

the five love languages of teenagers

Imagine Kaylee, a 7th-grader who's new in town, comes to your youth group this week. Her mom made her.

You want to make sure she feels welcome, so you greet her at the door with, "Ich bin sehr froh dass du hier bist." She gives you the blank stare. "Bona sera, principessa," says someone passing by. Kaylee is not impressed, so you guide her to a group of middle schoolers. One of them looks up and says, "Hey! I'm really glad you came." Now Kaylee smiles and relaxes a little. Someone is speaking her language.

Of course, we're not greeting kids at the door in German or Italian, but are we saying "Welcome" in a way they immediately understand? Gary Chapman has written a wide array of books based on his original, *The Five Love Languages*. The core premise of all of them is that people "hear" love in different ways, and if we want to communicate love clearly, it helps to speak each individual's language.

One of our goals as youth pastors is to communicate God's deep love to every young person. Imagine how much better we'd do that if we learned each one's love language. See if you can recognize your own love language and, conversely, the languages you rarely use to communicate with your youth.

QUALITY TIME—A quick "How ya doin'?" doesn't cut it with these kids. They need to spend some time with an adult who cares. Letting them know that you're listening, inviting them to visit you after school, and showing up for games can go a long way.

GIFTS—A little goody bag for visitors speaks volumes to some. Lessons that include a take-home reminder—even a paper bookmark—will stay in their desk drawers and memories for years.

PHYSICAL TOUCH—This is a tricky one in

today's youth ministry world, but we have to find creative, safe ways to speak love in these teenagers' primary language. Whether it's high fives, knuckle-thumps, appropriate hugs, or pats on the back, find a dialect that works.

WORDS OF AFFIRMATION—"Love your shoes." "You have a great laugh." "Nice pass." They all say, "I love you" to people who speak this language. The flip side is that these kids are particularly sensitive to the "just kidding" put-downs that some of us are famous for.

ACTS OF SERVICE—Don't just say it; do it. Rides to and from youth group, taking an empty plate to the trash, offering homework help—that's what tells these teenagers that you really mean it when you say you care about them.

For youth workers, the *Five Love Languages of Teenagers* is probably the best place to start. But if you read any of Chapman's books, you walk away with the desire and the tools to speak all five languages—or at least to have all five represented on your team of youth leaders. A hugger is communicating with some of her kids, but not all. An affirmer is filling up the "love tank" of some of his youth, but others just aren't hearing it.

Maybe a good exercise would be to examine the ways we welcome newcomers. We should be saying, "We care about you," in many ways to make sure we're speaking each teenager's language—not insisting that they learn ours. ■