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PRINCIPLES OF Parenting

Sending Messages of...



Every child (and adult) needs to be reminded often that people love and value him or her. Often we get busy and forget to send messages of love to our children. Or we send messages poorly. Or we send only angry messages.

Sometimes we send a message of love, but the child does not get it. It is as though we are talking different languages. There are at least three "languages" of love: showing, telling, and touching. Consider examples of each.

Schedule special times with each child.

Some parents schedule dates or special times with each of their children.

Once a month Nancy would schedule a special time with each of the children. On Andy's day she would take him for a hike because he loves to hike. On Emily's day she would take her shopping and for a malt. On another day she would sew with Sara. For each of the children she scheduled the things that they most liked to do.

6	7	8	9
Andy -HIKE	Emily -SHOP	Sara -SEW	me

Of course, once a month is not often enough to send a message of love. But it may be a reasonable schedule for special times. You may want to use a calendar to schedule such special times for each child.

At least once every day we should find some way of sending a message of love to each child. It may include taking a few minutes in the evening to talk with a child about her day. It may mean inviting your son to help you cook dinner. It may be reading a story to your daughter. But every day the message of love should get through to each child.

In any family there are times of conflict. It's not reasonable to believe that there can be no differences, arguments, or fights at home. But while learning to control the problems, we can be sure that the message of love is still getting through.

Send clear messages.

One of the difficulties of sending messages of love is that we sometimes send mixed messages.

Tom was visiting with me when he saw his son do something that upset him. He marched over to the boy, picked him up, yelled at him, and, when he was finished with the lecture, said, "And I love you." I don't think the boy got a message of love. I think all he heard was his dad's anger.



The dad may have thought he had taught his son about responsibility and still let him know that he loved him. Probably the boy did not learn anything about responsibility but only learned to be afraid of his father. A parent's anger can be so frightening to a child that he does not hear any of the words a parent says.

Another difficulty in sending messages to our children is that our own needs may keep us from seeing our children's needs.

When Andy earned an award, I told him I was so proud of him that I would take him out to dinner. He said he would rather have me help him buy a bike. I realized that I was going to take him to dinner because that's something I like to do, not because it's something Andy likes.

One of the challenges in sending effective messages of love is being aware of what's important to the child. Take a few minutes right now to make a plan of how you will send messages of love to each of your children in the coming week

Child's name:

How will I send the message:



Children want to know that they are loved and valued by their parents. We can be effective at sending messages of love if we learn their "language," send messages regularly, schedule special time with them, and avoid letting anger block our message.

If you want to learn more . . .

Faber, Adele, and Mazlish, Elaine (1980). *How To Talk So Kids Will Listen And Listen So Kids Will Talk*. New York: Avon.
Ginott, Haim (1956). *Between Parent And Child*. New York: Avon.

This publication was originally written by H. Wallace Goddard, Extension Family and Child Development specialist, Auburn University, for the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service. It was adapted for use in Tennessee by Kathleen Rodgers, former Assistant Professor, Family Life.



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Billy G. Hicks, Dean