

Five Love Languages of Teenagers by Dr Gary Chapman (a noted marriage and family counselor)
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This is a highly condensed synopsis for general overview; hence apologies for omission of anecdotes and examples. Library copies of the book would be made available. Where 'parent' appears, teachers may substitute with 'loco parentis', especially when our students spend extended periods of time in school in our care. Many look up to the teachers as positive role models – Mrs Mervyn Goh [ACS(I)Counselling]

Chapter 1: Understanding Contemporary Teens

- Teens search for independence and to establish self-identity
- Teens are concerned with logical thinking (ie: development of abstract thinking), personal morality and values, understanding sexuality and issues of dating and marriage, questions of the future
- Today's teens are especially vulnerable to the exposure of technology, violence, fragmented families, neutral morality

Other general points:

- The whole concept of the 5 love languages is learning to speak the teen's language, not your own.
- Teens need to receive love from parents in all 5 languages. The primary love language of the teen will speak more deeply and will more quickly fill the emotional love tank.

Chapter 2: The Importance of Parental Love

- Teen's desire for **connection**: presence of parents in teen's life is prerequisite for bonding, or sense of abandonment will result. The abandoned teen, whose parents hardly have time for, will wrestle with the question, "What's wrong with me that my parents don't care about me?'. Emotional connectedness requires communication eg: family meal
- Teen's desire for **acceptance**: teen feels loved when he is accepted for who he is [not just what he does]. Rejected children are at heightened risk for numerous psychological problems, ranging from low self-esteem, deficient moral development. Often this rejection grows out of being compared with another sibling. Unconditional Love: Teen needs to hear that parent accepts him even when his behavior is not approved.
- Teen's desire for **nurture**: that has to do with feeding the inner spirit of the teen. Avoid abuse: verbal abuse such as hostile, cutting, harsh or demeaning words; physical abuse which will malign the teen's emotional development. An empty love tank affects these areas of teen's life: **motivation for learning** is dissipated ['Why should I study in school? No one cares what happens to me anyway?']; ability to empathize is affected; development of conscience and moral judgments
- Most Basic Need: Feeling Loved: the most fundamental need of the teenager is to feel emotional love from the significant adults in his life
- Finding love in Wrong Places: teens are vulnerable to negative role models

Chapter 3: Love Language #1: Words of Affirmation

-Negative, condemning words are harmful to any teenager, but they are devastating to the teenager whose primary language is words of affirmation. 'Death and life are in the power of the tongue'.

Proverbs 18: 21

-As the teen struggles towards independence and self-identity, any verbal argument by parents to subdue the teen into submission would in reality be pushing the teen toward rebellion

-Affirming your Teen: **(a) Words of Praise** that are **sincere** (teens are looking for authenticity in adults)

(i) Praise **specifics**: train yourself to look for specific actions eg: 'you did a good job of cleaning your room' (x); 'you did a good job of getting the coffee stain out of the carpet' (✓) (ii) Praise **efforts**: teen will feel appreciated and motivated. Love tank will grow as parent has noticed his efforts.

(b) Words of Affection – these words focus attention on the teen himself/herself, such as the teen's **body or personality**. Teen will feel valued, admired, loved. Look out for physical characteristics eg: 'your hair looks like sunshine today'. Focus on personality such as 'You are so steady. I like the way you think before you speak'.

(c) Speak affirming words in front of the family (or class)– teen would be able to relive the satisfaction and feel emotionally affirmed by the family.

Chapter 4: Love Language #2: Physical Touch

-Speak this language at the **appropriate time, appropriate place and appropriate manner**. If the teen's primary love language in childhood was physical touch [eg: hugs], this love language will not change during the adolescent years.

-Timing is largely determined by the teen's **mood**. Sometimes his mood is not apparent. When teen is *angry*, physical touch may come across as an effort to control.

-Appropriate Place: not in public settings and not in the presence of their peers; his self-esteem is tied up with that of his friends

-Appropriate Manner: be flexible with the various ways – hugs, kisses, pats, massages, arm wrestling. But teens as individuals may not like the same touches, especially if the manner stimulates feelings of dependence and insecurity – eg: touches perceived as 'childish' expressions of love

-Fathers to note: teenage daughters need to feel good about herself as a female and the father's role is to give her this sense of well-being about herself. Appropriate physical touch is a vehicle for doing this. If the father withdraws physical affection from the daughter, she is far more likely to become sexually active at a younger age.

Chapter 5: Love Language #3: Quality Time

-Means giving your teen your undivided attention: a powerful communicator of emotional love

-Busy parents substitute time with things: many teens live in houses filled with gadgets but have love tanks that are empty. They often feel like they too are simply a part of their parent's collection of things.

-Togetherness – the central aspect of quality time. Teen needs to feel he is the focus of parent's attention.

-Quality conversation: parents to learn to speak 'with' their teens rather than 'at' the teens. Words of affirmation focus on what we are *saying*, whereas quality conversation focuses on what we are **hearing**.

New listening skills include: asking questions with genuine desire to understand; maintaining eye contact when teen is talking [refrain from rolling eyes in disgust]; not multi-tasking by doing something else at the same time; listening for feelings [eg: 'sounds like you are feeling disappointed...']; observing body language; not interrupting; expressing understanding ['what I hear you saying is that you want ..*in expressing understanding, you are affirming the teen's sense of worth and treating him as a person with desires*']; asking permission to share your perspective [eg: 'would you like to hear my perspective on the idea?']

-**New manner of talking**: be positive, share your perspective, thoughts, feelings and desires; use 'I **statements** rather than you eg: 'I think..I feel..I want'. These are statements of self-revelation; they are informing the teen of your thoughts rather than '*you are wrong, you don't understand..*' which would only lead to explosive arguments or withdrawal and depression. Replace 'Because I said so' with 'Let me tell you why' → teens are interested in reasons

-Quality Activities: parents' involvement in teen's activities [eg is i: concerts/games] important → not only creates memories for the future but deep bonds of love in the present. Involvement says 'your interests are important to me'.

-'**My Teenager won't talk**' – there are times when teenagers don't want to talk about it because they want to work it out for themselves. Let the teen know that we are available when they want to talk. Parents' responses also deter teens from talking when teens feel put down or rejected, feel misunderstood when parents express no empathy. Be sensitive to the teen's **moods** and at his convenience, ie: late at night; privacy of his room.

-Recognise teen's need for friends: adolescents newfound peer groups help satisfy need for companionship and fun, but research shows that most teens would like to spend more, not less, time with parents than they currently spend. Consult teens when planning family activities to avoid conflict with teen's social activities with peers.

Chapter 6: Love Language #4: Acts of Service

-Acts of service freely given from parents to teens are true expressions of emotional love.

-Loving service is not slavery. Loving service is an internally motivated desire to give one's energy to others; it's a gift, with no intention to cause teen to feel guilt.

-Manipulation is not love. Avoid these statements: 'I will...**if** you will...' This is a bartering system and not an expression of love. If your acts of service are always tied to the teen's doing something you desire, you are practicing manipulation. Teen will in turn manipulate parent by acts of service.

-Reciprocal love: modeling and guiding. A rule of thumb: you do acts of service for your teen that he cannot do for himself. When he was young, you wash the clothes for him; when he is a teen, you teach him how to wash the clothes.

-Helping your teen's sense of identity and independence: if the teen learns to do acts of service, he will feel good about himself; thus his self-identity will be enhanced. In learning skills of service, he will be able to maintain life on his own; thus he has a greater sense of independence.

Chapter 7: Love Language #5: Gifts [this is the most difficult of the love languages]

-Given because the parent desires to share unconditional love with the teen. Not to be confused with paying them for a service. Consider the teen's welfare and interest → gift is for well-being of the teen.

-Ceremony: giving the gift without the ceremony diminishes the emotional power of the gift. If all gifts were given in this manner, it creates an entitlement mentality in the teen's mind. There is little appreciation for the gift which has little emotional meaning. Words of affirmation that accompany the gift make the gift a strong vehicle of emotional love.

-Giving money: we must encourage the teen to work for the money so that he learns the value of money. Give also for specific purposes

Chapter 8: Discovering your Teen's Primary Love Language

-Teens are in a state of radical transition; challenging time of growth marked by moodiness, need for independence, withdrawal. Has the child's love language changed?

-The teen's primary love language did not change, but *his secondary language becomes more important*.

Eg: Jared was a toucher as a child [primary love language – physical touch] but his secondary love language, words of affirmation, surfaced in his adolescence.

-Parents who want teen to feel loved must learn new dialects: come up with new verbal expressions of love, using more adult words without the ring of childishness.

-Finding your Teen's Primary Love Language: ask questions; make observations [eg: his complaints and requests]; experiment [one week: experiment with physical touch; next week, words of affirmation].

-Speaking all 5 Languages: teens need to receive love in all 5 languages and also need to learn to speak all 5 love languages.

Chapter 9: Love and Anger: Help for Parents

-Love and anger are opposite sides of the same coin. Love seeks the good of the other person and so does rightly directed anger

-Why teens anger us: teen's intellectual growth and growing independence may lead the teen not only to question our judgment but to choose noncompliance.

-Why parents must break out negative anger responses: painful words and destructive behavior of parents leave lasting legacy; break destructive patterns by (i) admitting the truth (ii) developing a strategy : walk and count to 100 (iii) analyzing own anger and looking at options (iv) engaging family member in conversation

-Teaching teen to handle anger: if the teen's love tank is empty, he will almost certainly handle anger poorly; **Silent teen implodes** with anger because the anger is held inside and goes unprocessed, which would lead to feelings of resentment, loneliness, isolation and ultimately depression. Implosive anger also leads to passive-aggressive behavior. Passive-aggressive behavior may involve such dissimilar things as loss of interest in school or sports, drug use, or becoming sexually active, all of which are aggressive expressions of anger toward the parent. **Explosive** patterns of handling anger – throwing, breaking things: if these patterns are not changed, they will grow into abusive spouses and parents.

Chapter 10: Love and Anger: Help for our Teens

- (1) recognize the pattern (implosive or explosive) that exists in the teen after close observation. (2) Listening to the angry teen – must hear the teen's concerns no matter how harsh they sound, because the anger cannot be processed unless the concerns that stimulated the anger are addressed. Discover why the teen is angry. Focus on what the teen is saying, not the manner – don't lose our cool or we shut

out the teen. Don't defend yourself but record what the teen is saying. Move on to Round 2 of listening by asking reflective questions to indicate that you are listening and want to hear more [eg: 'What I think I hear you saying is because I...']. Continue to write what you are hearing. Round 3 of listening – give him the opportunity to make sure you are getting the full message. After 3 rounds, he will sense that you have taken him seriously.

-(3) Dealing with the Silent Teen: his refusal to share the issues that stimulated his anger renders the parent powerless. When the parent is extremely controlling of the teen's life, making all decisions for him, the teen feels powerless; unable to develop independence and self-identity. Silence is his weapon to gain the upper hand. If parent explodes with 'I can't help you if you don't tell me what's wrong' → the teen is winning the battle. Better to communicate the message that parent is available and willing to listen, using the teen's primary love language. This creates an atmosphere where the teen feels a sense of recognition. When the teen realizes that it is safe to share anger with his parent, he will do so; but not when he feels threatened, shamed or ill-treated; this is when he will retreat into silence.

-(4) Affirming that angry feelings are valid: teach the teen a positive response to anger by affirming his emotion. This is best achieved through *empathy*-stepping into the shoes of the teen and remembering the insecurities, the mood shifts, the desire for independence and self-identity.

-(5) Final step in processing anger: explain your perspective and seek resolution. If you have listened carefully and affirmed his anger, then he will listen to your perspective. He may not agree with you, but he will hear you and the issue can be resolved.

Chapter 11: Love and Independence

-Along with the need for independence, the teen continues to need parental love. Independence is expressed in the desire for personal space, desire for emotional space, social independence [choosing friends over family], playing his own kind of music [take a positive approach; don't criticize], fashion and personal style; desire for intellectual independence, values & religious beliefs [he will question values if he perceives inconsistency between parent's actions and values]

Chapter 12: Love and Responsibility

-Responsibility requires boundaries. Independence without responsibility is the road to low self-esteem, meaningless activity, and eventually boredom and depression. We do not gain self-worth from being independent. Our worth comes from being responsible. Teens who do not learn responsibility will be troubled teens and eventually troublesome adults.

-Lawrence Steinberg, professor of psychology at Temple University, observed 'What causes adolescents to rebel is not the assertion of authority but the arbitrary use of power, with little explanation of the rules, and no involvement in decision making'.

-Involve teens in the circle of decision making: rules and consequences to be decided by consensus. The teen is at a different stage in life; this calls for rethinking and reforming the rules. Pointers: rules should be as few as possible/rules to be as clear as possible [eg: Be inside the house at 10:30pm-unclear rules set the stage for argument]/rules should be as fair as possible

-Consequences: fear of paying the consequences is a motivator to follow the rules. Consequences can be tough but they foster responsible living. Consequences should be: determined before a

violation/administered with love [parent not to be harsh or gleeful]/administered consistently, so sense of fairness will be violated.

-Establishing areas of responsibility: household opportunities; schoolwork [eg: for every day missed at school, the teen will spend Sat reading a book and report to parents]; money management [no loans to teens as it is teaching the teen to purchase beyond one's income; should not earn funds for additional chores as it confuses issue of normal household responsibilities]; dating [later better than early adolescence]

-Keep teen's love tank full and his rebellion is likely to be only sporadic and temporary.

Chapter 13: Loving When Your Teen Fails

-Child psychologist, John Rosemond, "Good parenting is doing the *right* thing when the child does the *wrong* thing'

-Fact is we cannot keep our children from failing; teens make poor choices, parents suffer → nature of parenting

-Kinds of failures: (i) failure to meet our expectations [ie: unrealistic goals/teens pushed into areas of performance in which they have little or no interest or aptitude] (ii) moral failures – rejecting family moral values

-Bringing Redemption to teen's moral failures: (i) don't blame yourself – teen must be given freedom to make decisions; if parent takes the blame, it removes guilt from teen and he is less likely to learn from the failure and more likely to repeat it (ii) don't preach to the teen (iii) don't try to fix it – teen must learn responsibility from consequences (iv) give unconditional love – speak primary love language loudly while giving the other 4 as much as possible (v) listen with empathy (vi) give guidance and support: suggest possibilities and help teen to follow thinking to logical conclusion

Chapter 14: Love Languages in the Single Parent Family

-Eruption of Suppressed emotions: feelings buried in childhood often erupt in the teen years. Emotions of hurt, anger and rejection may give rise to low self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy and depression, or critical words and abusive behavior.

-It is the custodial parent who bears the brunt of the teen's formerly dormant emotions

-Response: (i) focus on teen's emotions: parent must realize that behind the teen's behavior that is based upon his depression and low self-esteem are deeper feelings of hurt, anger and depression (ii) tell the truth – lying about relationship/divorce will cause teen to lose respect for parent. Truth hurts but it also heals (iii) respect teen's unrealistic desires (eg: I wish Daddy would come to my games) as he is sharing information. Often many of these desires are in keeping with teen's primary love language. Eg above: desire reveals love language to be for quality time

-Non –custodial parent: avoid being the Disneyland Daddy where attention is focused on fun activities rather than teen himself; don't assume teen is emotionally stable if not talking about problems [fearful that talking will drive away parent]; don't criticize custodial parent; Be involved and speak teen's love language

[Five Love Languages Test for Teens – photocopied copies can be obtained from me, or the book in the library]