

The World Beyond Words: Understanding the Power of Nonverbal Communication



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Body language is an outward reflection of a person's emotional condition which humans send almost entirely subconsciously. They include body posture, hand and arm gestures, leg position, facial expressions, and eye movements. Understanding this nonverbal communication is a key to perceiving how a person feels about you, an issue, a product or an idea.

Rules on reading body signals:

1. Read gestures in clusters
2. Read gestures in context
3. Look for congruence and consistency with words

The Hands

Hands behind back – Superiority and confidence.
Thumb display – Dominance and assertiveness.
Folded hands – Holding something back; Negative attitude.
Clenched hands – Frustration and hostility.
Palms up – Submissiveness; I am not a threat.
Palms down – Controlling; Wants to exert authority.
Hiding hands – A sign of dishonesty.
Finger pointing – Aggressiveness; Dominance.

Some Common Gestures And What They Mean

Hand on side of head – Interested Evaluation.
Hand used to support head – Negative thoughts.
Hands behind head – Control; Dominance.
Picking lint – Doesn't like what is being said.
Elbows up – Ready to dominate; Ready for action.
Straddling a chair – Dominance and protection.
Legs apart with hands on legs – Ready for action.
Hands in steeple position – Confidence; dominance.

The Mouth

A hand near mouth is connected to lying. But fingers in mouth is an indication of a need for reassurance. If faced with this sign, providing support and encouragement is a good idea.

When To Try A Different Approach

If a person's body is pointed toward the nearest exit or they are getting ready to stand up.

Smiles

The eye muscles act independently and subconsciously – the "crow's feet" they create indicate a genuine smile. A fake smile comes more quickly, is held much longer and does not show around the eyes.

Three types of smiles:

1. The tight lipped smile – Not sharing an attitude.
2. The twisted smile – Reflects sarcasm.
3. The drop jawed smile – Feigning enjoyment.

SOFTEN

To help improve your communication as a receiver, use the SOFTEN approach:

Smile; **O**pen posture; **F**orward lean;
Touch; **E**ye contact, **N**od;

The Arms

- Crossed arms are a barrier that provides protection. The person does not want to hear or is not open to what you have to say.
- As a communicator, know that when you fold your arms your credibility is reduced dramatically.
- If the receiver of your communication does not unfold their arms, do not proceed with your message until the reason for this is uncovered.

Gestures that Indicate Deception

1. **The mouth cover** – Wants to suppress words.
2. **The nose touch** – Increased blood pressure causes a tingling sensation in nose.
3. **The eye rub** – An attempt to block out distasteful things it is seeing.
4. **The ear grab** – An adult version of a child covering his ears to avoid hearing something.
5. **The neck scratch** – Doubt what is being said.
6. **The collar pull** – Relieves a tingling in the neck.
7. **Leg movements** – Research has shown that people increase leg movements when they lie.

The Legs

Legs point in the direction that people want to go.
Open leg pointed in your direction – Open for ideas.
Crossed legs – Indicate a defensive attitude.
The leg clamp – A defensive position. Not open to your idea.
Legs locked behind chair – Negative emotion. Something is wrong with the communication.

Physiological Reactions That Indicate Deception

**Sweating; Facial muscular twitching; Flush cheeks;
Excessive blinking; Pupil dilation or contraction.**

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