

# How to Communicate Love and Acceptance

A critically important aspect of parenting is communicating love and acceptance to children. This comes naturally to some, and is seemingly beyond the comprehension of others. Here are a few practical ideas for those who are struggling to communicate love, but just don't know what to do.

## **You've got to spend time with your kids.**

They need to know that they are important to you, and the easiest way to do that is to spend time with them. This time can be spent doing the things they like, on a date, serving together at church, or working on a project at home, but they need to understand that they are an important part of the agenda. If they think they are a nuisance, inconvenience, or are just being babysat, then that is not the kind of time that will matter to them. They need to know that you want to be with them, and *that you enjoy being with them.*

## **You need to be proud of your kids, and they need to know it.**

We correct, instruct, and coach our kids regularly. Sometimes one kid or another will receive a fairly intense amount of correction over a period of two or three days. I don't want to crush anyone's spirit; I'm just trying to help my kids. So when I become aware that a child might feel overwhelmed, I pull him aside and give a little pep talk that might go something like this:

“Hey buddy, I've been on your case a lot lately, haven't I? I don't want you to feel like you're messing up all the time and I don't want you to feel like you are a disappointment to me. I love you like crazy. You know that, right? And I am proud of you. I don't know of another kid like you. You are a great kid as you are, but God has created you with great potential, and I want to help you to grow and be an even stronger person. But I'm proud of you, just the way you are. I'm trying to do the best that I know in helping you grow. I may be too strong sometimes, but I'm trying, and I love you no matter what.”

Those aren't magic words or anything, but they are true. That's how I feel about my kids, and I want them to know that—especially if I've been particularly strong with them.

## **Three magic words**

Say “I love you.” Say it again, and again, and again. Let them never have any doubt about that. If your kids grow up and someday accuse you of failing them in some way as a parent, don't let it be this way. This one is too easy to take care of. Say the words!

## **Hug and touch**

Nothing communicates acceptance like a hug. Even the prodigal son was welcomed home with a hug and a kiss.

## **Eye contact**

If you're too busy reading the paper, working on the computer, or watching TV to stop and look in your child's eyes when he talks to you, then you have communicated your priorities to your child. Stop and look at your kids when they talk to you. You may have a lot to get done, but even in the busiest of times you need to stop and connect for a minute here and there.

### **Encouragement**

Praise your kids for what they do right. Discipline is an important part of character development, but so is affirmation. God disciplines us, but he also encourages us and offers rewards and words of praise. A “well done” here and there or a few words of praise will work wonders in drawing your kids’ hearts to you.

### **Give them some grace**

Allow some time for your efforts to work. You can hold a very high bar with your kids without jumping down their throats for every minor mistake. Don’t expect them to act like 12-year-olds when they are two, or like 30-year-olds when they are fifteen. Don’t nitpick every flaw and mistake. You do need to help them grow and change, but if they are corrected after every job, they won’t feel love and acceptance; they’ll feel that they never measure up.

A simple rule of thumb is to follow the golden rule. “Do to others what you would have them do to you.” If you treat them as you would want to be treated if the roles were reversed, then you should be in good shape. God’s ways always work!