

Body Language

Body language refers to the nonverbal signals that we use to communicate. According to experts, these nonverbal signals make up a huge part of daily communication. Understanding body language is important, but it is also essential to remember to note other cues such as context and to look at signals as a group rather than focusing on a single action.

These two pictures show how gesture can have two different meanings.



Angry



Confident

The arms and legs can also be useful in conveying nonverbal information. Crossing the arms can indicate defensiveness. Crossing legs away from another person may indicate dislike or discomfort with that individual. Other subtle signals such as expanding the arms widely may be an attempt to seem larger or more commanding, while keeping the arms close to the body may be an effort to minimize oneself or withdraw from attention.

When you are evaluating body language, pay attention to some of the following signals that the arms and legs may convey:

- Crossed arms high on the body, such as over the chest, might indicate that a person feels defensive, self-protective, or closed-off. Crossing the arms low on the body, such as by the abdomen, indicates a more relaxed and attentive frame of mind.

- Standing with hands placed on the hips can be an indication that a person is ready and in control, or it can also possibly be a sign of aggressiveness.
- Clapping the hands behind the back might indicate that a person is feeling bored, anxious, or even angry.
- Rapidly tapping fingers or fidgeting can be a sign that a person is bored, impatient, or frustrated.
- Crossed legs can indicate that a person is feeling closed off or in need of privacy.

How we hold our bodies can also serve as an important part of body language. The term posture refers to how we hold our bodies as well as overall physical form of an individual. Posture can convey a wealth of information about how a person is feeling as well as hints about personality characteristics, such as whether a person is confident, open, or submissive.

Sitting up straight, for example, may indicate that a person is focused and paying attention to what's going on. Sitting with the body hunched forward, on the other hand, can imply that the person is bored or indifferent.

When you are trying to read body language, try to notice some of the signals that a person's posture can send.

- Open posture involves keeping the trunk of the body open and exposed. This type of posture indicates friendliness, openness, and willingness.

- Closed posture involves keeping the trunk obscured or hidden often by hunching forward and keeping the arms and legs crossed. This type of posture can be an indicator of hostility, unfriendliness, and anxiety.

- Slouching is an overly relaxed posture where the shoulders are hunched. This posture could indicate that the person is tired or very



relaxed, but could also be an indicator of boredom, disinterest or arrogance.

Pointing, and using the fingers to indicate numerical amounts are all very common and easy to understand gestures. Some gestures may be cultural, however, so giving a thumbs-up or a peace sign might have a completely different meaning than it might in the United States or UK.

The following examples are just a few common gestures and their possible meanings:

- A clenched fist can indicate anger or solidarity.
- A thumbs up and thumbs down are often used as gestures of approval and disapproval.
- The "Okay" gesture, made by touching together the thumb and index finger in a circle while extending the other three fingers can be used to mean okay. In some parts of Europe, however, the same signal is used to imply you are nothing. In some South American countries, the symbol is actually a vulgar gesture.