



How to Read Body Language

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Body language is one way of communication that we pay little attention to. Oftentimes others "*hear*" something from our body language that we didn't even realize we were "*saying*" and it can come back to haunt us!

Some experts say that up to half of our communication is conveyed through body language. That's a lot more than most of us might imagine it to be!

Learning to *read* body language can help you understand what someone is *really* saying. Conversely, learning to *use* body language can help you communicate your message more effectively than words alone.

What is Body Language?

Body language is a form of non-verbal communication that utilizes the body. It can be anything from a facial expression to a stance.

For instance, many people talk in an animated fashion, using their body to help communicate their thoughts. There are a lot of "*hand talkers*" in the world who keep their hands in constant motion to help them convey information, emphasize a point, or keep a story moving along.

Body language can give off a certain attitude based simply on posture alone.

- Slumped shoulders and a rounded back with the head hanging down may indicate sadness or shyness.

- A firm walk with the chest puffed out, shoulders raised and head held high could be interpreted as confidence or even arrogance.
- When someone has his or her arms folded across the chest, this position tends to be understood as a standoffish or unfriendly stance.

It's truly amazing how much can be perceived from body language! Not only can you use body language to judge an individual's attitude or mood, but you can also better understand relationships between others. ***These non-verbal cues can indicate the level of bonding people have to one another.***

Body language can be broken into general categories that we see time and time again.

General Body Language Categories

1. **Aggressive.** Aggressive body language is threatening by nature.
2. **Attentive.** This type of body language shows that you're engaged and interested.
3. **Bored.** Just as it says, this body language is the opposite of attentive and is indicated by yawns and lack of eye contact or other visual listening cues.
4. **Closed.** This one shuts you off from others. Arms crossed and standing far away are two common signals of closed language.
5. **Deceptive.** Deceptive body language is often used when someone is trying to get away with a lie. It can be easily distinguished by nervous behavior, which is brought on by guilt and worry.
6. **Defensive.** This kind of body language tends to be present when someone is protective of information or their inner thoughts.
7. **Dominant.** Those who like to be in command use dominant body language. Dominant people tend to stand tall with their chest puffed out.
8. **Emotional.** This one is influenced heavily by feelings at any given moment. It's constantly changing with mood.
9. **Evaluation.** Evaluating body language is used when making a decision or hesitating to make a judgment.

- 10. Greeting.** This type of body language is used when first coming into contact with people.
- 11. Open.** Open body language is welcoming and very friendly in nature.
- 12. On the Ready.** This type of body language lets people know you're prepared and willing.
- 13. Relaxed & Content.** Relaxed body language is that which is seen when people are restful, happy, and calm.
- 14. Passionate.** Romantic body language is flirty and expresses attraction for another.
- 15. Submissive.** This one shows your relenting side.

These are the most common ideas communicated through a stance or combination of poses or posture. ***Many body positions can have different meanings depending on the person, the situation, or their culture.***

In the United States, for example, it's polite to look into another person's eyes intermittently to show you're listening to them. In Japan it's considered rude. While it's commonplace for Americans to smile at one another as a show of friendliness, in Korea smiles are indicators of embarrassment and aren't shared in public.

When traveling abroad, it is best to do as the Romans do, that is, follow suit with the practices of the culture you're visiting so that you can communicate your ideas appropriately.

It's important to be more aware of what your body is saying when you talk to others! Keeping these body language tips in mind will strengthen both your comprehension and communication skills, paving the way for more effective interactions with others.