

Episode 54

Unhappy Marriage After Baby? Rebuilding Emotional Closeness in Parenthood Using Love Languages | Ep. 54

You've changed. Your partners changed and the way that you used to love each other, it might not fit anymore.

But that doesn't mean that you've grown apart. It doesn't necessarily mean that the love is gone. What it does mean is that it may be time to relearn to love each other differently. Welcome back to this four-part series about love languages.

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!

In episode 52, we talked about how your love language may have changed over time, especially after becoming a parent. In episode 53, we zoomed out a little bit and explored what happens when you and your partner are speaking different emotional languages and how frustrating and lonely that can feel. So what are we talking about today?

Well, today is about rebuilding. This is for you. If you've been thinking "we're not in crisis, but something's just off," or, "I love my but I just don't feel as connected anymore, and I don't know why. I can't pinpoint it." This is for couples who are just getting through the day, but missing the spark; for the ones who to feel like lovers, again, not just teammates or roommates or co-parents. For people who wonder if intimacy, play, or softness are even possible in this season or ever again.

And here is what I want you to know right up front. You don't need to go back who you were, and that's never the aim here. You don't need chase what used to work. We are not here to recreate the past. We are here to create something new, something that fits the version of you that has emerged since becoming a parent. So if this speaks to you, in this episode, we're going to talk about why relearning love matters so much more than fixing anything.

We're also going to discuss how to know when you are emotionally ready to reconnect and what small real world rituals can bring us back together. Done gently, slowly at each other's pace without pressure.

And if you would like to go deeper, I created a journaling prompt to help you explore how love feels in your body and heart right now; not how it used to feel or how it's supposed to look, but how it feels now. You'll get it in this

week's newsletter, and you'll hear more about that at the end of the episode. But if you're really eager, you can go to markellakaplani.com/newsletter and get it there.

And if you're just tuning into this series right now in this episode, I highly recommend that you catch episodes 52 and 53. They'll give you the full emotional arc that leads you here.

All right, so let's talk about how love can change and still be love. Let's talk about how you can meet each other again in this new chapter without needing to be perfect or fluent or even fully ready; just willing.

Let's begin here. Why does relearning how to love, especially if our relationship is quite steady, even matter. It matters because most of us assume that relationships should just flow. That if I the right person, and if the foundation is good, then connection will always be easy and natural, effortless. But that's a myth.

Love doesn't stay the same, not something is wrong, not because it's gone, but because you don't stay the same and neither does your partner. You've both gone through a complete identity shift. Parenthood has changed your routines, your priorities, your bandwidth, and with all that, your emotional needs too. And yet so many couples quietly try to just keep playing with the same emotional rules.

Rules that no longer apply. Rules that used to exist before our massive transformation. The same ways of connecting the same cues, the same assumptions, but you are not who you were when you fell in love. And trying to love each other the way that you did back then without updating the language or the rituals or the expectations can quietly lead to disconnection.

That's when couples say things like, "we get along, but we're not as close as we used to be."

Or maybe you've heard something like this, like, "I don't feel unhappy, but I don't feel connected either." And those are so easy dismiss because technically nothing is wrong yet something is missing. And most of us make the mistake of thinking, Hey, this is a difficult time for most couples, which it is. So we downplay it and we think things will just iron themselves out time passes. That the couples who are successful after parenthood in maintaining and flourishing their relationship just got lucky or they had a good flow from the beginning or something like that.

But no. We need to put in intentional effort. Love needs to evolve. And so that's this episode is about. Not fixing something that's broken, but allowing yourselves to meet again as the people you've become. Love that's allowed to adapt, love that's allowed to grow up alongside you. That's the kind of love that deepens, the kind that doesn't just survive parenthood but matures because of it.

So let's go ahead and explore the signs readiness, what those look like, how to know if it is time to start rebuilding emotional connection intentionally.

There's no dramatic wake call for most people in this case. It's usually something softer, quieter. You start missing your partner even when they're right there beside you. You look at them across the room and feel this subtle ache because of this distance grown between you, because you want to feel closer, but you aren't sure how. Maybe affection has started feel a little awkward. Maybe you hesitate when you feel the need to reach out for a hug, or you can't remember the last time that you kissed intentionally, passionately, not just as routine, saying goodbye in the morning. You may

even have started to wonder they'd be open to it anymore or if they're feeling just as unsure as you are. Maybe you've noticed that conversations are mostly logistical. Who's doing what? Who's going where? What's for dinner? Did you remember to grab the milk? And while that's normal in chaos of family life, you find yourself craving something more; depth, play warmth. You might have caught yourself thinking, I love my partner, but I'm not sure that I feel in love right now.

And that thought alone can feel so heavy, but it's not a sign that your marriage or your relationship is failing. It's a sign of awareness.

It means you're paying attention. It means something in you is longing, and that longing could become a beautiful new beginning.

So let me ask you gently, have you felt the subtle drift, that sense that while love may still be there, you don't know how to reach it? If so, it might be time to rebuild not from scratch, but from the place that you're both in now.

So if the love is still there and both of you are doing your best, why does connection fade? The answer is rarely dramatic. It's not betrayal and it's not indifference. It's not some fatal incompatibility either.

More often than not, connection fades from neglect. Not intentional for the most part, but the kind that happens when you're just so exhausted that you can't notice that something precious has started slipping through the cracks.

Because as we become parents, our energy gets reallocated. We are suddenly responsible for tiny humans who need everything from physically, mentally, emotionally, psychologically, logistically. And so what is that gets pushed aside first, the small things that once made your relationship feel

intimate. The playful glances, the inside jokes, the casual touches, the about dreams instead of diaper sizes.

What once felt effortless, now feels like extra effort. And when those micro moments disappear, so does the emotional glue that held you close. Add to that, the pressure to perform, to parent well, to manage a home, to stay functional. And so love starts to feel more like a task than a refuge. But here's what I want you to know.

This is not unique to you. Fortunately, or unfortunately, we're not that special. This is not a personal failing. This is what human relationships look like. And even more significantly, this is reversible.

When you start to notice the absence, you can begin to make space for presence again, and that's where we're going next. Not a full renovation, but small acts of repair, rituals, curiosity, tiny forms of intimacy that make it seem possible again, to love.

So how do we actually start to reconnect? Not in theory, but in the real world, in that 10 minute window before or after bedtime, in that quiet moment while the pasta is still boiling. In the in between.

Let's talk about how love can be rebuilt gently. There's no need for grand gestures. You don't need a two week vacation or retreat together.

You don't even need your partner to be fully on board yet. What you need is small consistency, tiny moments that tell your nervous system, "I am safe here. We're still choosing each other."

So number one, you could create micro rituals of connection. Start here. Can you add one ritual of connection into your daily or weekly rhythm, like a six second hug before leaving the house, or five minutes before bed where you guys just sit, the two of you- no screens, no kids, no problem solving, no logistics- just talking? Another suggestion is a Saturday morning coffee on the balcony even if you're both half asleep.

It's not about adding pressure. It's about creating little lighthouses in the day that remind you that you are more than just co-parents. You're a couple.

A second thing you could do is to reignite curiosity about each other. So many couples say, "I just don't feel emotionally connected anymore." And often it's because the curiosity is gone. It's left the room.

So wanna spark it again, try this: once a week. Ask a question that you wouldn't normally ask, like "what is something you've been craving lately on an emotional level, creatively or just in your day to day? What did I use to do that made you feel loved? And do you still want that?"

You don't have to fix anything. There's nothing to fix. Just listen. Curiosity is connection.

Number three, build intimacy slowly and gently. If physical closeness feels distant, don't force it. Start with emotional intimacy. Sit close while watching a show. Reach for their hand in the car, say something kind without expecting a response; playfulness, warmth, touch, they come back more naturally when there's emotional safety. You don't have to leap. You just have to lean.

Number four, use love languages as a compass, not a rule book. Maybe you've been thinking, "I don't even know what my partner's love language is",

or maybe you feel like if they're not even speaking your love language, what's the point?

But here's the thing as a reminder: love languages are not fixed categories. They're clues. They are compass points. Don't use them as a diagnosis. Use them as starting places. Instead of asking, "are we compatible?" Ask "what would feel meaningful to you this week?"

That one question can bypass so much disconnection.

Relearning how to love isn't about getting it right, it's about being willing to try. It's about creating a relationship that reflects who you are now, not who you used to be and not some kind of expectation. You're still here, your partner is still here. That is more than enough to begin.

If this episode stirred something in you, possibly a quiet longing, a flicker of possibility, or maybe just the realization that you miss feeling close, then you will find my journaling prompt. Very useful to you just at this moment. It's simple, it's reflective, and it's designed to meet you exactly where you are, to give you a chance to pause and ask yourself, what kind of love do I need right now? And what kind of love am I afraid to ask for? If you're ready to explore that gently with honesty and compassion, the full journaling exercise is waiting for you in this week's newsletter. So make sure to go to markellakaplani.com/newsletter or find the link in the show notes so that you can sign up.

This is where the deeper conversations happen. And that is where your answers begin to take shape.

So that's a wrap for episode 54, the third episode in the series of Love languages. Next week we're going to have a guest expert who is going to join this discussion.

If you've made it this far, I want to say something that you might not hear enough.

Thank Not just for listening, but for caring enough about your relationship to pause and reflect. To stay open, to stay curious, and to stay soft, even in some of the hardest seasons. Relearning how to love is not a sign that something is wrong.

It's a sign that you are still evolving and that your love is alive and that you care for it, that you and your partner are still growing and you're becoming together.

You don't need to match perfectly. You don't need to always get it right. You just need to be willing to try again with a little bit more awareness and more kindness.

If you haven't yet listened to episodes 52 and 53, go back and give them a listen. Each one builds towards this final piece of the puzzle.

And if this episode resonated, I would love it if you shared it and if you left me an Apple Podcast review so that other parents can find their way here.

Until next Sunday, be gentle with yourself. You're not behind, you're becoming, and that is exactly where you're meant to be. Take care. See you next Sunday. Bye-bye.

