

I have been writing about children in new family structures. The new family might have been created because of divorce, foster placement or adoption. The children in these new situations need help in the transition. They need huge amounts of love. Last week, I wrote about their need to be reassured that God loves them. They also need to know that you, the parent, love them.

“I love you.” Those three little words are powerful. A fifty-year-old man cries because he never heard those words from his father. An eighty-year-old woman on her deathbed relates the story of hearing those words for the first time from her own dying mother. A three-year-old grandson reassures his granddad as he ends a phone conversation. A soldier leaving for war blesses his wife and small children with those words.

If those three words can do so much for the recipient, why are they so often withheld? The excuse that I often hear is, “They should that I love them by what I do.” It is true that what a person does for his family is an expression of love. But, oh, how we all long to hear the words. No one longs to hear the words as much as a child whose life has been uprooted—one in a totally new family situation.

For these children, say the words again and again. Say the words in many different ways: “I love you more than you can imagine;” “I love you all the way to the moon and back;” “I love you so much that I want to hug you all the time (demonstrate).” My grandsons and I send each other notes that say, “I love you this much...” with an illustration of a stick figure with long, long outstretched arms. We try to see who can draw the longest arms to show the most love.

Add the word “because” sometimes, but take care that the “because” is not tied to deeds. Never say, “I love you because you cleaned your room.” Instead say, “I love you just because you are you,” or “I love you because you make our family complete.” The “because” should emphasize who the child is rather than what he does.

Even if you are dealing with a teenager who rolls her eyes when you say, “I love you,” keep saying the words. Say it loudly; say it in a whisper; leave notes; say it in sign language. Say it with a question, “Do you know I love you?” or “Do you know why I love you?” (Just because you are you.) For these children, there is no such thing as too much love. Cover them just like you cover a cake with icing—lavishly!