



How to use body language

Building confident communications through body language.

Research has shown that we communicate in three ways:
What we say has 7% of importance to the receiver.
How we say it has 38% of importance to the receiver.
Our appearance, including our body language, has 55% of importance to the receiver.

Body language is highly significant to the communication process and so is worth further study if we want this to be effective.

Our facial expressions or our posture, for instance, gives clues and signs to the receiver about our mood and feelings about them and the subject under discussion.

If we are to be believed and trusted our body language and voice tone must be congruent with the verbal message. Elements of body language include:

The space we give people and our positioning relative to them

Our posture – standing and sitting

How we move – fast or slow, smooth or jerky

Our facial expressions – especially eyes and mouth

Our gestures and use of our hands

Use of our arms – open or closed positions

Sitting positions and how we position our legs

Use of touch



Note also your choice of clothes, accessories, hair style etc all add up to the 55% significance that appearance has to the communication process.

Confidence is also conveyed through body language. Use body language to help build rapport with people and get off to a confident start. This would include positive eye contact and a smile, smooth bodily movements, sitting or standing tall. Shaking hands may also be an appropriate start. Walking purposefully alongside a person and having clearly thought out seating arrangements also conveys a sense that you are in control. Smooth, steady movements and an asymmetrical body posture can convey a relaxed informality.

Note that behaviour tends to breed behaviour, that is, if your body language conveys a positive, friendly and business like mood then most people will feel it and respond in kind. This positive matching of body language conveys a conversation and relationship that is going well.

Typically helpful body language – conveying assertive adult behaviour

Sitting upright, sitting back comfortably, standing tall, relaxed shoulders, bright facial expression, nodding understanding, open hand gestures, smiling – mouth turned upward, smooth and purposeful movements, steady and soft eye contact, one hand on hip, slight leaning on desk or wall, hands to front of body, shaking hands, facial expressions indicating positive interest – eyes opening/tilt of head.

Typically unhelpful body language – conveying either submissive or aggressive behaviour – even if not intended

Slumped posture or sitting position, head leaning on hand, hands in pockets, hands tucked away, finger pointing or wagging, crossed arms with frowning expression (defensive), both hands on hips (aggressive) mouth turning down or fixed in a stern expression, looking at feet or averted eyes, staring wide eyed, nervous fast or jerky movements, standing too close (one metre or less) to people, slow ponderous movements, swinging legs or body.



It's simplifying things a little too much to say that any one behaviour must have a very defined meaning. So take a broad view of specific meanings, and instead make use of body language as an indicator that allows you to respond and match appropriately in any given situation.