

Using Open Body Language to Express and Connection

Body language is an important part of the way people communicate. When you are having a problem communicating with your partner, it might be because your body (non-verbal) language does not match up with your words. Even though you may be trying to communicate better with your partner, if your body language does not match your words, your efforts may be having the opposite effect.

Take Jon and Maria for an example. Jon complained that Maria never had time for him and didn't really care about his work or his interests. Maria said she wanted to feel more connected to Jon and decided she would ask him about his day each night after dinner. So that evening when the meal was over, Maria started doing the dishes while Jon was sitting on the couch and she said to him, "Tell me about what happened with your presentation today."

Maria's intentions were good, but what did her body language really communicate to Jon? She was busy doing another activity, the water was running and the dishes were clanking, her back was to Jon and so she couldn't see his facial expressions, his posture, what his hands were doing, or any other aspect of his non-verbal communication.

Now imagine another scenario. Maria asks Jon to tell her about his day, but she is sitting next to him on the couch. She is watching his face and leaning forward. She is in a relaxed position, with her arms and legs uncrossed. Everything about her non-verbal language says that she is ready to engage in a meaningful conversation.

It is not hard to guess which scenario would make Jon feel more valued and connected to Maria.

This exercise is about using your body language to express your openness to your partner. It is designed to make you more aware of how you communicate with your body language and to consciously express "open to listen" body language when you are trying to connect with your partner.

Body language has many different aspects. Below is a "dictionary" to help you become conscious of what open body language looks and feels like.

Facial Expression: Generally, people are not very aware of their facial expression. When you are feeling compassionate and open to your partner it will be easy to see that in your facial expression, just as it will be apparent on your face if you are angry or upset. Needless to say, it is always best to be honest about your feelings.

Eye Contact: Normally when people are engaged in a conversation they make eye contact about 60% of the time. Less eye contact gives the impression that you are not interested in what the other person is saying. Too much eye contact can seem like you are staring and can feel weird to the other person.

Posture: Sit comfortably when engaged in a conversation, but also lean forward to show your interest in what your partner is saying.

Gestures: Some people use gestures more than others, and different cultures have different meanings for different gestures. Gestures are used to emphasize a point. Positive gestures include: short clap, thumbs up, and “OK” sign.

Voice Volume and Tone: Your voice is also an important part of how you express your attitude and feelings. The same words can have completely different meanings depending on the way you say them.

Physical Contact: No aspect of body language speaks louder than a touch. It can be as simple as placing your hand on top of your partner’s hand or giving a pat on the back.

Proximity: The distance between two people says a lot about how they are feeling toward each other. Usually, when you are having a meaningful conversation with a partner, you will want to be within an arm’s length.

You can use the worksheet on the next page to help you and your partner be more aware of your body language.

Becoming Aware of Your Body Language

Directions: Make two copies of this worksheet, one for you and one for your partner. Pick a time that is good for both of you to have an open conversation. When you are done, rate each other on the following statements. Use the scale 1 = Don't agree at all to 10 = Strongly agree. Then answer the questions below.

_____ My partner's facial expression told me he/she was listening.

_____ My partner made good contact with me throughout our conversation.

_____ My partner sat in a way that showed he/she cared about what I was saying.

_____ My partner's voice showed that he/she was concerned and caring.

_____ My partner made physical contact that made me feel good about our conversation.

What are some ways your partner expressed himself/herself non-verbally that made you feel connected?

Were there some non-verbal things your partner did that put you off?

Can you think of some things you might have done differently to feel more connected to your partner during this conversation?

After each person has completed this worksheet, share your responses being as uncritical as you can. Remember that the object of this exercise is to help bring you closer to your partner by becoming aware of your non-verbal communication.

<p>How helpful was this exercise? _____</p> <p>1 = Not very helpful, 10 = Extremely helpful.</p> <p>Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
