

SELF-HELP

Keep love from languishing

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Valentine's Day presents an optimal opportunity to improve communication with one's romantic partner. In our fast-paced lifestyles, we often unintentionally neglect our primary relationships for the many other competing demands on our time – jobs, children, friends, hobbies – leading to the languishing of love. Moreover, the manner in which we express our loving feelings to our partners may not be received as loving by our partners because of different “love languages.” It's as if we are saying, “I love you” in a foreign language; our partners don't understand our

meaning.

Therapist and author Gary Chapman, Ph.D., described five “love languages” in his popular book of the same name.

We typically express love to our partners in the way we prefer to have love expressed to us, which works well for couples who prefer the same love languages. But couples who prefer different love languages do not feel loved when they express love for one another using their own love language, and they often don't even realize why they don't feel loved.

The love languages Chapman describes are **acts of service** (doing helpful things for your partner without being asked, such as loading and unloading the dishwasher, or preparing dinner before your partner gets home), **quality time** (spending dedicated time with your partner doing things you both enjoy), **gifts** (things

purchased or made with your partner's tastes in mind), **words of affirmation** (recognition or praise for your partner's efforts or accomplishments), and **physical touch** (hand-holding, cuddling, lovemaking).

We all use each of the love languages at various times, but the most preferred and/or frequently used love languages are considered the primary love languages. My husband and I both prefer acts of service and quality time as our primary love languages, so it is relatively easy for each of us to meet the other's love needs.

On the other hand, let's consider the fictional example of Sally and Fred, a couple whose relationship is fraught with squabbles because neither partner feels truly loved by the other. Fred shows his love for Sally by buying her expensive gifts (e.g., jewelry from Andrews Jewelers), which she puts in her drawer and doesn't wear;

what she really wants is to spend a romantic evening at Palmetto Bluff, because her primary love languages are quality time and affectionate touch. Fred feels unloved because Sally doesn't wear his loving gifts, and Sally feels unloved because she thinks that Fred is inattentive to her needs. Over time, their love languishes.

Even if your love languages differ from those of your romantic partner, you can build a bridge over the love language gap by discussing your love language preferences; you can even make a guessing game out of it. Most importantly, once you know the love language preferences of your partner, use those love languages rather than your own, if different, to express your love for your partner, and watch your romantic relationship blossom as your partner feels truly loved by you. *Helene Stoller, Psy.D., licensed clinical psychologist, Bluffton*