

Episode 52

Love Languages After Baby: What Changed and Why It Matters | Ep. 52

You used to melt when he held your hand.

You used to love it when he hugged you, but now you flinch.

You used to crave long, deep conversations. Now you just want someone to clean the kitchen without being asked.

Does that sound familiar? If so, you might be wondering what happened to me?

Did I change? Did we change? And why doesn't love feel the same anymore?

Today we're kicking off with a four-part series on love Languages in Parenthood, and we get to look at how they can shift in ways that feel confusing, frustrating, or even scary.

In this first episode, we're talking about something people rarely admit- that the way that we want to be loved doesn't always stay the same; that fills your emotional cup today might look completely different than it five years ago or even six months ago.

And that's not a red flag. It's a signpost.

It's your system trying to tell you something about what you need in this new season. Because when you become parent, your entire inner world gets rearranged.

Your nervous system, your schedule, your stress levels, your energy, your body. It all changes. So it makes sense that what you need and the way that you want to receive love could change too.

In this episode, I'll walk through what the original love language theory got right and what it may have missed. Why may be feeling disconnected from the things that once made you feel deeply loved, as well as how matrescence, patrescence, and relationships explain this shift.

Most importantly, we're going to talk about how can rediscover what makes you feel loved now in a way that fits your current life, not your past one.

And if you wanna take this a step deeper, I've created a short journaling prompt that will help you reflect on your current love, language, and emotional needs. You can find it at MarkellaKaplani.com/newsletter, and I have the link in the show notes. I'll remind you at the end of the episode.

So whether you're feeling emotionally in your relationship, unsure how to ask for what you need, or just curious why that "I love you," text doesn't do what it used to, you are in the right place. Let's begin.

Hi there! If this is your first time here, welcome to The Parenthood and Relationship Podcast.

I'm your host, Markella Kaplani, a Psychologist, a Parenthood and Relationship Coach, and a parent myself.

Together we explore the transformative journey of Parenthood and its profound impact on our relationship with ourselves, our partners, and our children, so that we can be present and show up as we envision without having to do more.

Let's get into today's episode!

What Is a Love Language?

Let's start the beginning. What exactly is a love language?

In 1992, Dr. Gary Chapman Chappman introduced the idea that people tend to give and receive love in one of five primary ways: words of affirmation, acts of service, physical touch, quality time, and receiving gifts. At time, this framework was revolutionary.

It helped countless couples put language to something that had felt frustrating but vague.

Chapman suggested that we each have a dominant love language, the one that makes us feel most cared for and that when partners speak different languages, they may end up unintentionally missing other emotionally, even when they both care very deeply.

And let's be honest, it really resonates. For many of us. Discovering our love language feels like finally getting instructions for an emotional blueprint that no one had ever handed to us.

But here is another part that is not talked about as much. What happens the love language that once used to make you feel deeply connected no longer lands the same way?

What happens when what once used to light you up emotionally now feels flat, distant, or even irritating?

That is we're exploring today. Because as helpful as this framework is, it was never designed to be static. It doesn't account for how life transitions, especially something as all consuming as parenthood- because it reshapes our emotional landscape.

And so today we're going to expand idea of love languages- not throw the whole concept out no, but to stretch it, to make space for the truth that your emotional needs are allowed to evolve. We'll look at what the research and what psychology now suggests -

that your love language can change and that often does. And that instead of seeing this shift as threat to your relationship, it can actually become an opportunity, a chance to get curious, to reconnect, and to start listening to your inner self in a new way. Because the question isn't, " why am I not responding in the way that I used to?" Maybe the real question is, "what am I longing for now?"

Expanding the Theory – Can Love Languages Change?

So let's expand the theory a little bit. When Dr. Gary Chapman first introduced the idea of love languages, he suggested that most people have a

relatively stable way of receiving and expressing love. Think of it kind of like, native emotional language. You learn it very early and it stays with you.

And while that idea was helpful for making sense of emotional needs in relationships, it didn't fully account something we now understand more clearly through lived experience, through couples therapy, and in psychology: your love language is not fixed. It's not a personality trait. In other words, yes, your love language can absolutely change. It can shift with your stress levels, your mental load, your relationship dynamics, which always are changing, your energy reserves, your trauma history, and especially with life transitions like parenthood, grief, illness, or burnout.

Think about it: when you're well rested, emotionally supported, and have margin your life, you might love long, deep conversations. But when you're sleep deprived and touched out, running on empty, what you actually need might be acts of service- someone to take something off your plate. Not to talk to you, not to touch you. Just make the bottles or start the laundry. That doesn't mean you've lost your capacity for intimacy. It just means that your emotional needs are adapting to your current

reality.

In fact, I'd argue that your love language isn't just a way that you feel cared for, but it's also a signal. It tells you what running low on. What kind of care will help you regulate your nervous system and feel grounded and stay connected to yourself and your relationship?

Let me give you a few examples.

A partner once thrived on quality time, lazy Saturday mornings, long drives, late night talks, may now crave acts of service because they're constantly juggling a child's schedule and working late, feeling like there's no room to breathe.

What they now want is not more time together. It is less less on their shoulders.

Another example is a that is experiencing sensory overload, who used to love cuddles in the past and physical closeness, but now might suddenly pull away from touch and this to their partner might feel very alarming. But this is not because they're rejecting their partner, but because their body is already saturated. They might need words of affirmation instead- a kind validating text or verbal reminder that they're doing a a great job.

A third example, I'm thinking of someone who to value words of affirmation. They loved compliments and encouragement, but they may no longer feel soothed by these words. That could be because what they really need right now now is evidence- someone stepping in, someone following through, something tangible that says, "I see you. I've got you."

These shifts can feel very disorienting at first, both to you and your partner because what used to work, what you were trained in, what comes naturally doesn't seem to land anymore. But that doesn't mean that something is wrong. It means that something has changed.

And when something changes, it's not a bad thing. It's an invitation to get curious.

"What am I needing now? What kind of love reaches me in the season of life?" These are the kind of questions that we need to be asking so that we can with ourselves, not try to fix ourselves and go back to something that doesn't work in the now.

The Neuroscience and Psychology Behind the Shift

So now let's move on talk about the science of why these shifts happen so profoundly, specifically parenthood, how brain and body adapt to this new identity and how this transformation touches everything, including how you receive love and maybe even you give love.

So we talked about how love languages aren't fixed and how they shift based on what you're emotionally needing the moment.

Now, let's go a deeper. Because this shift isn't just happening in your preferences. It's happening It's happening in brain, in your body, and in your sense of identity.

As said on this podcast, I'll keep on reiterating, when we become parents, our brain rewires itself. This is not just a poetic metaphor, this is neuroscience.

Studies show that after childbirth and even in the non birthing parents, the brain undergoes process of neuroplasticity. That means new pathways are being formed, priorities are getting reorganized. Your brain starts optimizing for caregiving and emotional attunement, as well as scanning your child's safety.

It's an incredible adaptive response. But it also comes a cost: your bandwidth for other types of emotional processing like romance and spontaneity or deep personal reflection can shrink.

And the things light up your reward system also shift. What used to feel bonding, like physical touch or quality time may now feel overstimulating or even stressful. You are just responding to new internal chemistry. Let's say that you felt like touch is everything. Now after a full day of being climbed on and spit on or breastfeeding, you might feel like your body isn't even yours anymore. Your brain, therefore, is telling you, 'I need space to regulate. I am so maxed out.' In that moment, a long hug from your partner might feel less like comfort and more like pressure.

And so you may be feeling awful like, "oh am, am I shutting my partner out?" But what it really means is that your nervous system is adapting to a very real demand, and our emotional needs are shifting in response.

Now, let's layer in attachment theory a moment. Parenthood can stir up often unexplored emotional material. This is to mean things from your childhood about how you were cared for and what love looked like and what it didn't that can quietly rise to the surface.

Suddenly, your sense of emotional safety becomes more delicate. You may find yourself craving for more reassurance or conversely more independence. Why? Because becoming a parent doesn't just require energy. It is asking of you to reexperience being a child in some way. Love languages often shift to reflect this. A secure partner might now need more verbal in order to feel anchored. Someone who usually craves time together might suddenly need space to feel safe again.

It's all part of this attachment recalibration.

And then there's culture. We live in a world that still praises self-sacrifice as the golden standard of parenting. Mothers in particular, well, we're the story that good moms always give, always put others first, always show up no matter the cost.

And so here's what happens. Even if you were once, the type of person who lit up over surprises and gifts, travel or long, slow mornings, you might now feel that asking for those things is indulgent.

So instead you focus on doing, serving, managing. You shift toward acts of service, not always because it's love language, but because it's what feels permitted.

But here's a gentle truth. Just because it's what you're doing doesn't mean it's you're needing. You might be living in a love language that reflects your responsibilities, not your desires. And that kind of disconnection starts to wear on you.

Matrescence / Patrescence and the Identity Reformation

So, moving on, let's take a moment to about something that still doesn't get the that it deserves to this day; matrescence and patrescence. You've heard me talk about but if you are new here, these are the psychological, physiological, emotional, mental, financial, as well as social, and cultural

transitions that we go through when we become parents. This is not a role change, but an entire internal restructuring of our identity. We parenthood like a logistical shift, new routines, new responsibilities, less sleep. We expect all of that, but the reality is so much deeper. Parenthood is a metamorphosis. It affects your body, your brain, your sense of purpose, your social role, your emotional bandwidth, and yes, your sense of self.

This transformation is not unlike adolescence. It's intense. It's disorienting, and often it's invisible to the outside world.

So how does relate to love languages? Well, if the very foundation of who I am is being reshaped, then of course my emotional needs, the way that I give and I receive love might shift too. You are not losing who you were, but you are growing into someone new.

So your love language didn't go wrong and it didn't disappear, but it is evolving in order to help you survive, to regulate, to feel seen again in this incredibly demanding new chapter in your life.

It may different than used to. It may feel confusing even, but that doesn't mean that it is wrong. It means that you are in motion.

And the love that moves with you is the kind of love that lasts.

How to Rediscover Your Love Language in the Now

So now that we've explored how and why love language may have changed, let's talk about how to actually reconnect with it right now in this new version

of your life. You don't really need to go searching for some kind of grand definitive answer, but what you really need, all you need is a little bit of honest reflection and willingness to get curious.

And I can help you with that.

Let's walk four gentle steps that can help you tune into what love really looks like for you in this new season.

Okay, so step one is to check in with your body and your emotions. Start with this question, "What makes me feel seen right now?" and then move on to ask, "What drains me the most? What restores me the fastest?"

Your body holds on to so much wisdom. If the thought of deep conversations now feels heavy, but the idea of someone folding the laundry for you makes you want to cry from relief, that's information. Your nervous system will often tell you what love language is before your mind ever does.

Step two is reflect on what it is that you long for, not just what you're getting. It's easy to confuse what you're receiving with what you actually need. But in reality, your current love language is often the thing that you feel the most hungry for. So ask yourself, "What do I find myself wishing that my partner would do or say? What kind of love do I fantasize about receiving, especially in my lowest moments?" That longing isn't selfish, it's a breadcrumb trail back to your emotional core.

Step three is to observe your reactions to small gestures. Start noticing your body and your emotions respond to what your partner does now. When they do something kind, does it land deeply or does it barely register? You might notice that a quick text saying "You've got this," makes you feel more

connected than a long conversation, even though it used to be the opposite before, or that someone simply starting dinner means more than any compliment ever could. Let those little signals guide you. You don't need to label it right away.

Just notice what hits and what misses. Your body is already keeping score.

Step four is to consider the season that you're in and that your love language doesn't live in a vacuum. It lives in the context of your life.

So if you're in the thick of newborn life where you're sleep deprived and exhausted and overstimulated, you might need more words and more space instead of physical closeness. If you're managing toddlers and you're juggling a household, you may crave acts of service, real visible support over long conversations.

Wrap-Up

There's no right or wrong here. There's just what need right now, and that need is allowed to shift. You don't have to have all of this figured out. You don't need the perfect language to express what it is that you're craving. You just need to begin the conversation with yourself first and foremost, and then with your partner so that they can understand, so that they feel rejected, so that they don't feel like you've changed, and that that could mean that you no longer love them.

And if you want a simple but powerful way to explore this even more deeply, I've created a short journaling prompt that helps you uncover what your love language is now. Along with that journaling prompt that I'm gonna send you, I'm also going to send you a link to my favorite Love Languages quiz, and I'm

going to give you certain tips about how to discover what is going on for you and for your relationship, giving you a little bit of a sneak for what's to come in the next episode. So go grab my newsletter, sign up, it's at markellakaplani.com/newsletter. I'll link it down in the show notes.

In the next episode, we'll talk about what happens when you and your partner have different love languages, especially after having kids where they may have changed, and how to stop getting lost in translation- because this isn't just about knowing your needs, it's about learning how to ask for them and how to also listen.

Okay. So if you have been wondering why what used to work in your relationship just doesn't cut it anymore, why the same gestures don't feel as meaningful or why you find it harder to reach your person, you are not high maintenance. You are not ungrateful, you are not too much, and it's not that you're pulling away and you're no longer in love, but it is a signal that you're changing. It's a sign that you're alive, you're attuned, and you're trying to find your footing in a completely new chapter of life. And you don't have to figure it out all at once.

I'll see you next Sunday.

Bye-bye.