

# What "I Love You" Really Means



By Regina V. Cates

# What "I Love You" Really Means



Relationships are the most important part of life. Not just the relationships you have with your family, children, pets, and friends. Every exchange you have with another human being and animal is an opportunity to fully feel your magnificent, heart-connection to all that is alive. Each encounter is also an opportunity to learn more about yourself, other people, and the beautiful world we are blessed to call home.

The truth is, having the best life, one filled with healthy, balanced, and rewarding relationships, is hard work. It is the kind of work that leads to the greatest rewards you'll experience in life.

Right up front, I want to share that in creating the best relationships possible, the most important person is you. Of course you love your child, partner, parents, friends, boss, coworker, or siblings, but no, the most important person in your relationships is not them. You will always be the most important part of all the relationships you have, because only you can be in charge of you.

You cannot control others. You cannot change others. You cannot heal others. That means it is only possible for you to be half of the association you have with other people. Your goal, in any relationship you have with others, is to be your best half. You are your best half by controlling, changing, and being responsible for YOU.

Love is caring and affection. You love others, which means you have a deep fondness for them. They are special to you. You have a warm personal attachment to them. They are important to you and add positive benefit to your life. You would miss them if they were no longer around.

The love, caring, and affection you have for others is always expressed through positive behavior. The caring and affection others have for you is also always expressed through positive action. You know you are loved by the people who say they love you by the way they treat you. The people and pets you love know they are loved by the way you treat them.

In addition to the "What 'I Love You' Really Means" audio, I wanted to share four aspects of love you may not have thought of before. It is my experience that love makes agreements, love lets go, love does not expect perfection, and love looks for ways to heal betrayal. These are important understandings

to have when telling those you care for, "I love you."

## Love Makes Agreements, Ego Has Expectations

Dictionary.com defines "agreements" as:

1. the act of agreeing or of coming to a **mutual arrangement**
2. the state of **being in accord**
3. an arrangement that is **accepted by all parties to a transaction**
4. **unanimity of opinion; harmony in feeling.**

Love wants to make agreements. Love comes to mutual arrangements that are clearly stated, rather than depending on guesswork or assumption. Love wants the agreements it makes to be in accord or freely accepted by both parties. Love wants to enter into arrangements that result in harmony of feeling.

Why? Because when both people are in agreement, the relationship flows. The relationship hits a wall if only one person is operating from loving agreements while the other is operating on ego's expectations.

Dictionary.com defines "expect" as:

1. to look forward to; regard as likely to happen; anticipate the occurrence of
2. to look for with reason or justification
3. to suppose or surmise; guess.

While it is appropriate to anticipate that people will arrive at a certain time because that is when they said they would, it is not appropriate to enter into a relationship with suppositions or guesswork. For example, expecting the woman to cook, clean, work, and take care of the children. It is not appropriate to expect a man to solve problems, take care of the yard, and make the money.

Today there are many stay-at-home dads because they choose to be, and their wives choose to pursue professional careers outside the home. The success of these relationships depends on clear communication and discussion to arrive at agreements on what role each partner will take on. Every area of success in a relationship is based on mutual agreement. Raising children, finances, sex, etc.

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Successful relationships are built on coming to mutual agreements about countless numbers of things. Relationships develop problems when love takes a back seat to individual egos.

One of the aspects of love that rings true is that ego (personal importance, self-centeredness, judgment) is not the part of us that loves. Our ego is the part of us where control, domination, arrogance, and feelings of unworthiness reside. When the unhealthy, insecure part of us, lacking self-worth and respect, rears its ugly head, we want to control another person. We want to change someone else. We want them to anticipate our needs, read our minds, and act accordingly.

Ego is resistant, uncooperative, impatient, and out for itself. Ego is guarded, close-mouthed, and unfeeling. Ego expects to get its way, to be understood without divulging anything personal, to establish intimate relationships without sharing, and to be obeyed without question. None of these negative, controlling behaviors is part of successful, loving relationships.

When we stop to think, relationships where ego is allowed to enter into the mix result in self-control, caring, and respect going out the window. Ego wants what it wants when it wants it. Ego is blind to any other point of view than its own. Ego only wants to be right and for the other person to admit he or she is wrong. Ego is all about control and domination.

The problem with control is, domination is not love. Love is affection and caring given freely as positive behavior. For example, love is willing, cooperative, understanding, patient, and loyal. If I have to control someone or I am allowing myself to be controlled by someone, it is not love. This realization allows us to understand that love makes agreements, while ego has expectations.

Just like successful business relationships are based on standard operating principles, so are successful relationships between partners, friends, parent and child. For example, when a new employee enters a company, he or she is given an employee manual of rules and regulations. By accepting employment, the employee agrees to obey the company's guidelines. It is an agreement entered into between the employee and the company. The employee either follows or ignores the rules and regulations based on his or her character. The company either

rewards or punishes the employee based on how closely the clearly stated rules and regulations of the company are followed.

There are many questions and situations that arise in relationship. How will we spend money? How will we save? What roles will each of us assume? What roles are we comfortable assuming? Is it a monogamous relationship? How will we approach challenges as a unified front? Each of these, and many other questions, need to be addressed either beforehand or when they arise, so a clear way of dealing with the situation will be jointly agreed upon.

Like a successful business, thriving relationships also need a set of principles that are clearly stated. In a way, positive relationships develop their own manual to ensure clear, open communication and cooperation. This is not done in an official manual but over time, through talking together positively, facing challenges, and restating mutual goals.

Love wants to be agreeable. Love desires to establish clear communication. Love wishes to most positively deal with challenge. It is ego, not love, that rationalizes going against the agreements it makes.

For instance, while you may expect your partner to be faithful, you have no control over his or her actions and personal decisions. Just because you have an expectation does not mean he or she will abide by what you assume or anticipate. That is why love makes agreements. It is love that keeps those agreements. And, any and all agreements are kept only when freely entered into.

In order for two people to be on the same page in relationship, it is necessary for each person, without the help of the other, to be responsible for his or her own behavior. That means I must make an agreement with myself to be loyal, kind, and faithful. When tempted to stray from the agreements I make, it is I and only I who can keep myself from doing so. Whether to keep an agreement I make or not keep the agreement is my choice. Someone having an expectation about me will not keep me faithful. Only I can keep myself faithful by keeping the agreements I make, out of affection and caring.

If you are having difficulty in relationship, look at what expectations you have of your partner. Are you imposing demands onto that person without

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his or her input? Are you trying to control or change another? Are you living in fear? Do you have open and clear communication? Is your partner silent and uncooperative? Are unspoken expectations being placed on you?

Love makes agreements. Ego has expectations. If you and your partner desire to establish a successful relationship, then open the channels of communication and make agreements with one another out of love. Respect yourself and each other by openly talking and sharing your emotions. Agree to live in love, then work hard to keep the agreements you make to one another. Keep talking, sharing, working on the relationship. Don't allow ego in, because expectations cannot grow where love is the agreed-upon foundation of a relationship.

## Love Lets Go

I am often contacted by women whose husband/boyfriend/partner left them for someone else. As you can imagine, the women are furious. They begin to doubt themselves and feel cheated, abused, and unworthy.

While these are typical reactions to being betrayed, they are not expressions of love. Love never dies, even when a relationship does. Because love is always expressed through positive behavior, we either continue to be loving or we do not.

I've been in several relationships with partners, business associates, and friends that did not work out. Sometimes when a relationship ended, it was easy. Thank goodness it was over and I could move on. I was finally free of someone who was not right for me. But several times, it hurt like hell to let go.

I fought, struggled, was depressed, questioned what was wrong with me, and was angry over all the time and effort I invested that had been wasted. No matter what the reason for the breakup, the bottom line is, if people did not want to be with me, why did I want to be with them?

When people leave us, the most important issue we face is not how to get them back. We cannot control or change anyone but ourselves. When a relationship is over, the best thing we can do for ourselves, the most self-loving action, is to let go.

We cannot stay loving if we are focused on revenge and all of the hurtful emotions that go along

with wanting to repair what cannot be repaired. Jealousy, control, clinging, blame, judgment, and other negative behaviors that often happen when a relationship is going bad are not love.

Love is not demanding or vindictive. Love does not seek revenge or payback. When someone breaks a promise to us, we still have the power to remain loyal to ourselves and the promise we made – to love.

For our happiness and peace, the goal of saying "I love you" becomes to get past the pain, the hurt, the resentment so these negative emotions don't continue to eat at us. Moving on cannot happen if we cling to a fantasy of what we think should be – our partner comes back to us – when leaving is evidence that he or she does not want to be with us.

It is ego that tells us we must seek revenge or try to get someone back. When someone leaves a relationship, there is something driving them to do so. Whether that is an inability to be intimate, to make a lasting commitment, old wounds that are not healed, whatever. We cannot change or heal someone who is not interested in looking at his or her own issues. We only have the power to look at our own issues and what we may have contributed to the unsuccessful relationship.

Looking back, I am now grateful for each relationship breakup, because I realize nothing was wasted. The truth is, every relationship I've had added value to who I am today.

Maybe it was a hard breakup that taught me I was continuing to choose the wrong people. Maybe it was the business deal where I was taken advantage of that taught me to be careful giving my power over to others. Maybe it was a friendship where I learned that someone I thought was loyal actually was not.

Every relationship taught me something about myself and others. Yes, being left in relationship hurts. We can choose not to take it personally. No matter why the relationship ends, our goal is to move on, having learned all we can about how to make a better choice in a partner and to honestly determine what we can change about ourselves.

It was after the sixth hard breakup in a series of bad relationships that I realized the common denominator was me. Often the breakup of a

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relationship is a gift that allows us to learn more about ourselves and what we need to change about us.

Learning how we can change ourselves is one of the positive outcomes of a relationship dissolving. We miss a huge opportunity if we go through a breakup only blaming the other person.

Often we find that the other person does shoulder the majority of responsibility, such as if he or she is an abuser or addicted to substances. Maybe the change necessary for us is refusing to enter into another relationship with someone who abuses drugs or alcohol. Sometimes we need to heal our co-dependency, our neediness, and our fear of intimacy. Often we need to learn to say "no" and stand by the boundaries we set.

The lesson for us in a relationship breakup is that to have healthy relationships, we must be healthy. When we have worked to heal our issues and make ourselves worthy of having good relationships, then we will not even consider having a relationship with someone who is not working on his or her issues or whose values are different than our own.

One of the best and hardest lessons I learned from the relationships I lost is that love lets go. When a relationship is over, love willingly lets go. Love looks for ways to grow and learn to benefit from the ups and the downs. Love does not harbor resentment, guilt, feelings of unworthiness, or shame. Love does not cling to a fantasy of what we think should be. Love accepts the reality of what is.

If you have been left in relationship, don't waste your precious energy in anger, resentment, blame, or feelings of revenge. Those negative emotions will not get the person back. Those negative emotions and behaviors will only hurt you.

Sit down and make a list of what you valued about the relationship and the other person. Why did you enter into relationship with the person in the first place? Then make a list of what you did not like about the relationship. Concentrate on your behavior. What behaviors did you allow that were hurtful, demeaning, or unhealthy? What were your contributions to the unhealthy aspects of the relationship? What about yourself do you need to work on – insecurities, clinginess, being a doormat, losing yourself in relationship, values, inability to set boundaries, etc. – before you enter into another

relationship?

Breakups are not the end of life. Disruption signals a time when something new is needed in order for you to create a new life filled with joy and peace. When someone leaves, or a friendship dies, let go. Let go of the resentment, blame, anger, and disappointment. Let go of the notion that if you did something different he or she would have stayed.

You did your best with the tools you had at the time. If you want to avoid another breakup, do everything within your power to learn all you can about yourself and what is most valuable to you in another person. Whether it is a friendship, business partnership, or significant-other relationship, shared values determine the strength of the relationship. Let go of what cannot be and focus on what you can create now, to ensure you are ready to make a success of the next relationship.

## Love Doesn't Expect Perfection

About five years ago, I had a carpenter fix the medicine cabinet in the bathroom. A hinge was stuck with layers of old paint, so it would not close. We couldn't close it no matter how hard we tried. It had been broken for years, and my partner and I got used to not closing the cabinet door.

That door's been fixed for years now, but almost every morning I go into the bathroom to find the medicine cabinet door ajar. No matter how many times I remind her that the door is now fixed, she does not close it with any regularity. What's a little, easy thing to me must be a monumental task to her. Who knows why, after all this time, she still leaves the door open? I haven't a clue. The times I have reminded her, she seems shocked. I'm actually the one in shock that after all this time she still leaves it partly ajar. But hey, what can you do?

"I love you" means letting the little things in your relationships slide - you know, the minor things your partner does that irritate you. It is perplexing to me why someone would leave a fixed cabinet door open. But in the end, who really cares. I've given up, and if I want it shut I close it myself. My partner is not perfect, but to be completely frank, I'm not either.

It drives her nuts that I don't squash the almond milk container flat, to the thickness of a microscope slide cover, before placing it neatly into the paper

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recycling bin. The vast majority of time, I stomp on it once, screw the cap back on, and throw it in. Later I hear her in the kitchen rustling loudly around in the recycling, muttering something indistinguishable but definitely irritated about my less-than-perfect squashing abilities.

Yes, of course, she's asked me about 16,000 times to neatly place stuff in the bin. I listen, intent on doing my best to follow through. The next time, I actually step up to the plate and hit a home run. The container and its placement in the bin have passed inspection. Then boom, I'm squashing the next empty container and the phone rings. I hurriedly stomp and toss, and in one beautiful, ballet-like movement, I hit the basket and score. Later she arrives with the partially squashed container in hand, hoping that her show-and-tell will finally be effective and I will consistently meet her stomp standards.

I assure her the folks at the recycling center aren't interested in how flat that almond milk container is. I bet they don't sit around saying, "Hey Mikey, come over and take a look at this. Can you believe someone left this like this? Wow, what is the world coming to when you don't even care to squash an almond milk container as flat as it can be before sending it to us?"

It is one of those things that is important to her. Everything must fit neatly into the sack. Maybe she thinks Mikey will find out where she lives and think less of her because her paper recyclables are not perfectly placed. I've told her when Mikey shows up on our doorstep to tell him it is all my fault. She does not even crack a smile.

Hey, I will be the first to tell you my partner is NOT perfect. I have a list of 101 ways she does not meet my standards, from not shutting the fixed cabinet door, to her unbelievably high standards of flatness for recycling containers, to actually slowing down when I ask her to hurry.

Don't you just hate it when someone intentionally moves more slowly when you've asked them to speed up? She adamantly swears she does not move more slowly, but one time I set up a time-lapse camera and BAM, there was the evidence. "Please hurry up" sends her into slow-motion mode. What's up with that? And, please do not EVER, and I mean EVER, allow her into your kitchen.

She is not meant to cook or cut bagels. Her brother and I can't look when she cuts a bagel with a huge butcher knife while balancing it precariously on its side in the palm of her hand. Or the time she took a Samurai sword-length knife to cut a slick watermelon that kept rolling around in the sink. Or the time she steamed broccoli without putting water in the pot. My partner in the kitchen is like one of Dan Aykroyd's bad Julia Child Saturday Night Live skits. You're just waiting for the blood to start spurting out all over the place. You know what, she ate the broccoli she steamed without water. Super UCK!

My partner is not perfect, and every day is another opportunity to let something else slide, other than when she picks up a knife. Those occasions need to be quickly addressed. She is not perfect, but that only means she does not operate under the same strange ways that make me tick. Not that what makes me tick is perfect, it's just my way of doing things. Like her uniqueness, the things I do don't hurt anyone, but they do not necessarily come up to the standards of doing things the way she or someone else would do them.

You see, I love her, and that means I accept her imperfections because, shock of all shocks, I am not perfect either. I know it is surprising, but I happen to know for a fact that if she shared her list with you, it would have at least 2,002 things on it she does differently, and of course better, than I do. There are things I do that make no sense to her. Like insisting on arriving to each and every event much earlier than necessary. It's just one of those things I do. I'll even beat everyone to my own funeral.

I remember once, my niece, nephew, sister, mom, and I went to the movies in Mom's home town of Marshall, Texas. There are about 10 street lights in the entire town. Only one of those lights is between Mom's house and the movie theater. It is literally a five-minute-or-less trip, with traffic, to get to the Marshall Cinema. But about 35 minutes before preview time, I was herding everyone into the car so we wouldn't be late.

Begrudgingly they got into the car. Sure enough, in less than five minutes we were there, a full 30 minutes early. First in line for tickets. Actually, we had to wait for the box office to open. But when it did, we were first in line for popcorn, the bathroom, and to get great seats in the middle about 10 rows from the front. Can't stand to sit closer, because the

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actors' teeth are so huge up close. Something scary about that to me – another strange thing about me the family has to endure.

It was a fun time filled with good memories. But come to think of it, I haven't driven to the movies with my niece and nephew again since they learned to drive. For some strange reason, they insist on taking a separate car. Just one of those things about me – being really, really early. Not such a bad thing.

You and I are not perfect. In addition to the mistakes we're bound to make, we have our own way of doing things that just makes sense to us. Like my partner leaving her bra on the door handle at night. She thought it was more convenient to just reach for it in the morning. Okay, that's great, but each time I tried to open the door, my hand got tangled in the bra, which sprang backward in a slingshot motion and slapped my hand. Thank goodness that one has been taken care of. Sometimes when bodily injury is a real possibility, we have to be insistent. After only a short, 10-year run of asking her to hang it somewhere else, has she seen the light and actually moved it to a drawer. Now she uses the doorknob to hang up her robe, which has much less of a slingshot, slapping impact, so it does not actually hurt.

I cannot say I've vastly improved on squashing the almond milk containers. The last time she did her show-and-tell, I did come closer to her standard though. Mikey still has not shown up, but the threat looms large, and I am reminded he may knock on the door at any moment.

No matter what we do, no matter how many times we ask, there are minor things about those we love we just have to let go of. Maybe they are working on changing other, more important things about themselves. The minor irritations are not worth wasting our precious energy on. After the 16,000 or 17,000 time of asking, having our show-and-tells, calling Mikey to come over and address the problem directly, we just have to let them slide.

Love lets the little irritations slide. If they do not cause harm, then those small things really are only minor inconveniences. "I love you" always keeps in mind our partners are not perfect, but then again, neither are we.

## Love Looks for Ways to Heal Betrayal

Have you been betrayed in a relationship? Have you been the one to betray another's trust? I have been on both sides. I have betrayed the trust of others and other people have betrayed my trust.

Betrayal comes in the form of lies, or gossip, or not following through on a promise we make. And betrayal could be cheating on a partner, stealing, or drinking after we've promised loved ones we'd never drink again. There are many ways we can betray one another in relationship.

When I was a junior at Sam Houston State University, I was on the softball team. One of the players told me something in confidence. She asked me to promise that I would never tell her secret to anyone else. I swore I would not betray her trust. But I chose to break the promise I made, and I told.

Well, my betrayal got back to her and she refused to speak to me again. No matter how much I asked her to forgive me, she refused to even listen. Soon my world fell apart, because everyone else on the softball team avoided me. My grades fell, I could not sleep or eat. I was miserable because I went against myself by gossiping. I was hurting because my actions hurt the woman who put trust in me. No matter what rationalizations I told myself to justify gossiping, the painful truth is that my betrayal not only hurt her, it hurt me, too.

No matter how much I wanted to be forgiven by the woman on my softball team for sharing her secret with another person, she would not forgive me. I suffered because I truly wanted to make right what I had done wrong. Since she refused to hear me, I was absolutely powerless to move the relationship forward.

When one person is willing and the other is not, then, in my experience, the relationship cannot be repaired. However, if BOTH people – the one who was betrayed and the betrayer – are determined to work at communication, then the distrust and hard feelings that come from betrayal can be repaired.

Today, I'd like to share with you how to repair betrayal in relationship. Let's say a husband has an affair. How can his wife trust him again?

First, both husband and wife must be willing to work on the relationship to make it better, stronger, more intimate than it was before. If there

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is true dedication on the part of both people, then the husband and wife have a strong role in reestablishing the relationship.

To repair betrayal in this example, the husband has the majority of responsibility to make certain he never betrays the trust of his wife again. He is the one who must step up and make himself grow into a trustworthy person. The only way to do that is to consistently be honest with himself and his wife. He must do what he says. His words and actions must consistently align.

To repair betrayal, the one who betrayed the trust of another has to show he or she can be trusted. The only way that is possible is to accept that, like respect, trust is earned over time through consistent action.

An important thing to remember when establishing trust is words are cheap. We can say whatever we want, but our actions must align with our words. Nonverbal communication is almost 93 percent of all communication. So while we may say one thing with our words, our body will always tell the truth. People can read our body language. If we are lying, they will feel it.

If what the husband does and says consistently line up with the truth, then his body language will confirm it. This is the intimacy I was speaking about that has the power to heal a relationship after betrayal.

We are feeling beings. We feel truth even when we're being lied to. Often we ignore what we feel in favor of wanting to believe the lie we are being told. It is never a good idea to go against what our gut is telling us.

To repair a betrayal like infidelity, the husband must not do the behavior again. That way, his actions will align with his words, and over time his wife will be able to trust what he says and does.

The wife who was betrayed also has a part to play. She must let the past go. She has to consciously make the decision to begin again with her husband by allowing him a clean slate. She must give her husband an opportunity to prove he has changed.

Sometimes this is hard for those who have been betrayed, because we are anxious the other shoe will drop. We fear the person will betray us again. If we truly want the relationship to work, then our

responsibility is to give the person a chance to prove he or she has changed. In this case, unless the wife is truly willing to move forward, then no matter how much the husband changes, she will be unable to acknowledge his new behavior. She will continue to see him as a cheater rather than give his current behavior the honest assessment it deserves.

If we have been betrayed and we truly want the relationship to improve and move forward, we have to give the person who betrayed us a chance to prove he or she has indeed changed. We cannot do that while clinging to the hurt of the past or dreading a future betrayal. We cannot continue to beat the person up with what he or she did. If we are still clinging to what was done, we cloud our vision to what the person is doing now.

As the person who was betrayed, we must let go of what happened. We cannot wait for betrayal to happen again. We cannot find peace if we expect our loved one to cheat again. Love supports positive change. So if we are the one who was betrayed, we have to trust ourselves enough to give someone the benefit of proving to us they have learned their lesson. We have to let go of the past. That does not mean we forget. But it does mean we do not use past behavior to evaluate present actions. Love looks for the truth. Truth is what is happening right here, right now.

Betrayal can be repaired. Love is powerful enough to heal any relationship. Don't just throw away a relationship you have invested in. Don't give up. There is always an opportunity to make a relationship right when both people want to do so.

If you have been betrayed and you still want the relationship, then ask your partner, friend, lover, child, whoever betrayed you to read this. Determine together if you are both willing to do the work necessary to get the relationship to the other side. If so, openly and honestly discuss the steps each of you will take to reestablish trust.

Betrayal can be repaired. Relationships can grow stronger when both people are willing to do what it takes. There is nothing that can destroy a relationship when both people are committed to making sure that nothing does.

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