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Store and/or access information on a device. Use limited data to select advertising. Create profiles for personalised advertising. Use profiles to select personalised content. Measure advertising performance. Understand audiences through statistics or combinations of data from different sources. Develop and improve services. Use personal data to select content. Microexpressions Reviewed by Psychology Today Staff Body language is a silent orchestra, as people constantly give clues to what they're thinking and feeling. Non-verbal messages including body movements, facial expressions, voice and volume of speech, known as body language. Microexpressions (brief displays of emotion) reveal the face), hand gestures, and posture register the human body almost immediately—even when persons don't consciously aware they have perceived anything. For this reason, body language can strongly color how an individual is perceived, and how he or she, in turn, interprets others' motivation, mood, and openness. It's natural to mirror; beginning as soon as infancy, a newborn moves its body to the rhythm of the voice he hears. Body language is a vital form of communication, but most of it happens below the level of conscious awareness. When you wait for a blind date to arrive, for instance, you may nervously tap your foot without even realizing that you're doing it. Similarly, when you show up to meet your date, you may not consciously perceive that your date appears closed-off, but your unconscious mind may pick up on the crossed arms or averted gaze. Luckily, with knowledge and a little practice, it is possible to exert some measure of control over your own body language and to become more skilled at reading others. How can I learn to read body language? The face is the first place to look, arching eyebrows might indicate an invitation of sorts, and smiling is another indication that the person welcomes you. And is the person standing or sitting close to you? If so, then there is interest. Plus, open arms are just that: Open. How can you tell if someone is attracted to you? If a person repeatedly touches your arm, places a light hand on your shoulder, or knocks elbows with you, the person is attracted to you and is demonstrating this with increased touch. People interested in each other smile more, and their mouths may even be slightly open. Engaging in eye contact is another indication. A person who leans towards you or mirrors your body language is also demonstrating interest. A common form of body language is mirroring another person's gestures and mannerisms; mirroring also includes mimicking any and all personal patterns and even behaviors. This is a subtle but powerful form of communication. When you are sitting through an unconvincing sales presentation, mirroring can be an effective way to build rapport. This is especially so if you are prospective clients pay close attention to them and they listen, observant with positive results, mirroring a sign of attraction? People who are attracted to one another often copy each other's movements and mannerisms. In fact, many animals mirror each other, and why chimpanzees start to eat each other before intercourse. What does a tilted head convey? If you tilt your head while looking at a baby, the baby relaxes. Why is that? The same applies to couples who are in love, tilting the head exposes the neck, and perhaps shows vulnerability. The person with a tilted head is perceived as more interested, attentive, caring, and having less of an agenda. How do your eyes express how you feel? Eye blocking, or covering your eyes, expresses emotions such as frustration and worry. And sometimes the eyelids shut to show determination, while sometimes the eyelids flutter to show that you have screwed up and feel embarrassed. What does touching your neck mean? When you're stressed out, touching or stroking the neck signals a pacifying behavior. We all rub our necks at the back, the sides, and also under the chin. The fleshy area under the chin has nerve endings and stroking it lowers heart rate and calms us. What do different hand gestures mean? The hands reveal a lot about a person. When you feel confident, the space between your fingers grows, but that space lessens when you feel insecure. And while rubbing the hands conveys stress, steeping the fingers means that a person feels confident. What is conveyed with a light touch? In many cultures, a light touch on the arm conveys harmony and trust. In one study, people in the UK, the US, France, and Puerto Rico were observed while sitting at a coffee shop. The British and the Americans hardly touched, and the French and the Puerto Ricans freely touched in togetherness. What does crossing your leg while standing mean? To make others feel comfortable while standing, crossing your legs will show you are interested in what the other person has to say. It also means, "Take your time, the standing crossed legs will help you feel comfortable with the other person. How do your feet tell about someone? Fidgety hands means an anxiousness or even nervousness and keeping your arms akimbo may telegraph arrogance. Crossing the arms and legs is, no doubt, a closed position. Whereas sitting with open arms invites the other person to sit. If you are sitting and want to appear neutral, it's best to hold your hands on your lap, just like the Queen of England. What is the right way to shake hands? Shake hands firmly while making eye contact, but do not squeeze the other person's hand—our goal is to make someone feel comfortable, not to assert dominance. It is important to be sensitive to cultural norms: if you receive a weak handshake, it may be that the person comes from a background in which a gentle handshake is the norm. What are some mistakes we make when reading body language? Most people think that crossed arms are a sign of aggression or refusal to cooperate. In fact, crossed arms can signal many other things, including anxiety, self-restraint, and even interest, if the person crossing their arms is mirroring someone who is doing the same. All do non-verbal behaviors serve a purpose? For the most part, yes. All primates demonstrate behaviors including the freeze response and various self-soothing behaviors, such as touching the neck or twirling the hair in humans. We know that many non-verbal behaviors are innate because even blind children engage in them. Still, some behaviors are mysteries. What do the shoulders convey? In males, wide shoulders and narrow hips are associated with strength and vitality; this is reflected in everything from the form of Greek statues to padded shoulders in men's suit jackets. How one hold's one's shoulders conveys dominance and relative status within a hierarchy. How can you tell if someone is deeply distressed? Freezing in place, rocking back and forth, and contorting into a fetal position are all known as "reserved behaviors," as they are used only when a person experiences extreme stress. Facial expressions alone can signal this state, such as pursing or sucking in the lips, often seen when a person is upset or feels contrite. Why can't I hide how I'm feeling? As social animals, we evolved to display emotions, thoughts, and intentions, all of which are processed by the brain's limbic system. Because these reactions precede and at times even precede our conscious deliberation, body language is unique and capable. By revealing how a person feels—but only if another person is watching—their facial expressions and body gestures indicate, in a sense, what they are feeling. What are the best ways to communicate? Research shows that more than half of communication is nonverbal. In fact, studies suggest that more than half of communication is nonverbal. This means that understanding body language can be invaluable in order to effectively communicate with others. By recognizing how we are communicating through our nonverbal cues, we can deepen conversations, build trust, and better convey our message. Nonverbal behavior plays an important role in verbal communication. Through nonverbal behaviors like eye contact, for example, we can convey our interest and intentions. Nonverbal communication is a form of communication that occurs without the use of spoken words. It involves an individual's body language, facial expressions, eye contact, tone of voice and posture. Research suggests that up to 93% of communication is nonverbal, with only 7% being communicated through spoken words. This means the importance of body language cannot be overstated. It can convey messages in a much subtler way than spoken words, and 55 percent of our body language, including our facial expressions, posture, and gestures, when communicating in person, one should always take into account the cultural differences in body language to ensure successful communication. When speaking in public, for example, hand gestures can often help form clearer ideas and sentences; moreover, different cultures gesture in different ways. Generally speaking, head movements such as nodding contribute to expressing agreement with what is said. On the other hand, shaking your head can mean disagreement or disapproval. People who are aware of the subtle forms of body language will be more easily able to pick up on others' feelings and emotions. The off-putting effect of message incongruence must also be noted when considering nonverbal communication: when there is a mismatch between verbal and nonverbal behavior, people tend to follow the nonverbal cue they receive instead of the literal meaning of the words. This can be seen in teachers who use gestures while teaching. Research has found that students remember and understand written content better when their teachers exercise hand gestures that are consistent with the lesson content. You should also read: How can you use verbal communication effectively?Non-verbal Communication: Why It Matters and How to Do it Well10 Steps to a Successful Communication Plan: Why You Need One A huge portion of nonverbal communication stems from facial expressions. Our expressions give us away and reveal our emotional condition. It is especially important to become acutely aware of facial expressions when in conversation, as expressing empathy allows one to better connect with the other person. Making use of body language can strengthen or weaken a message, depending on how it is expressed and received. Reading a person's nonverbal signals is also helpful for judging the attitude of a person you are communicating with. You can observe their facial expressions, tone of voice, and body movements to recognize if they are engaged, bored, annoyed, frustrated, etc. Expressing yourself through nonverbal communication is important, as it is understood, the intention and emotions behind gestures. One theory is the 38-55 rule, which states that around 7 percent of any message we choose, 38 percent is determined by how we say them, and 55 percent is determined by our body language, including our facial expressions, posture, eye contact, and using a higher pitch of voice. Nonverbal communication. Maintaining eye contact during conversations can increase the speaker's confidence, build trust and make sure the audience is truly listening to what is being said. Additionally, smiling is a great way to maintain eye contact and express emotion; a pleasant, friendly smile can make the other person more likely to listen and pay attention. Communication is a two-way street, where both parties involved in the conversation exchange verbal, as well as nonverbal information. Nonverbal cues such as body language, facial expressions and physical distance communicate a lot more than the spoken word. Knowing how to utilize and read these signals provides a unique view of the message behind the words being spoken. Albert Mehrabian, a professor emeritus of psychology at UCLA, has done extensive research on the importance of nonverbal communication and has come up with a 55/38/7 formula, suggesting that approximately 55 percent of all communication between two individuals comes from their body language, 38 percent from the sound of their voice and only 7 percent from the literal meaning of their words. In most cases, therefore, nonverbal communication plays a much more important role than verbal communication. When people who speak and are unaware of nonverbal signals, they may come across as sending mixed messages; despite having these intentions, the wrong message could still affect the listener. At the same time, it is important to note that these signals can vary widely between and within cultures. Understanding and interpreting body language are particularly important skills in a professional setting and can help enhance communication, negotiation, and leadership abilities. Facial expressions, for example, serve as an excellent way to articulate and understand complex feelings. Research indicates that facial expressions account for the vast majority of digital nonverbal communication—approximately 90 percent of digital nonverbal communication, incorporating posture, eye contact, and using a higher pitch of voice. People often subconsciously send distress signals when engaging in conversation. Universal signs of discomfort can include fidgeting, avoiding eye contact, faulty posture, controlling tension and an awkward body movement related to insecurity or fear. Being mindful of these signals is important for preventing misunderstandings. Cultural body language disparities can also play an important role in communication. Certain head movements are culture-specific, such as shaking the head for "no" in the United States and "yes" in India. Within this mind, it is important to be conscious of how other societies employ nonverbal forms of communication. Such information can be valuable when participating in cross-cultural dialogues or negotiations. In addition, certain context cues must be taken into consideration when attempting to understand somebody's body language. Stereotypes and preconceived notions lead to misreading much of communication through body language. Good posture, a sense of confidence, self-awareness and maintaining an open attitude all demonstrate a willingness to engage in the conversation. By being conscious of these small details, the value of nonverbal communication increases considerably, with large potential payoffs. Digital communication has grown in popularity in recent years. Although the internet and communication technologies enable us to communicate quickly and easily across distances, surprisingly, face-to-face interaction is still key when it comes to understanding subtle nonverbal cues shared among people. Digital nonverbal communication is a little different than in-person body language and it relies on fewer facial expressions, gestures, and eye contact, which allow many of the same nuances to be communicated virtually, but on a more limited scale. In an effort to recognize what's missing in this digital landscape and find ways to compensate, Dr. Nick Morgan, author of *Power Cues: The Subtle Science of Leading Groups and Influencing People*, proposes three practical nonverbal communication skills that are still applicable in the digital age: 1. **Proximity and Distance:** Understanding personal space boundaries is crucial for making good judgements based on nonverbal cues. In the world of digital communication, it is especially important to recognize how nonverbal signals that cannot be seen might be influencing how your message is being received by the reader. It is important to be aware of the impact that simply changing your posture or making eye contact can have. Proper expressions combined with good posture and appropriate use of words can do wonders to establish confidence in communication. Furthermore, learning to empathize with the other person's experience is equally important. Emotional empathy means understanding the emotions of the recipient. According to neuroscience research, through "mirroring neurons", the activity of the observer's brain follows that of the subject's. This means that by paying attention to the other person's nonverbal signals, it becomes easier for both parties to adjust their verbal message to reach a common language. Avoid responding sudden unexpected reactions or triggering aggressive body gestures such as crossing arms, which could indicate a negative response or discomfort. Speak to the individual calmly and confidently, understand the approach, and aim to bring comfort and reassurance. Communication is nonverbal to a great extent and is dependent on the way in which one speaks rather than on the number of words used. According to two research studies conducted by the University of Haifa and Stanford, peoples' responses are almost twice as likely to be influenced by the tone of voice than by the actual words that are said. The tone of voice reveals much more than just the meaning of the words uttered. Pitch, inflection, intensity, and volume all add to the meaning of what someone is saying and can help build a bridge of understanding between partners. For example, raising or lowering the pitch of one's voice can change the tone of a sentence from neutral to alert, angry, excited, or surprised. When speaking digitally, pay special attention to the tonal characteristics of your speech to ensure that they do not impede communication, one must understand that these 3 C's: context, clusters, and congruence. Context includes cultural norms and taboos as well as general behavior accepted by society. Clusters are associated with facial expression, posture and gestures that come together to create a message or emotion. Lastly, congruence focuses on sending a consistent message between verbal and non-verbal communication. In the virtual world, leveraging these three C's can revolutionize how people communicate with each other. It can be easy to not pick up on small nuances, such as pauses and vocal inflections, when communicating remotely. One way to replicating every day conversation over digital platforms is to pay closer attention to details within the conversation. Saying things and exhibiting actions that align with each other will strengthen the likelihood that your message gets across accurately. Human-centered communication strategies, such as being aware of how the other person is interpreting what you're saying and answering questions based on their view of the world, will put your conversations on the right track. Another concept to apply when communicating without spoken words is the 7-38-55 rule. This rule states that 7 percent of a person's total attitude is conveyed through his or her actual words, 38 percent through tone of voice, and 55 percent through body language. In negotiations, this means that while it may seem like spoken words have the most weight, what people do not say actually carries the most power. When communicating through a video conference, camera proximity should also be taken into consideration. The closer the person's face is to the camera, the easier it will be to read their facial expressions and nonverbal cues. This can show confidence and, ultimately, build trust with the other party. Taking the time to adjust to the other person's comfort zone allows for a more personal and meaningful interaction. The last, but certainly not least, tip is to never forget to use turn up emotional volume. Although virtual conversations quite often lack the large majority of emotions that would typically be expressed through physical presence, turning up emotional volume is a great way to ensure that your message is communicated accurately. Emotions easily muted or lost in virtual conversations and also misjudged if one is not mindful of accentuating their emotions. Considering adding gestures or facial expressions during significant points, giving more emphasis with a wider tonal range. During virtual interactions, it is imperative to consider camera proximity. Doing so gives the conversation a heightened level of engagement, as the view of each person's facial expressions informs the other of the intent of their words. If a person's face is too far from their camera, details in their faces can be lost and this could lead to miscommunication. For example, facial expressions can give life to words, such as smile indicating sarcasm or a wink expressing approval rather than its literal interpretation. Showing appropriate levels of enthusiasm—not too little nor too much—is also key factor to communication effectiveness. Additionally, due to the wide variety of cultures around the world, body language used in communication can vary greatly in meaning specific context. Moving nearer to the camera can help viewers identify certain specific gestures that may differ in name and purpose. This can help them accurately decipher the context and determine true intentions behind the speaker's comments. Albert Mehrabian's research on nonverbal communication revealed the vast majority of communication is not done through spoken words, but instead through body language and facial expressions. His formula, which consists of 55 percent postural component and 38 percent vocal inflections make up the total attitude expressed. This means that though person's body language and facial expressions play an important role in how their message is interpreted, the spoken word will still carry the greatest weight. By adding nonverbal elements, such as body posture, facial expressions, eye contact, and a professional yet friendly tone of voice to your communication, you can help ensure your messages are accurate and full of emotional content. That said, it is important to remember to keep your conversations welcoming, warm and relaxed while speaking to avoid creating an unwelcome tense environment. It is critical to be mindful of facial expressions and other nonverbal cues when communicating virtually, however, it is equally important to be aware of cultural distinctions regarding these nonverbal communication techniques, so as not to convey an intrusive, aggressive or disrespectful. Through practicing active listening and monitoring our own emotions, behaviors and body language, we can build trust and confidence as effective communicators. Practicing nonverbal communication is essential for successful communication. There are plenty of resources available to help hone our skills, such as workshops, masterclasses, books, and video tutorials. Rehearsing a speech with a friend or even recording your own speaking can help us become more confident and familiar with the material. Viveka Von Rosen's chapter on women using video in sales in her book *Modern Sales* is a great example of how taking a human-centered approach to communication can help cultivate meaningful relationships by connecting with our audience through displaying our authenticity. Listening is another powerful tool when it comes to effectively communicating without words. When we listen attentively and sincerely, we create an understanding between ourselves and our interlocutor. It is therefore necessary to stay mindful of our expectations while listening and to consider nonverbal cues present that may indicate the true emotions behind what is being said. By consciously committing to listening, we can optimize communication, become better people and share knowledge in the same way in ways that words alone can't express. Nonverbal communication is a powerful tool that can significantly enhance in-person and remote conversations. Albert Mehrabian's research estimates that 93% of communication is done nonverbally, while only 7% is expressed through words. This emphasizes the importance of having strong nonverbal communication skills in order to be successful in any interpersonal relationship or virtual setting. Developing effective nonverbal communication skills involves understanding different cultural contexts, adapting to emotion, controlling one's physical proximity to others, expressing emotion online, adjusting tone and expression, reading body language, and listening attentively. Practicing these strategies can help build meaningful relationships and foster effective communication. In conclusion, nonverbal communication is an integral part of human interaction and should not be overlooked in order to ensure successful communication. With the help of the tips outlined in this article, individuals can effectively express and interpret various nonverbal cues with confidence. Studies on the topic of nonverbal forms of communication point to the conclusion that between 70 and 93 percent of all communication is actually nonverbal. Thus, it is correct to say that 80% of all communication is nonverbal. The 7-38-55 Rule, proposed by Albert Mehrabian, suggests that only 7% of the meaning of a message is conveyed through the actual words that are spoken, while 38% is attributed to vocal elements such as tone and inflection of voice accounts and 55% to body language and facial expression. According to the 7-38-55 Rule, 55% of all communication is done through body language. This statistic was derived from a joint research project between Dr. Mehrabian and colleagues in the 1960s which revealed that, out of all non-verbal communication, 55% comes from body language and 38% comes from inflection and tone. Based on the research of Dr. Mehrabian's book and other studies, it is widely accepted that communication is mostly nonverbal, with 70 to 93 percent of our messages coming through body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions. This second study suggests that 93 percent of communication can indeed be nonverbal. Based on the research of communication experts such as Dr. Mehrabian, it has been suggested that up to around 70 percent of communication is nonverbal, or body language. This highlights the importance of recognizing and responding to both verbal and nonverbal cues in all types of communications. Our body language communicates essential information about our thoughts and feelings. This article covers the different types of body language and key examples of how body language reflects our inner workings. \*This page may include affiliate links; that means we earn from qualifying purchases of products. Many years ago, a romantic partner of mine pointed out that when we argued, I would cross my arms as the conversation grew more heated. (Even more observantly, she noted that my father seemed to have exactly the same behavioral pattern.) At first, I was even more defensive, but then I realized that yes, I did do that, and that it was because I felt attacked and wanted to protect myself; my arms were a physical barrier I was putting up between myself and my partner's criticism. Over time I came to realize that this behavior also had a calming effect on me, and withdrawing in a conversation and withdrawing in a conversation. Since I wanted to stay in conversation with others, I worked hard to deliberately stop crossing my arms, and I do think it has helped me stay more open to the feedback other people are giving me. This anecdote from my life represents just one example of the many ways that our body language can offer a window into our inner workings. Let's learn together about body language, including plenty of examples of what different types of body language can signify. Before reading on, if you're a therapist, coach, or wellness entrepreneur, be sure to grab our free Wellness Business Growth eBook to get expert tips and free resources that will help you grow your business exponentially. Are You a Therapist, Coach, or Wellness Entrepreneur? ✓ Save hundreds of hours of time ✓ Earn more \$ faster ✓ Boost your credibility ✓ Deliver high-impact content Body language is sometimes referred to as kinesics, and it includes all the ways that we use our bodies (but not our voices) to communicate information (Phutela, 2015). Usually, the information we are conveying is related to our emotions, but it can also include more general cues about who we are. Broadly speaking, the categories of body language are the orientation of the body (such as toward the other person speaking), hand gestures, eye contact, facial expressions, and our posture (Phutela, 2015).Body language can achieve at least four communicative goals (Phutela, 2015):1) Substituting for spoken language. Instead of using words to send a message, we can sometimes say everything we need to say simply through body language.2) Adding meaning to what you've said. Sometimes, body language can add more layers of meaning to what is being said out loud. For example, I might tell you that I have a lot of work to do this week, and you might deduce from my raised shoulders and furrowed brow that I am worried about getting it all done.3) Contradicting what you've said. Our body language can communicate something opposite to what we are saying out loud, such as when somebody says they are not nervous, but the smile that accompanies this statement is not a genuine one (Harrison & Taing, 1997).4) Emphasizing what you've said. When our body language and our spoken words are in agreement, but one is stronger than the other, it can help emphasize what you're saying. For example, if you say "I'm really excited about this project," and you have your arms raised in the air, it emphasizes your excitement.5) Adding meaning to what you've said. Sometimes, body language can add more layers of meaning to what is being said out loud. For example, I might tell you that I have a lot of work to do this week, and you might deduce from my raised shoulders and furrowed brow that I am worried about getting it all done.3) Contradicting what you've said. 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Scene 2) "[A] reason to pay close attention to body language is that it is often more believable than verbal communication. For example, you ask your mother, 'What's wrong?' She shrugs her shoulders, frowns, turns away from you, and mutters, 'Oh . . . nothing, I guess. I'm just fine.' You don't believe her words. You believe her dejected body language, and you press on to find out what's bothering her." "The key to nonverbal communication is congruence. Nonverbal cues usually occur in congruent clusters—groups of gestures and movements that have roughly the same meaning and agree with the meaning of the words that accompany them. In the example above, your mother's shrug, frown, and turning away are congruent among themselves. They could all mean 'I'm depressed' or 'I'm worried.' However, the nonverbal cues are not congruent with her words. As an astute listener, you recognize this incongruency as a signal to ask again and dig deeper." (Matthew McKay, Martha Davis, and Patrick Fanning, *Messages: The Communication Skills Book*, 3rd ed. New Harbinger, 2009) "Most people think liars give themselves away by averting their eyes or making nervous gestures, and many law-enforcement officers have been trained to look for specific tics, like gazing upward in a certain manner. But in scientific experiments, people do a lousy job of spotting liars. Law-enforcement officers and other presumed experts are not consistently better at it than ordinary people even though they're more confident in their abilities." "There's an illusion of insight that comes from looking at a person's body," says Nicholas Epley, a professor of behavioral science at the University of Chicago. "Body language speaks to us, but only in whispers." . . . "The common-sense notion that liars betray themselves through body language appears to be little more than a cultural fiction," says Maria Hartwig, a psychologist at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City. Researchers have found that the best clues to deceit are verbal—liars tend to be less forthcoming and tell less compelling stories—but even these differences are usually too subtle to be discerned reliably." (John Tierney, "At Airports, a Misplaced Faith in Body Language," *The New York Times*, March 23, 2014) "For the purpose of literary analysis, the terms 'non-verbal communication' and 'body language' refer to the forms of non-verbal behaviour exhibited by characters within the fictional situation. This behaviour can be either conscious or unconscious on the part of the fictional character; the character can use it with an intention to convey a message, or it can be unintentional; it can take place within or outside of an interaction; it can be accompanied by speech or independent of speech. From the perspective of a fictional receiver, it can be decoded correctly, incorrectly, or not at all." (Barbara Korte, *Body Language in Literature*. University of Toronto Press, 1997) "For life, though largely, is not entirely carried on by literature. We are subject to physical passions and contortions; the voice breaks and changes, and speaks by unconscious and winning inflections, we have legible countenances, like an open book; things that cannot be said look eloquently through the eyes; and the soul, not locked into the body as a dungeon, dwells ever on the threshold with appealing signals. Groans and tears, looks and gestures, a flush or a paleness, are often the most clear reporters of the heart, and speak more directly to the hearts of others. The message flies by these interpreters in the least space of time, and the misunderstanding is averted in the moment of its birth. To explain in words takes time and a just and patient hearing; and in the critical epochs of a close relation, patience and justice are not qualities on which we can rely. But the look or the gesture explains things in a breath; they tell their message without ambiguity; unlike speech, they cannot stumble, by the way, on a reproach or an illusion that should steel your friend against the truth; and then they have a higher authority, for they are the direct expression of the heart, not yet transmitted through the unfaithful and sophisticating brain." (Robert Louis Stevenson, "Truth of Intercourse," 1879)