



Child psychologists affirm that every child has certain basic emotional needs that must be met if he is to be emotionally stable. Among those emotional needs, none is more basic than the need for love and affection, the need to sense that he or she belongs and is wanted. This need is especially pronounced for children with a parent (or both) in the military. With an adequate supply of affection, the child will likely develop into a responsible adult. Without that love, he or she will be emotionally and socially challenged.

Dr. Ross Campbell, a psychiatrist who specialized in the treatment of children and adolescents, puts it this way: “Inside every child is an ‘emotional tank’ waiting to be filled with love. When a child really feels loved, he will develop normally but when the love tank is empty, the child will misbehave. Much of the misbehavior of children is motivated by the cravings of an empty ‘love tank.’”

Military daughter Deborah Roszel experienced an empty love tank while her father was away during the Vietnam conflict. Her love language of quality time was unmet by either parent for a full year.

*“My mother showed love by acts of service. She cooked and canned and cleaned and baked and sewed and mended and washed incessantly. We had a spotless house. I was always clean—and life was sterile. I wanted my mother to sit down with me and listen to my questions, but she was too busy and didn’t realize my need. I withdrew to books and schoolwork, where I excelled. I began to think of myself as an imposition on others. I became independent to a fault, trying to figure out everything without asking for help. I grew fearful of rejection: rather than opening up to others in relationship, I hid myself and only showed what I thought would be accepted. There were other factors involved in this unhealthy pattern of development, but I know the year I turned six was crucial and that a lack of quality time was a fundamental part of the problem.”*

The author of *The Mom’s Guide to Surviving West Point*, Deborah has now overcome those unhealthy patterns and is intentional about communicating love to her military son.

Let me encourage you to discover your child's love language and speak it regularly. You can learn their language by the time they are three or four years old by observing their behavior. If they are regularly jumping into your lap and hugging you, their language is physical touch. If they say, "Come into my room, I want to show you something," they are asking for quality time.

Below, Deborah Roszel and Ellie Kay, author of *Heroes at Home*, share specific examples of how they have successfully applied love languages with their own children. Under Acts of Service, Rebecca Halton, a grown-up military daughter, shares her own perspective on the love languages as well.

## Words of Affirmation

**Ellie:** "We had five children in the first seven years of marriage. We also made them move eleven times in thirteen years. Because we prioritized our kids we wanted to make sure they felt loved, even in the midst of all the moves and the stress of their dad going off to war or being deployed into harm's way. Daniel, our oldest, has a love language of words of affirmation. When he was nine years old, he had a hard-core soccer coach who yelled at the kids frequently. Coach Gibson was loud and proud and Daniel faced this challenge. We knew that our son felt bad when he made a mistake on the field and his coach fired off corrections. So every time he had a practice or a game, we gave him a note to put inside his shoe (you can't have shorts with pockets in soccer). We called it a "secret treasure" for him to hide away and carry with him on the field. The note would say something like, "You are a treasure to us and we love you." Or, "We believe in you and you make us proud just by trying hard." From the time he started hiding "treasures" in his shoes, he started feeling better about himself. By the end of the year, when he got his participation trophy, he felt like a full-blown soccer player and he was proud that he finished the season. Speaking the right love language can make help a military child cope with the unique challenges they face."

## Quality Time

**Debbie:** "It was easy to discern my child's love language from an early age: quality time. This was the boy who stayed until the very end of every social activity, who always wanted thirty birthday guests, who could get along without food but not without friends. Before going into military training, he chose to cut extracurricular activities to focus on time with friends and family. His love tank was full to the brim the day we hugged him farewell at the United States Military Academy.

West Point is nearly a thousand miles from home, so we knew time with our son would be limited during his years there. Before he left, though, we talked about how much strength he gained from being with the family. He looked his dad in the eyes and acknowledged the distance and the cost of a trip to USMA, then said, "I just want you to realize I'm about to go through the toughest year of my life, and I want to be able to rely on the support of my family."

We made the necessary sacrifices to afford trips to New York, and he saved money for tickets home. He also enjoyed internet video chats with us and with his girlfriend. Time with loved ones was critical to his success, and we all worked together to make that possible. Having solid emotional support in the language he understood gave him strength to face the physical, mental, and spiritual challenges of military life.”

## Receiving Gifts

**Ellie:** “Our daughter has two older brothers and two younger brothers and they were all born within 7 years of each other. We always lived in base housing and there was rarely a lot of extra room with all those kids underfoot. Bethany had to struggle to hold her own amongst so much testosterone, and she did this by creating works of art whenever she could. She drew pictures constantly and gave them away to the mailman, the babysitter, her gymnastics teacher and the neighbors.

After we read *The 5 Love Languages*, we realized that her language was gift giving. Since her nickname was “Bunny” it was easy to collect bunny memorabilia at garage sales and in discount stores. When she was four years old, in order to help Bunny cope with her military aviator dad being deployed, we purchased a bunch of these tiny gifts ahead of his departure. Then Bob signed a quick note for each item and I wrapped it in pretty paper. Each week when her Papa was gone, she would talk to him on the phone and once a week she was able to open a gift from him.

She grew up knowing that her dad loved her more than life, whether he was physically there or whether he was serving his country in another land. That gave her the security to become a well-adjusted, independent and confident young woman. Today, she graduated from Moody Bible College and is a missionary in England. She still gets gifts in the mail from her Mama and Papa and she knows she is well loved.”

## Acts of Service

**Rebecca:** “For most of my teen years and young adulthood, I didn’t understand how my Marine dad communicated that he loved me. I – with words of affirmation and quality time as my two primary love languages – didn’t perceive his acts of service as displays of love.

Learning about the five languages helped me to stop disqualifying acts of service as valid “fuel” for my love tank. I remember one of the first times that shifted for me. It was during or after college, and I was preparing to travel by train. My dad drove me to the station, and walked with me to the proper platform.

We re-capped pick-up plans, hugged, and I found a seat on board. Moments later, there was a muffled knock on the thick-glassed window. I looked over to see my dad, with hands cupped

around his eyes, peering into the train so he could find me. We smiled and waved at each other; then he dutifully stood back and waited.

Once the train started moving, he walked and waved alongside the section where he knew I was sitting. He waved from the end of the platform. And he kept waving even after he could be certain that I could still see him (which I could). That day, with heart (and tear-filled eyes) full, I realized I could interpret and receive acts of service as ‘I love you.’”

## Physical Touch

**Ellie:** “Joshua was the youngest of seven military kids. He was also the toughest, as he constantly jumped off bunk beds (five stitches) and ran into trailer hitches (7 stitches) and even cut off the tip of his finger (10 stitches). It was tough to keep him still. After studying the Five Love Languages book in a chapel bible study, we decided his language was meaningful touch. It certainly explained why he always wanted to wrestle with his three older brothers, even if it meant picking a fight and getting squashed on the floor.

In order to speak his language, his dad, an Air Force pilot, decided to make it a habit to “snuggle” him whenever possible. So when we watched a movie as a family, Joshua sat on his Papa’s lap and got snuggles. It broke through and as we spoke this love language more, his desire to pick a fight with his older brothers diminished. Don’t get me wrong, he still loved to wrestle them at every opportunity, but it was in a positive way.

Today, he’s just gotten accepted into West Point and is following his dad’s military legacy (albeit a different branch of service). Even though he’s outgrown snuggles, he still wrestles his older brothers when they come home for holidays and we hug him every chance we get.”

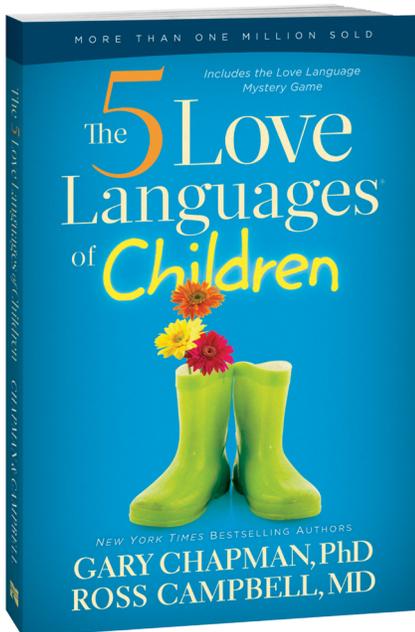
**Debbie:** “Our son is a good hugger; he didn’t realize how much that meant to him until he started basic training. In his letters that summer, he mentioned how much he missed hugs. Physical touch is not his primary language, but he definitely missed it when it was gone.

After a brief period of “no-touch” in his early teens he had come back around to giving and receiving family hugs. As he prepared to join the military we knew we needed to make the hugs count. In his last days with us, both little sister and girlfriend made sure he was rarely without an affectionate hand on his arm or shoulder, and hellos and good-byes always included hugs. Many of his friends stayed with him throughout his last night at home, piled on one another in the living room, watching movies, eating, talking, and laughing. On his reception day, we had sixty seconds to say good-bye, but we’d filled the preceding days with hugs and words of encouragement and quality time, so he was in good shape.

He had to draw on the memory of those extra hugs through a long summer of physical challenge without meaningful physical touch. Just in time, I suppose, the best hug ever came: greeting him again after basic training. We had endured eight weeks of no touching, and it seemed as if that hug needed to last at least that long again. It certainly felt as good as an eight-week-long hug.”

## Love Languages Despite Distance

**Debbie:** “The summer of basic training tested our family’s ability to support our son. Accustomed to being together frequently throughout our days, sharing all the love languages freely, we were abruptly limited to mailing letters and sending photos and homemade pictures (no packages allowed). We packed those plain, white envelopes with words of affirmation; we hoped that his reading them would provide quality time. We made gifts - photos of things at home or in town, drawings from his little sister. We used creativity in our communications - for meaningful interaction, the younger siblings played slow-motion tic-tac-toe with him through the mail, complete with written banter about who was winning and smiley or frowny faces commenting on the progress of the game. Always a humble and grateful boy, our young man received all of these appreciatively as acts of service, too. Physical touch had to wait until we could see him again, but we regularly promised hugs and looked forward to them. We needed all the love languages to keep strong.”



For an in-depth look into the subject, check out **The 5 Love Languages of Children** by Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell.

Visit [www.5lovelanguages.com](http://www.5lovelanguages.com)

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