

Relationship Hacks: Simple Fixes for Common Issues (Part 1)

I'm sure that most of you have read articles about "life hacks." If you're not familiar, a **life hack** is defined as, "a strategy or technique adopted in order to manage one's time and daily activities in a more efficient way." Basically, hacks are creative ways to make your life simpler or ways to use common objects for uncommon uses, which help you to be more organized or efficient. Similarly, there are issues that I hear couples struggle with time and time again, and while we work on the underlying problem in therapy, the issue itself frequently has a quick and easy solution. In a Two-part article, I'm going to share with you some relationship hacks that address common issues couples have.

When one or both partners in a relationship are unhappy, the issues that usually arise in therapy can generally be organized using the 5 Love Languages (created by Dr. Gary Chapman). We all give and receive love differently and it's vitally important that you know your partner's love language (i.e. how they receive love from others). Below is a brief description of Chapman's 5 Love Languages. Once you've correctly learned their love language, you'll be able to choose from the hacks in Part 2 of this article, to help you "speak" their language (this is especially helpful if it's different from your own love language!).

If you're unsure of you or your partners love language, go to Dr. Chapman's website and take a short quiz to find out what it is (www.5lovelanguages.com). Dr. Chapman's website assures that the results from the quiz will "give you a thorough analysis of your emotional communication preference. It will single out your primary love language, what it means, and how you can use it to connect with your loved one with intimacy and fulfillment." I have found it to be a useful tool for couples in therapy, regardless of their presenting problem.

NOTE: If you both share the same love language, it may throw off the results of the Quiz. For example, if you both crave physical touch, and you are a couple that already has a lot of physical contact, than you may answer the question differently. For example, if it asks "What would be more meaningful _____ or holding hands" you might answer with the first option, because you already hold hands so frequently that the novelty of the other seems like it would be more "meaningful." It is also of note that many people will answer these questions differently depending on how long they've been in their relationship or if there are any special circumstances influencing their relationship (e.g.- having a baby, a recent loss, a new job, etc.). Take a look at the summary of each Love Language below. Ask yourself, "which of these could I absolutely not live without in a relationship?" The answer to that question is most likely going to be your Love Language.

- **Words of Affirmation**

Actions don't always speak louder than words. If this is your love language, unsolicited compliments mean the world to you. Hearing the words, "I love you," are important—hearing the reasons behind that love sends your spirits skyward. Insults can leave you shattered and are not easily forgotten.

- **Quality Time**

In the vernacular of Quality Time, nothing says, “I love you,” like full, undivided attention. Being there for this type of person is critical, but really being there—with the TV off, fork and knife down, and all chores and tasks on standby—makes your significant other feel truly special and loved. Distractions, postponed dates, or the failure to listen can be especially hurtful.

- **Receiving Gifts**

Don’t mistake this love language for materialism; the receiver of gifts thrives on the love, thoughtfulness, and effort behind the gift. If you speak this language, the perfect gift or gesture shows that you are known, you are cared for, and you are prized above whatever was sacrificed to bring the gift to you. A missed birthday, anniversary, or a hasty, thoughtless gift would be disastrous—so would the absence of everyday gestures.

- **Acts of Service**

Can vacuuming the floors really be an expression of love? Absolutely! Anything you do to ease the burden of responsibilities weighing on an “Acts of Service” person will speak volumes. The words he or she most want to hear: “Let me do that for you.” Laziness, broken commitments, and making more work for them tell speakers of this language their feelings don’t matter.

- **Physical Touch**

This language isn’t all about the bedroom. A person whose primary language is Physical Touch is, not surprisingly, very touchy. Hugs, pats on the back, holding hands, and thoughtful touches on the arm, shoulder, or face—they can all be ways to show excitement, concern, care, and love. Physical presence and accessibility are crucial, while neglect or abuse can be unforgivable and destructive.

In many cases, just knowing what your partner’s Love Language is can be a “relationship hack” all on its own. It can be the tool that helps you to remember how to reconnect with them when you’re feeling things are “off” or to use as an everyday helpful guide for ways to show them your love.

The Basics of Relationship Hacks

One of the most creative tools I’ve seen people use is also the most basic: **keep notes**. In the past, I would have suggested that the person trying to be more “in-tune” carry a small notebook and jot down things their partner likes, things they mention wanting to buy, their favorite food, favorite music, etc. Now that most people are using smart phones, this has become even easier! Most phones come with a “Memo” app already on the phone. Using the Memo app, you can keep track of all of the things your partner loves, wants, desires...their favorite activities, restaurants, sports. Keeping track of all of this information is an easy way to buy them thoughtful gifts, show them that you’re listening to them, and plan special dates that will be meaningful to them.

In next month’s Issue, I’m going to share with you specific relationship hacks for each of the 5 Love Languages.

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