

Foundations

Summer

All We Need is Love

Steve tells a joke about a woman who asks her husband if he loves her. He says, "That's a dumb question. Why are you asking?" She responds, "We've been married for twenty-five years, and you never tell me that you love me." He says, "Look twenty-five years ago I said I loved you. If I change my mind, I'll let you know." Once he told that joke at a talk, and afterwards a woman came up to him and said, "That describes my ex-husband to a T."

Love Wrapped in Affection

Affection is a kind of gift you give to another. It's not something that can be earned. It's pretty much a spontaneous response, a turning with warmth to someone you know, of fixing them in your sight, and allowing your warm feelings to flow out toward them. The ways you show affection, though, is probably conditioned by what you learned growing up. In some families, people show affection by gentle touching. In some, warmth is expressed through humor. Other families use nicknames to reveal their intimacy.

Little Habits

You and your spouse have probably already developed habits of affection that you both recognize. You began the day you realized that this relationship was different from those that had gone before. Little habits grew up between you that set you apart and allowed you to know in a



"Affection is responsible for nine-tenths of whatever solid and durable happiness there is in our lives."

—CS Lewis

hundred ways that you meant more to this person than anyone else did, and he (or she) meant more to you.

Nothing stays the same

As your marriage grows, the ways you express affection will also grow and change as the things you experience

together become more numerous and more meaningful. As your common life builds and may include children, you may find yourself sharing stories about them at the end of the day. If one of you gets sick, showing your affection might include making tea, or buying more tissues!

Stay affectionate, and be creative 😊

Signs of affection are limited only by your creativity. How you express it is not important. THAT you show your affection *is* important. It will undercut conflict and support commitment. It keeps you young, it keeps you happy, it makes you more attractive, and it costs no money. Can you think of any wonder drug that can beat it?

Intimacy's Front Door

On the premarital conversation tool, FACET (full disclosure – it's also produced by S&K) there is a statement "Affection is not an important part of intimacy". It is surprising how many people will agree with that statement. In fact, affection is a very important part of intimacy. It's hard to imagine how a couple can create an intimate marriage without also nurturing affection in their relationship.

Opening the Door

You can think of affection as the place where the door opens to intimacy. The warmth you show toward one another softens the heart and turns your spouse's attention toward you. It is not until you are facing one another emotionally that intimacy can grow. And it can take many forms too! It often can lead to physical intimacy, but a deep conversation can result, or a sharing of one's dreams for the future. Affectionate acts, tone of voice, nonverbal cues such as smiles and looks of tenderness, can provide the path to many of the finest moments in a marriage.

Love Languages

If you have not yet read Gary Chapman's *The Five Love Languages*, please put it on your "must read" list. It is a very important view into how we each hear the words of love that our partner is trying to convey. Chapman identifies five ways that are the major avenues that allow each of us



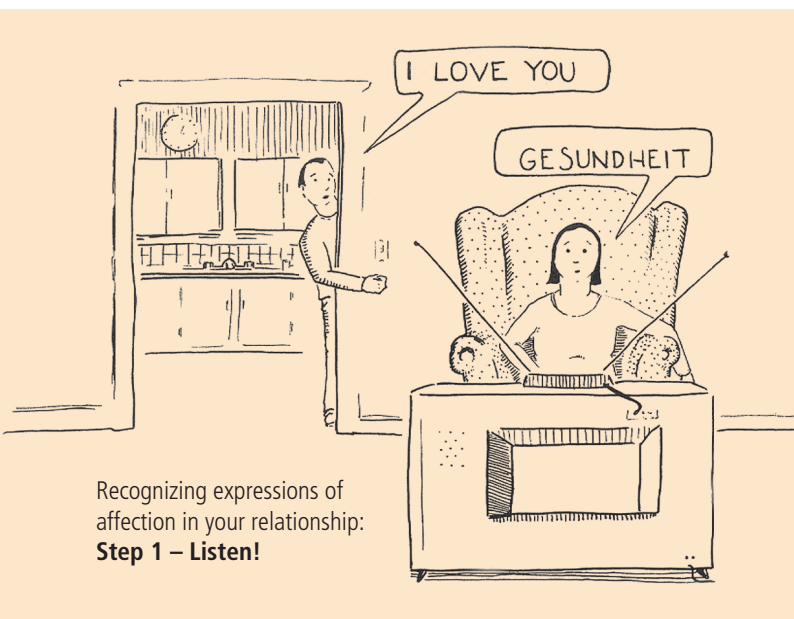
to feel love. If your primary love language is gifts, then no matter how often your partner tells you how great you are, you won't be able to hear it. You are waiting for the flower, or candy bar, or magazine that he or she would bring home. Dr. Chapman would argue that we are "deaf" to expressions of love that don't match our expectations. And affection can take place in any one of the five areas.

Melting the Ice

Every relationship goes through times when it's hard to hear each other. It is as though ice grows up between you. And if you have cultivated habits of affection, the melting comes much sooner! It is vitally important to find ways to keep those periods brief, to regain the sense of togetherness that is at the heart of your marriage. Dr. Chapman calls those periods the time when your "love tank" is empty.

Keep the door ajar

SO this article could be called "In Defense of Affection" because of the importance it plays in supporting every aspect of marriage. It is important in fostering intimacy. It builds the friendship between you. It keeps your blood pressure down and in general helps you be a healthier person. You may not be the type of person who likes displays of affection in public. That's okay – the two of you get to choose how and when affection is expressed. It will keep your marriage feeling young even when your bones creak and your hair thins.



Recognizing expressions of affection in your relationship:
Step 1 – Listen!

The Taste of Affection

I don't know about you, but in this household food holds a high place. We believe in trying to eat local food and cook our own food most times, rather than eating or ordering out. I know that is a luxury most couples don't have, though we recently worked with a couple who made their week's food on the weekend, freezing lumps of pizza dough and muffins, soups and casseroles, to eat during the week. For us and for that couple, every meal is aimed at trying to please those eating it.

I think we always realized that food was a way to express affection. One person cooks, the other praises the food. Or one person buys a special treat and the other is delighted with the surprise. Gary Chapman didn't identify food as a love language, but it crosses a few he does mention. It's a gift, it's an act of service, and it



is quality time (which may result in words of affirmation)!

I do most of the cooking, which, as every cook knows, involves the decision of what to eat, purchasing the ingredients, and then preparing them to turn them into a meal. What makes that all worthwhile? The appreciation

of the effort when the food is served! In this house, the other spouse does the cleanup, which results in more words of affirmation.

I don't think I thought of the preparation and presentation of food as a sign of affection, but it surely is. The appreciation that is shown for my efforts is affection coming back to me.

But you know, if we were a couple that did need to order food or eat out frequently, it could still be a sign of affection! Choosing the place with the food you know your partner likes, or ordering from a place run by your partner's buddy are ways of demonstrating your care for them and their preferences.

How does affection play a part in your eating patterns? Pay attention to those special gestures your partner makes around food choices with you in mind.

Affection Means...



You are unique. When I show you affection, it means that you have a special place in my life. I hug other people, but not the way I hug you. I

kiss other people, but not like I kiss you. There is a place reserved for you alone in my thoughts and my actions as well as in my heart.

You are precious. I place a value on you that is outside the way I value anyone else in my life. You are a treasure to me, and very close to the core of who I am. My signs of affection toward you are a way of sealing that very sacred belief.

We have a history. The gestures of affection I show you are almost a ritual. They began when we began and collected meaning as we spent more time together. Affection is a special language.

There is something deeper within. When I show affection for you, I am revealing the love that lies within. The love isn't visible except through the signs of affection I show. Affection is like a sacrament – an outer sign that points to an inner reality.

We are a witness. Our public proclamation by word and action of our love for one another gives witness to the possibility of enduring love. Our friends, parents, siblings, children see us and know what love "looks" like. Others may admire our love for one another, others may imitate us and still others may be given hope that they might rediscover the love and affection they once had.

A Clue to the Value of Affection

Did you see (and do you remember) the movie, *Inside Out*? At the the climax of the movie, the importance of sadness is revealed. The movie makes the point that sadness gives others a chance to see that we need care, we can be healed and soothed by their efforts. That can only happen if they know we are hurting. Sadness alerts them and gives them a chance to respond.

In a marriage, affection plays a similar role. Affection, expressed though gestures, words, tone of voice, and facial expressions, allows your spouse to know that you are really seeing them, really focusing on them, and it casts a glow on your relationship.

When you reach for your spouse's hand you are indicating a desire for connection. When you rub their back or massage their foot you are giving affection through an act of service. The same when you fix the other's coffee with just the right amount of milk, or turn the music up so they can hear it while bathing the baby.

So like sadness in *Inside Out*, affection plays the role of alerting your partner that you care for them and that you value being connected to them. Think about the ways your spouse shows affection toward you, and commit



to showing affection for them every single day. There's a very good chance that doing so will stimulate gestures of affection coming back to you – a pretty good payoff for a “costs nothing” but priceless action.

“Being the ‘best you can be’ is really only possible when you are deeply connected to another. Splendid isolation is for planets, not people.”

- —Sue Johnson ,
- Love Sense: The revolutionary New Science of Romantic Relationships



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Exercise

Affection in Our Marriage

Do you know how your spouse likes affection to be shown? Do you believe that your spouse knows what affectionate signs please you?

Here are three categories for showing affection, and some possible signs of affection in each one. Check off ones that work for you, and add any that are not on the list!

Nonverbal	You	Spouse
Hug		
Kiss		
Back rub		
Touching your hair		
Smile		
“the look” (the positive one)		
Holding hands		
Other		
Verbal	You	Spouse
Pet name		
Fun comment		
Compliment		
Invitation to spend time together		
Other		
Action	You	Spouse
A gift		
A surprise phone call		
A planned activity		
Other		

Spirituality

In 2016 Pope Francis published an exhortation on love. It is called *Amoris Laetitia - The Joy of Love* in English – and it speaks so warmly of the blessings and the challenges of living out life as a married couple.

What do Priests Know?

Sometimes people will say, why are priests talking about marriage? They don't have the experience of married life! But it is clear from reading what Pope Francis has to say that while he himself is not married, he has listened carefully to those who are married. And he watched carefully in his home and in the homes of other married couples to see how they live out their married life.

The Glue of Affection

It is affection that helps us stick together while we continue to build the marriage. There is no way to have a successful marriage if we are just putting one foot in front of the other, feeling like this is our fate, our responsibility, and not our joy. We need that feeling of warmth, friendship, and loyalty to flesh out the promises we made at the beginning of our marriage. Nothing holds together without fastening – the wire spiral on your notebook, the thread on your shirt, the cement on your basement wall. So it is with marriage – we need the glue of our affection for one another.

Giving it time

The pope encourages us to build our marriages by making them a priority. "Love needs time and space; everything else is secondary. Time is needed to talk things over, to embrace leisurely, to share plans, to listen to one another, and to build a stronger relationship." We all have experienced this, often when we have not been giving the time to our relationship! Have you ever taken time for a day off, a dinner out, or just even a long walk and say, "Why don't we do this more often?" Affection can't be built on a schedule, but it also can't be built if we never get to spend time together.



"Love doesn't just sit there, like a stone, it has to be made, like bread; remade all the time, made new."

—Ursula K. Le Guin

Happy AND Holy

It is wonderful to understand that what makes us happy – feeling close to each other, making time for each other and building a life together – is also what is making us holy. The bond we are creating is a reflection of the love God has for each of us, and the love God wants us to share in! Pope Francis reminds us to move deeper into that love that we so yearn for, and to know that by doing so we are becoming the people, the couple, we are meant to be.

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A NEWSLETTER FOR MARRIED COUPLES

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