

I love you when you're happy.

I love you when you're sad.

I love you when you're feeling scared.

I love you when you're mad.



I love you all the time.

I love you in the morning
when you crawl into my lap.



I love you when you stay awake.
I love you when you nap.



I love you all the time.

➔ A Letter to Caregivers ➔

When my oldest was three years old, she had one of those epic tantrums—you know, the kind where children's bones become jelly and they melt to the floor, kicking and screaming. I carried her over to our old rocking chair and as we snuggled, I told her, "You know, I really love you when you are mad." She stopped squirming and looked at me, startled.

I continued, "I also love you when you are happy, and I love you when you are sad, and I love you when you are scared. I love you all the time."

Her body began to settle, and a new ritual was born. Every night before bed, I remind my children that—no matter the ups and downs of the day—I love them all the time. My daughter is an eight-year-old now, and she told me the other morning, "Mommy, I love you all the time—even when you are cranky!"

Children thrive when their caregivers offer them consistent love and support. This love offers a safe landing place as they stretch, struggle, and grow. As Fred Rogers said, "Knowing that we can be loved exactly as we are gives us all the best opportunity for growing into the healthiest of people." Following are a few ways you can help children feel loved and loveable.



Four Ideas for Helping Children Feel Loved and Loveable

1. Correct with Love

Children look to their caregivers for reassurance that they are valued and valuable. They crave attention when they succeed and understanding when they struggle. While they may not be able to put it into words, children sometimes wonder, "Does my mom or dad still love me when I break something? Will my teacher still love me if I make a mistake? Do they love me all the time?"

As caregivers, we may not love certain behavior, but we can make it clear that we always love children. We care enough to teach them how to care for others. We can correct their behavior in a way that reinforces our love and care for them.

Here is what that might sound like:

- When a child is physically aggressive: "I love you, and I'm going to help you use your hands for helping."
- When a child is learning how to interact appropriately with a peer, a younger sibling, or a pet: "Remember to be gentle. That's one way we show that we love someone."
- When a child is acting out in frustration: "It's okay to get mad! Everyone gets mad sometimes. It's not okay to throw your blocks. Let's take a deep breath and then we can pick them up together."
- When you circle back to a challenging moment later in the day and emphasize the positive: "Remember when you spilled your milk on the floor this morning but then you helped mop it up? I love cleaning up messes with you! You are a good helper."



2. Notice Children's Efforts

Children feel cared for when adults pay attention to the little ways they are growing and learning. One phrase that communicates this loving attention is "I noticed . . .":

- "I noticed that you got back up on your scooter after you fell down. You are brave!"
- "I noticed that you shared your treat with your sister. That was kind."
- "I noticed that you used a lot of colors on the card for your grandma. She's going to love it."
- "I noticed that you invited the child playing alone at the playground to play with you. You are a good friend."

