



Love Languages NOW YOU'RE TALKING

Learn how to discover you and your partner's love languages,
and unlock a whole new level of communication

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Communication – we all know it's one of the key factors in a healthy, happy relationship. But, when it comes to expressing love, what happens if you're speaking entirely different languages?

The concept of “love languages” comes from author Dr Gary Chapman in his bestselling book *The 5 Love Languages*. The idea is that everyone gives and receives love in different ways but, for most of us, our primary preference can be sorted into one of five categories: words of affirmation, quality time, gifting, acts of service, and physical touch. As Dr Chapman sees it, the key to relationship bliss is to learn to speak yours, and your partner's, languages.

But the good news is you don't have to sign up for night school to become fluent in these methods of communication. In fact, all it takes is a bit of time, understanding, and the question, ‘How can I love you?’

“To work out your own love language, take some time to reflect on what your partner does that makes you feel special and loved,” says Bibi Jamieson, an integrative psychotherapeutic counsellor and couples therapist. “Next, think about, and notice, what you do that makes your partner light up, and then share your findings with each other.”

How often do we take the time to have ‘relationship check-ins’? In long-term relationships, it can be easy to get to the point where

you feel as though you and your partner know everything there is to know about each other. But whether you're still in the honeymoon phase, or you're hurtling towards your ruby anniversary, taking the time to learn each other's love languages can unlock a whole new level of intimacy.

“We connect more by learning how to speak and receive in our partner's language,” says Bibi. “Where previously, you might have felt frustrated, because no matter how hard you tried, you just couldn't please each other – or disappointed because your expectations were not met – now it becomes exciting to learn each other's language. What's really lovely is when you realise all

Quality time

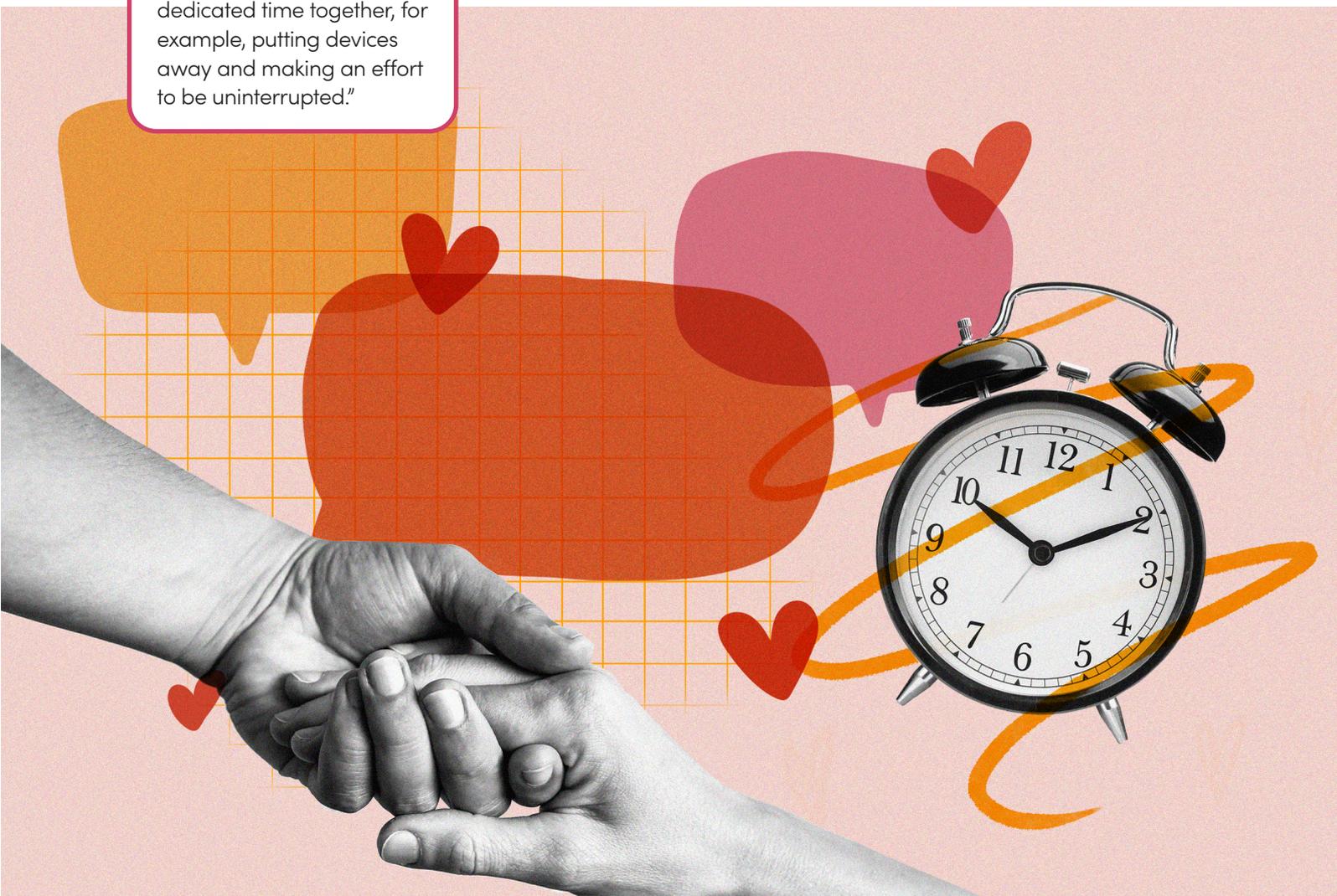
"This is the gift of your presence," says Bibi. "Love is expressed by taking the time to give your partner undivided attention." Of course, just spending time together doesn't necessarily equate to quality time, you need to really be present with each other, without distractions. "If this is your love language, put boundaries around your dedicated time together, for example, putting devices away and making an effort to be uninterrupted."

the times you have been shown love in the past. For example, if your partner's language is acts of service, you realise all those cups of tea brought to you in bed were an 'I love you'."

As Bibi sees it, learning how to speak each other's love languages is about feeling secure, appreciated, and seen. And this stretches beyond how we express love to teach us more about our preferences and behaviour – for example, you might now

understand why your partner, who values quality time together, may not be so keen on group outings and double dates.

Of course, there are some pitfalls to watch out for. As Bibi puts it, even if you and your partner have the same love language, you may speak different dialects. For example, you both might be into physical touch, but could still have different preferences on how, where, and when. >>>



Words of affirmation

"If this is your love language, written and verbal expressions of love light you up," Bibi says. Words of affirmation include compliments, encouragement, expressions of gratitude, and other reminders of your feelings. As Bibi explains, this could include leaving an encouraging sticky-note in your partner's lunchbox, an "I love you" text or email, or just regular reminders of how you feel. However, Bibi has a word of warning: with this love language, words are powerful, and so harsh words, sarcasm, and criticism may be taken to heart, and not easily forgotten.



Acts of service

"A helping hand is an act of love. Asking, 'What can I do to help?' is your way of saying 'I love you,'" Bibi says. Acts of service could be anything from helping out with chores, to doing practical things to make your partner's life easier. "Actions speak louder than words here, so if you say you'll do it – do it," Bibi warns. "Likewise, these people need affirmation when they do something for you. Say: 'I see you changed the sheets today. Thank you.'"

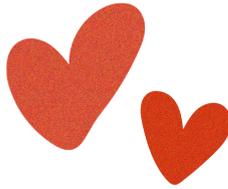


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"Another important point to make is that our historical and cultural beliefs may value or devalue one language over another," Bibi adds. "For example, if one partner comes from a culture that sees words of

affirmation as an indulgence, such a person might either crave these words of affirmation or, conversely, really struggle to actually give words of affirmation. Likewise with gift-giving – someone who believes in giving

extravagant presents may upset someone who believes presents only come on special occasions. This is why it's really important to check-in regularly with each other, to make sure you're speaking the right dialect of love to each other."



While love languages are a really great tool for understanding ourselves and others, it's important to remember that human beings rarely fit well into boxes, and you may actually find that your own language is a slight deviation on the big five, or that you identify with more than one.

"In fact most people have at least two primary love languages," adds Bibi. "The more languages you speak, the more open you are to giving and receiving love.

"Imagine having a bank account where you can only pay in cash over the counter, and then imagine one where you can pay in cash, cheques, bank transfers, and in different currencies. There would be fewer barriers for people to pay you, wouldn't there? Likewise with love languages, your love tank will be more accessible and easily filled. You can express love, look

for, and find love in whatever language your loved one speaks. And that is a beautiful thing."

As with anything new, love languages can take time and patience to master, but the payoff could be huge – and not just for your relationship. "It might be time to start speaking these five love languages to ourselves, to love ourselves the way we want to be loved," considers Bibi. "Let's make me-time important, being present with our feelings, buying ourselves little gifts, encouraging and affirming ourselves, and give ourselves a pat on the back or a warm hug that says: 'I see you, I love you, I accept you.'"

For yourself or for your relationship, the truth is every time we discover something new about ourselves, and the things that we want and need to make us happy, navigating the challenges that we face becomes a little bit easier – and that's something that speaks to the heart. **li**

Physical Touch

This one is about more than just sex. "Body language and the right touch can express concern, care, understanding, or joy," says Bibi. "If this is your partner's love language, ask them, 'How do you like to be touched? When? Where? How?' A massage, a hug, a foot rub, a kiss on the forehead, a hand on the small of your back, hand-holding, kisses, hair stroking, are all various ways to say 'I love you.'"

Gifting

This one comes with some misconceptions, and Bibi's quick to point out it isn't about materialism. "Thoughtful and meaningful gifts are visual representations of love that have emotional value to the receiver," she explains. "Gifts can be free, expensive or inexpensive, and they express that you care, pay attention, and take time to think about your partner." If this is your partner's love language, Bibi recommends taking note of the things that they like, and being sure to show excitement and enthusiasm when both giving and receiving gifts.



Bibi is an integrative psychotherapeutic counsellor and couples therapist. She also volunteers at mental health charity Headstrong, and as a couples pre-marital guide at HTB church. Find out more by visiting counselling-directory.org.uk