together. They need to actually hear kind and encouraging words. Verbal cues are important to them and so negative words and comments or a sharp tone of voice will hurt deeply and need to be avoided.



Quality Time - This language is all about giving the other person your undivided and focused attention. An aging parent who prefers this mode of receiving love wants time together, without distractions. Turn off the phone and the TV and spend real time together talking. Maintain eye contact and focus on actively listening. Your loved one will feel truly special and loved.



Receiving Gifts - For some people, what makes them feel most loved is to receive a gift. This does not mean that your loved one is out to gather up material possessions, but rather they appreciate the thought behind the gift, whether it is large or small, expensive or free. Gift giving shows you put effort into knowing your loved one's tastes and desires. Careful though, missing a birthday or anniversary or giving a thoughtless gift can be disastrous to the one who values this gesture of love.



Acts of Service - For these people actions speak louder than words. Commonly the love language of men and caregivers, this expression of love seeks to please by serving. Aging parents who speak this language of love will understand the dedication and assistance as acts of love and will be especially appreciative for the help. Broken promises or laziness will be interpreted as their desires do not matter.



Physical Touch - For some people, physical touch is how love is expressed. Hugs, pats on the back, holding hands all show concern, care and love. Elderly often suffer from not being touched enough and so respond gratefully to any demonstration of physical tenderness from their grown children. Neglect to touch or rough handling would be considered unforgivable, so gentle hands go a long way in expressing love.

How to recognize your aging parent's love language:

We all use a mix of these love languages in our relationships, but according to Dr. Chapman there is one dominant form of love expression that most will gravitate towards. To understand your aging parent's preferred love language, think back to how they related with you during childhood for clues. If mom was quick with a hug and a kiss, then she may be a speaker of the Love Language of Physical Touch. If dad rarely said, "I love you," but spent a lot of time playing ball with you, he might best respond to the Love Language of Quality Time. Once identified, knowing the love language your aging parent responds to can be used

to strengthen your relationship as well as make the sometimes difficult transitions of aging a little easier.

Sources:

“The 5 Love Languages Explained” Taken from www.thepersonalitycafe.com on 3/21/13.

“The 5 Love Languages” by Dr. Gary Chapman. www.5lovelanguages.com on 3/21/13.



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