

Ages of Love

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Is love at age 25 different than love at 55 or love at 75? I have come to believe that there are different kinds of love that we become capable of achieving as we journey throughout the ages of our lives. Infant love, childhood love, crazy-infatuation-teenage love, romantic love, maturing love, and growing old together love are some of the types of love that reflect the stages of our lives. Each type of love requires an awareness and maturity that comes with time and effort. It certainly makes sense that, as we gain insight through our earlier experiences of loving, we develop the capacity to love better, wiser, and more fully. Early in our lives, we were not able or willing to make the individual changes that contribute to the success of our relationships. Later on in our lives, we can be more successful because we have gained the knowledge and strength that allows us to be better partners in love. As I outline the following kinds of love that we may experience during our stages of life, I will be primarily focusing on adult couple relationships.

In what ways do we define love?

The ancient Greeks broke down love in four categories:

- *Agape* (a-gob-e) love is unconditional love. Agape love involves faithfulness and commitment. The Greeks

distinguished it from the other types of love by its lofty moral nature and strong character.

- *Philia* (phil-e-a) love refers to love for fellow humans and compassion for people in need. This is why Philadelphia is called the “City of Brotherly Love”.
- *Storge* (store-gay) love refers to the bond of family love, empathy and affection. An example is the love and affection of a parent for a child. Sometimes it is the love between exceptional friends such as the characters in the movie, *Grumpy Old Men*.
- *Eros* love is the physical expressed love. It is the root word of *erotic* and *eroticism*.

Why is love so important?

Harvey Ardman, a psychologist, says that love is the most satisfying and life-affirming thing that we can experience. Love comes from the mutual acceptance of who we are, including our warts and weaknesses as well as our strengths. It makes us feel worthwhile as human beings. Perhaps this is the key to why we so easily give and receive love from our animal friends.

There is a great quote from author Mary Ann Evans (pen name is George Eliot) that says: “We long for an affection altogether ignorant of our faults.” “Imagine what your dog thinks of you. The love that your dog has for you is one of the most unadulterated loves. Your dog does not care if you are thin or fat. Your dog does not judge you if you are having a bad day,

your dog will never reject your affection. You are your dog's favorite person." When another living being loves us so much, why would we ever doubt our self-worth? Our goal in life should be that of being the type of person that our dog thinks we are!

Rabbi David Wolpe of the Sinai Temple in Los Angeles suggest that it is time to change the meaning of the word "love."

The word love is mostly used to describe "an intense feeling of deep affection." In other words, love is what one feels. However, Rabbi Wolpe suggests that love should be seen as an emotion in action. To love is to feel and act lovingly. Regardless of what we have assumed about love, we do not "fall in or out of love." Love comes from the day-to-day efforts of exchanging loving behaviors over time. And, if we cease to express these loving behaviors, our loving relationship is likely to die.

The first love mentioned in the Bible is not romantic love, but parental love (Genesis 22). When a child is born, the parent's reaction to this person is to feel that "I would do anything for her." In the doing is the love. That is why we often hear the phrase "you don't act like you love me." We know in our bones that love is not a feeling alone, but a feeling that must be expressed in action.

Between human beings, love is a relational word. Yes, you can love things that do not love you back—the sky or a mountain or a painting or the game of chess. But the love of other people is

directional. There is a lover and a beloved—you don't just love, but you love *at* someone. Love exists when one person believes in another person and shows it. Therefore, love can exist between parents and child, brother and sister, and devoted friends and couples in all forms. In whatever form that love exists, love will always depend on how it is expressed in action.

Love and life stages

Infatuation love - Infatuation love is generally thought of as love that occurs during adolescence and usually occurs at the beginning of a relationship when sexual attraction is central. Adolescence typically describes the years between ages 13 and 19 and can be considered the transitional stage from childhood to adulthood. The main issues for the adolescent during this period include self-identity, appearance, sexuality, drugs, education and social acceptance.

The great thing about infatuation love is that it feels so exciting! The not-so-great thing about infatuation love is that it makes us act in some pretty crazy ways. Although young people are legally recognized as adults at age 18, studies about brain development suggest that our brains do not fully develop until age 25 or later. Because the rational part of the brain, the prefrontal cortex, isn't fully developed, teenagers often rely on a part of the brain called the amygdala to make decisions and solve

problems. Since the amygdala is associated with emotions, impulses, aggression and instinctive behavior, we may be presented with situations where the teenager is symbolically driving a high-powered automobile with inadequate or no brakes at all!

It is no wonder that infatuation love, the state of being completely lost in the emotional intensity of being with the person of our desire, is often brief in its duration.

Poem:

When I first met you

You were so cute that

My brain just couldn't compute

So I went mute

Romantic love, a second type of love, is a state of love that is more likely to occur during early adulthood (ages 21-45). Passion and intimacy are the two central components of this type of love. But often missing is the component of commitment due to circumstances beyond the control of the "star-crossed-lovers. Numerous books and movies about romantic love revolve around the lives of couples who would have lived happily ever after except for some tragedy (Romeo & Juliet, Love Story, Titanic, and West Side Story).

Harvelle Hendrix, author of *Getting the Love You Want*, describes the biggest change that occurs during romantic love is the way that people feel about themselves. They report suddenly having more energy and feeling more optimistic and playful. And, who wouldn't want to feel like that? So, what causes this rush of good feelings that comes with romantic love? Drugs? Yes, there are actual changes in the chemistry of our brains that explain this "lovers high." Natural hormones and chemicals make us feel addicted to being with the other person! Our addiction to the object of our romantic love may also be enhanced by what is known as selective perception - the tendency to see the other person's positive traits and at the same time, ignore any negative traits.

Poem:

So close, yet so far away

Don't know if I can stand another day

I long to hold your mesmerizing face

And on my lip, your kiss I taste

You've got me trapped in a box of wonder

Our bodies together, no matter who is under

I need you now, I need you quick

I need you fast, to get my fix

Maturing love, a third type of love, is what author Robert Sternberg calls companionate love. Ironically, what is often required to experience maturing love is “falling out of romantic love.” Falling out of romantic love means to give up the illusion that your partner can make you forever happy and fulfilled. It also means showing your partner that they are valued and respected. Although you know you’re separate people with separate lives, you love sharing life with that special someone. You think in terms of “we” instead of just “I”, meaning you always consider your partner when deciding important things. You think about the two of you when pondering weekend plans, monetary expenses, future goals, and everything in between.

In maturing love, all three components of passion, intimacy and commitment are present. While the expression of passion can change over time for most couples - from the “fireworks stage to a fireplace setting” the comfort and reassurance of touching and being touched remains a crucial part of loving. Intimacy relates to the sense of warmth and closeness in a loving relationship. And, the component of commitment refers to the decision to love one’s partner and maintain the relationship. Characteristics of couples who have created a mature love include caring, compassion, and empathy.

Remember that love at any stage of our lives requires expressing that love-in-action. When in a healthy relationship and the person loves you, you'll see it in their behavior.

Poem:

It is not your conversation
That keeps me entertained
But rather the way that you look at me
That makes me feel sustained.

And finally, **comforting love**, a fourth type of love which is usually a continuation of mature love, refers to the kind of love that comes with growing older. However, comforting love can exist at any age – between couples, family members, children, adults, and even strangers. Main concerns at this stage of life center around health, financial resources, and the ability to maintain one's independence. When someone suffers or becomes ill, providing comforting love can bring relief and reassurance.

For committed couples, a comforting love relationship depends on both partners regarding the relationship as a long-term commitment with both partners verbally and physically expressing appreciation, admiration, and love

for the other Both partners offer emotional support to each other and both consider the other as a best friend. Comforting love often requires our greatest patience and courage. And humor and laughter go a long way in showing that love.

Let's look at a picture of comforting love.....

Play video -

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ms7wQI_Q5iU

We will experience different types of love during our lives and each experience of love presents gifts, struggles, and opportunities. Always remember that the words of love are important but your actions of love are even more important. To love!