

Building Support by Simply Being and Doing Together

The holidays provide great opportunities to build assets with your children and make memories. These family gifts will last a lifetime!

- Play games together.
- Volunteer at your child's school parties.
- Host an open house for neighborhood friends and families.
- Invite children's friends to join your holiday fun.
- Buy gifts or provide food for a needy family.
- Decorate holiday cards for prisoners and their families.
- Make ornaments for senior citizens.
- Go caroling together.
- Read holiday books together.
- Talk about the values reflected in Kwanzaa and Christian traditions.
- Study holiday celebrations around the world.
- Let your children help to plan their favorite holiday traditions.

*Search Institute is a national non-profit research and educational organization based in Minneapolis. For more information on the other essential qualities for positive youth development, go to www.search-institute.org and look at their research based list of the 40 Developmental Assets™.



the Asset MESSENGER

December 2008

Building Blocks for Healthy Development for ALL Young People

THE GIFT OF LOVE. MAKING THE PRIMARY LOVE LANGUAGE OF CHRISTMAS, WELL, LOVE.

Support has been identified by Search Institute* as a necessary element of human development needed by children and teens, essential to their positive growth and development. Their research says that, "Young people need to be surrounded by people who love, care for, appreciate and accept them."

• What does having support in your life mean to you? What does it look like in your life? What does it feel like?

• Who are the people in your life that are there for you - people you lean on; people you hang out with and have fun with; people who listen to you; people you call when having a hard time; people you call with exciting news or just because?

• How do you know they support you? What are the tangible and intangible signs of support?

Gary Chapman covers extensively his understanding of support, relationships and love through a series of books, one of which is *The Five Love Languages of Children*. He suggests that each of us has a primary love language) through which we communicate and receive love.

They are:

1. Words of Affirmation	
2. Quality Time	3. Receiving Gifts
4. Acts of Service	5. Physical Touch

What tangible signs of support were you most able to readily identify? What quickly came to mind? Was it a flood of memories of simply being together with someone else? Then your love language is probably quality time. Long chats or special words of 'I love you' from someone you care about greatly? Then your love language might be words of affirmation. A giant bear hug? Physical touch might be your primary love language.

In this special Christmas season, a season of giving, how can you give the gift of love? Here is a recipe for making this holiday season a season of peace instead of chaos: find out specific love languages, choose gifts to match the language, then enjoy a simplified, focused holiday of intentional love.

The steps of the 'recipe' work this way:

1) First, find out the love languages of the special people in your life. Just start with 2-3 people, so you won't be overwhelmed. (Don't worry! You don't have to do this all on your own. You can use Chapman's books to help you identify each love language - go to www.garychapman.org.)

2) Then, choose a gift of love to give this holiday season.

The gift (examples described below) can go with the stuff you buy for under the tree to enhance your normal holiday traditions; OR you can simply decide that this season all gifts are going to be gifts of love and give life-giving, love language gifts this year in place of the 'stressed over what to buy gift, how much should I spend, do I have to spend more than them, will they understand' gifts. Isn't that refreshing?

Gifts of love do two things:

1) They save you materialism headaches, perhaps gas and trips to the mall in rush hour traffic and

2) They express to your special loved ones how much you care about them. They let people know that you took the time to really understand their own sense of love and support and to interact with them in a way they enjoy and understand.

Matching the gifts to the love language:

For example, if your child craves just to spend time with you and also enjoys art, then set aside some time to go the art museum, or create your own art show exhibit to display in the house, or create artsy gifts together to give other family and friends for Christmas presents.

If your child loves verbal affirmation and you like to write, consider creating a little book of the '12 things I love about X' and read them aloud to your child. This gift takes in two love languages, yours and theirs!

Personally, I labored all year cross-stitching bread cloths, potholders and hot pads to go with the baked goods I'll be giving out to friends and family. The cross-stitched designs are personal favorites or represent something meaningful for each person. Making them was an act of love on my part as well as being an expression of how I love others (creating and making things). The baked goods are goodies I know all the big kids (a.k.a. 'adults') in my life will enjoy and that will help simplify their holiday cooking needs.

3) Enjoy a simplified loving holiday that truly expresses the meaning of the season through love. Besides spiritual benefits, you can rest in the fact that you were helping provide the children and teens in your life with something they very much need in their lives: support, acceptance, care and love. All during a time when holiday stress and chaos can overcome (if we're not careful!) the real meaning of the Christmas spirit and season.

Love and love well!