

Cards are fun, but everyday actions say ‘I love you’

This is the month when we are surrounded by heart-shaped reminders of love. Certainly you love your children. That’s why you are reading this article. Oftentimes you make sacrifices to make sure your children are fed, clothed and have everything they need. With few exceptions, most parents love their children.

Yet, sometimes children do not feel loved. Some children learn that their parents only care about them when they are behaving in certain ways. Others wonder if they are really wanted. Clearly, being loved is not the same as feeling loved.

It is not the kind of house they live in or what is in their rooms to play with that give children the secure feeling that they are loved. Instead, simple everyday events tell children you value them. Your presence, a smile, a gentle touch and a kind word all spell “I love you” to a child.

In the same way, unintentionally, your words and actions can cause your children to question your love for them. If you’re always in a hurry, your children are not learning that you are busy, but that they are not important.

If you express your love only under certain conditions, your children may be learning that you love them when they obey you or if they don’t wet their bed or if they don’t make mistakes.

It is really quite easy to assure your children, through your words and your actions, that you love and value them:

- Pay attention to your children. Take time to talk to them, listen to them and show an interest in their activities. Try to find times when you aren’t hurried or tense and

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PARENTING POINTS

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can focus just on them.

- Express your affection often through physical contact. With babies, this means holding and cuddling.

As children get older, you can offer hugs, kisses, caresses, an arm over the shoulder or a pat on the back. Sometimes when the right words are hard to find, a gentle hug says it all.

- Treat your children with the same respect you show adults. Too often we use one set of manners for adults and another for children. Sometimes we embarrass our children by scolding or criticizing them in front of others. Or we may get so involved in a conversation with another adult that we forget are children are even present. Children are just as sensitive as adults and deserve the same kind of respect.

- Tell your children they are appreciated. Don’t wait until they get good grades, or just praise them when they look good or use their best manners. Let them know you enjoy being with them and believe they are great all the time.

- Respond to your children with patience and understanding. When children spill their milk for the third time or hit their sibling over the head with a toy shovel, it’s easy to treat them like a criminal. What they need the most is for us to help them regain control of their body and their emotions.

- Respect your children’s

feelings and abilities. Because of their size, we sometimes forget that children are people, too. They have a right to privacy and to have feelings of their own. We may have to remind ourselves not to carry children when they can get there on their own two legs or to speak for them when they can do this for themselves.

When children feel unloved, they may spend a lot of time trying to reassure themselves and other people of their worth. They are cautious about trying new things because they are very hurt by failure.

Children who know they

are loved, one the other hand, don’t have to waste time proving their worth. They aren’t afraid to try new things. They know that even if they fail, they can still count on your love and respect.

This doesn’t mean that if you ever get angry or frustrated with your children they are ruined forever. Children don’t need perfect parents. Ordinary people will do. If the overall climate you create is one of love and respect, your children will learn that they are loved.

» Source: *Making Children Feel Loved* (2006). Oregon State University Extension Service