



PARENTING · PRESENCE · LOVE LANGUAGES

Your Kids Don't Need More Things

They Need You to Get On the Floor and Play — And Why Speaking Their Love Language Changes Everything

By Jazmine L. Ramzy

My daughter asked me to play dolls with her. I was washing dishes. Mentally running through my to-do list. "Not right now, sweetie. Mama's busy." She walked away. Quiet. Small.

Ten minutes later I was scrolling my phone. She asked again. "In a little bit, okay?" She didn't ask a third time. That night, after she was asleep, I went on Amazon and bought her the expensive doll set she'd wanted. And I felt better. Like I was a good mom.

"She didn't want the doll set. She wanted ME. On the floor. Playing. Present. Not thinking about the dishes or the emails. Just there."

WE'VE CONFUSED PROVIDING WITH PRESENCE

I grew up in a house where love was shown through things. New shoes. A nice dinner. My mom worked hard and sacrificed. But when I think back to my childhood, I don't remember the things. I remember the absence.

I remember standing outside my aunt's house at seven, trying to tell her my phone number. The way she nodded without looking at me. The way I felt invisible. And now, as a mom, I'm doing the exact same thing to my kids.

THE RESEARCH IS CLEAR: PRESENCE BEATS PRESENTS

Dr. Becky Kennedy, child psychologist and author of *Good Inside*, puts it simply: "Kids don't need more toys. They need more of YOU. On their level. In their world. Present."

Studies show what kids remember isn't the toys. It's the time you got on the floor and built the Lego tower. The time you played pretend and became the dragon. The time you sat with them in silence and just existed together.

Dr. Daniel Siegel calls this **attunement** — the ability to be present with your child, to SEE them, to enter their world without agenda. Research shows: attuned children grow up to be secure adults. Not because they had a lot of stuff. But because they felt seen.

THE 5 LOVE LANGUAGES FOR KIDS

Gary Chapman's *The 5 Love Languages* applies to children too — and when you're speaking the wrong language, they feel unloved even when you're pouring everything into them.

How to identify your child's love language:

What do they ASK for most? "Will you play with me?" → Quality Time. "Can I have a hug?" → Physical Touch. "Did you see my drawing?" → Words of Affirmation.

What do they COMPLAIN about? "You never play with me!" → Quality Time. "You never say I did a good job!" → Words of Affirmation.

"You're exhausting yourself doing things FOR them. While they're starving for time WITH you."

WHAT QUALITY TIME ACTUALLY LOOKS LIKE

1. Get on their level — literally.

Sit on the floor. Get in the sandbox. Lie on the bed next to them. Being physically on their level signals: "I'm here. In your world."

2. Follow their lead.

Let THEM choose the activity. Even if it's boring to you. Play the game they want to play. Listen to the story they want to tell.

3. Put your phone in another room.

Not just face-down. Another room. Because even if you're not actively looking at it, your child can feel your divided attention. Kids know the difference between being WITH them and being NEAR them.

4. Set a timer and honor it.

If you can only give 15 minutes, say: "I can play for 15 minutes, then I have to make dinner. Let's set a timer." This gives them your full attention — and teaches them that you are present for the time you commit.

Ten minutes of full presence is worth more than two hours of distracted proximity.

THE HARD TRUTH

Dr. Gabor Maté talks about how "children will sacrifice their own needs to preserve the attachment to their caregivers." Translation: they'll stop asking. They'll make themselves small. They'll learn to not need you. And you'll think they're "fine." But they're not fine. They're just adapting to your absence.

"The dishes will still be there in 15 minutes. The emails can wait. But your child's childhood? That won't wait. And one day, they'll stop asking you to play. So say yes. Today. Right now."

*Jazmine L. Ramzy is a writer and mother exploring communication, connection, and what it means to truly listen — to ourselves and to the people we love. Her forthcoming book, *Shut The F**k Up*, includes a chapter on listening to children as the most important work we'll ever do. Follow her at @jlashae on X.*

What's your child's love language? And when's the last time you got on the floor and played? Set a timer for 15 minutes today. Just play. → jzmineramzy.com