



Body Language

Body Language is a form of **nonverbal communication** that uses physical behaviours, gestures, posture, facial expressions, and eye movements to convey messages. It often communicates emotions, intentions, and attitudes, sometimes more powerfully than words. People usually "read" body language unconsciously, and it plays a vital role in how we interpret others' feelings and intentions. Be conscious that neurodivergent people may struggle to notice body language.

Key Elements of Body Language

1. Facial Expressions

- **Smile:** Signals friendliness, approval, or happiness.
- **Frown:** Indicates confusion, disapproval, or sadness.
- **Eyebrow Movement:** Raised eyebrows may show surprise, while furrowed brows can signal confusion or concern.

2. Eye Contact

- **Direct Eye Contact:** Indicates confidence, interest, and attentiveness.
- **Avoiding Eye Contact:** This can signal nervousness, discomfort, or possibly dishonesty, but it may also be a cultural norm or part of neurodivergent behaviour.
- **Excessive Staring:** May be perceived as intimidating or confrontational.

3. Gestures

- **Hand Movements:** Pointing, waving, or using hands to emphasise points helps convey clarity.
- **Open Gestures:** Hands open and facing upward show openness, honesty, and friendliness.
- **Closed Gestures:** Crossed arms or clenched fists may signal defensiveness or resistance.

4. Posture

- **Open Posture:** Standing or sitting upright with relaxed shoulders shows confidence, engagement, and openness.
- **Closed Posture:** Slouching, hunching, or crossing arms and legs may signal disengagement, defensiveness, or disinterest.
- **Leaning In vs. Leaning Away:** Leaning in shows interest and engagement, while leaning away may signal disinterest or discomfort.

5. Proximity (Personal Space)

- **Standing Close:** Signals familiarity or intimacy, but too close may be seen as an invasion of personal space.
- **Maintaining Distance:** Demonstrates respect for boundaries, but too much distance might signal disinterest or avoidance.

6. Touch

- **Handshake:** A firm handshake signals confidence, while a weak one may indicate nervousness or lack of confidence.
- **Pat on the Back:** Can be a sign of encouragement, support, or camaraderie.
- **Hugs:** Context matters, as they can signal affection, comfort, or social bonding.

7. Movement and Physical Tension

- **Fidgeting:** Tapping fingers, bouncing legs, or shifting in a chair may indicate nervousness, anxiety, or impatience.
- **Pacing:** May be a sign of deep thought, stress, or anxiety.

Why Body Language Matters

1. **Nonverbal Cues Are Powerful:** Studies show that **55% of communication is nonverbal**, while tone and words make up the rest.
2. **Reveals True Feelings:** People can mask words, but often "leak" emotions through body language, unconsciously showing how they truly feel.
3. **Builds Trust and Connection:** Positive body language (like eye contact and open posture) builds trust and rapport.
4. **Supports Neurodivergent Inclusion:** Understanding that neurodivergent individuals may express body language differently (like reduced eye contact) helps create a more inclusive environment.

Body Language in the Workplace

- **Job Interview:** Open posture, a confident handshake, and direct eye contact project confidence and professionalism.
- **Team Collaboration:** Nodding, leaning in, and maintaining eye contact show attentiveness and support.
- **Conflict Resolution:** Crossed arms or avoidance of eye contact may escalate tension, while open gestures and leaning in foster cooperation.

How to Improve Body Language Awareness

- **Mirror Others:** Subtly matching the body language of the person you're talking to can build rapport.
- **Check Your Posture:** Stand or sit upright to project confidence and engagement.
- **Be Mindful of Cultural Differences:** In some cultures, direct eye contact may be perceived as rude, while in others, it is seen as a sign of respect.
- **Practice Self-Awareness:** Notice your own body language in meetings or social interactions. Are you closed off or open? Engaged or distracted?

