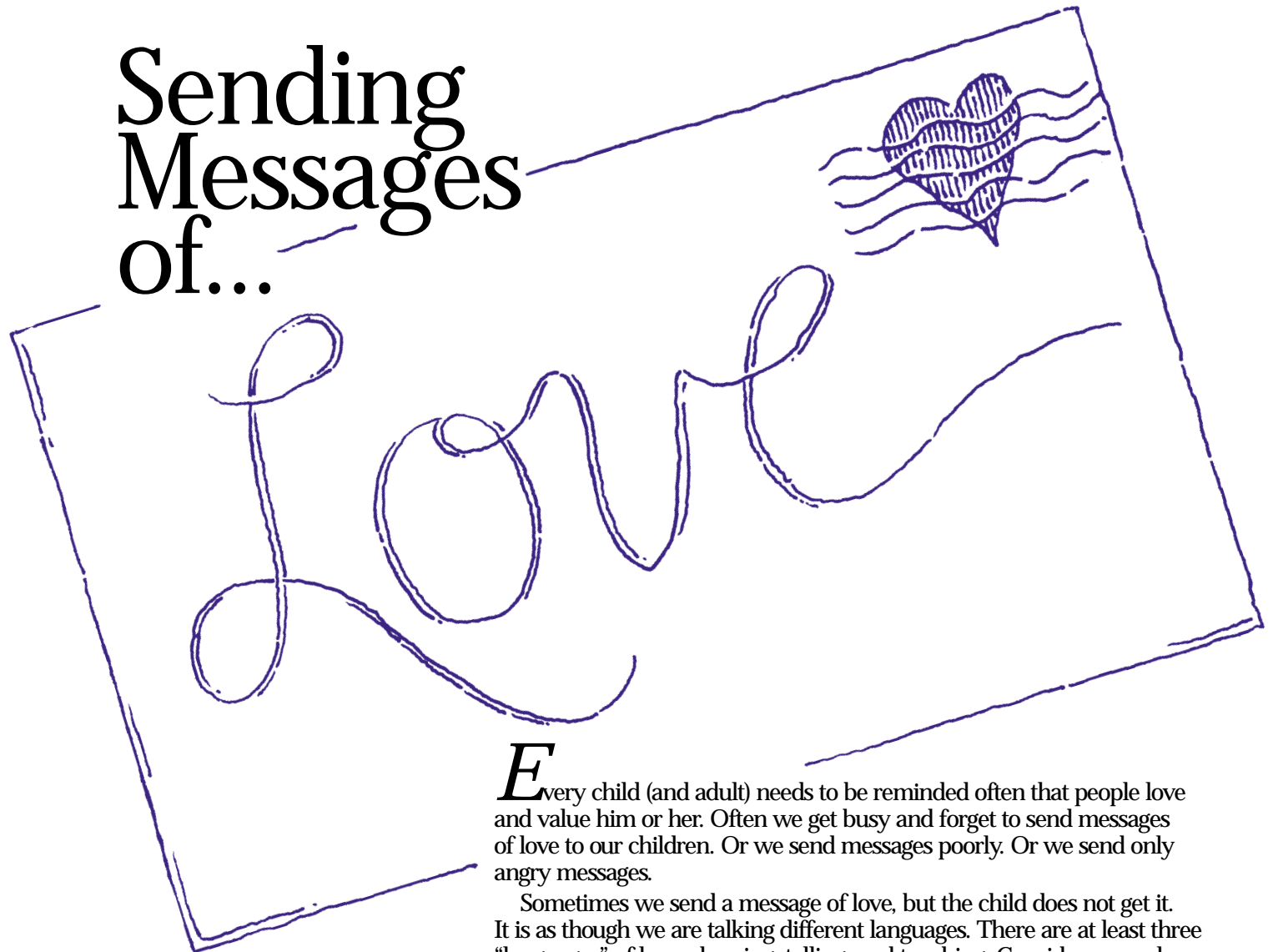


# PRINCIPLES OF Parenting

## Sending Messages of...



*E*very 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.

A child who likes show-me messages of love may want you to do things for her. She may want you to wash the dishes for her, to buy her a gift, to take time with her, to take her for ice cream, or to repair her bike. A tell-me child wants to hear words like: "I love you." "You're important to me." "I love to be with you." A touch-me child may want a parent to hug him, rock him, cuddle him, or hold his hand.



That all seems easy enough. But sometimes the message of love does not get through because we don't speak the child's "language." For example, if I send a message of love to my daughter by telling her that I love her but she wants me to take time to fix her bike, she might not get a message of love. She might feel that I don't really care. To make it more complicated, if you have more than one child, each child probably has a different way of getting messages of love.

How can you effectively send a message of love to a child? One way is to notice what your child asks for. Does he want time, attention, a listening ear, materials for a hobby, outings? Another way is to notice how the child sends messages of love to you and others. Does she tell you, hug you, write you notes, clean up the house? Observing these things can help you know how to be more effective at sending messages to a given child.

### You can learn to send the right messages of love to your children.

As you read the following list, think of each of your children and consider whether this method (or something like it) would be effective in sending messages of love. Write your children's names in the blanks to show which messages each child may need to receive.

**Child's name:**      **Ways to send messages of love:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Say, "I love you."
- \_\_\_\_\_ Take a bike ride together.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Hug the child.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Take a nature walk together.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Say, "I sure enjoy being with you."
- \_\_\_\_\_ Make a trip to the library together. Research a topic of interest to the child. Check out books for you to read to him or him to read to you.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Say, "I sure am glad you're my child."
- \_\_\_\_\_ Work on a craft together: sculpt with clay or playdough, build with sticks, sew, draw.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Work on a hobby together: writing, stamp collecting, woodworking.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Give the child a back-rub.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sit with the child and talk.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Arm-wrestle, thumb-wrestle, or play a game involving physical exertion. (Be sure the child has a good chance to win!)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Visit a relative or neighbor.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Thank the child for helping (or trying to help).
- \_\_\_\_\_ Go to a park and swing together.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Build a playhouse with the child, even if it's only a sheet thrown over a table. Then play in the playhouse together.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have the child help you with grocery shopping.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have the child sit on your lap or close to you while reading, talking, or watching television.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Give the child an "Eskimo kiss" (rub noses).
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other:

Children often enjoy even jobs that seem like "work" if they provide a special time to be with the parent. For example, a child might feel important if allowed to go grocery shopping with a parent, especially if the child is allowed to help.

As you put your children's names on the ideas above, was one of your children very easy to show love to, while another was very difficult? It's important to find effective ways of showing love to each of your children. The child who is hard to love needs love as much as any child. Be sure to find effective ways to send love to that child also.

## 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	Emily	Sara	me
-HIKE	-SHOP	-SEW	

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.



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