

## How to Use Body Language to your Advantage

There is no specific advice on how to use your **body language**. What you do might be interpreted in several ways, depending on the setting and who you are talking to. You'll probably want to use your body language differently when talking to your boss compared to when you talk to a girl/guy you're interested in. These are some common interpretations of body language and often more effective ways to communicate with your body.

First, to change your **body language** you must be aware of your body language. Notice how you sit, how you stand, how you use your hands and legs, what you do while talking to someone.

You might want to practice in front of a mirror. Yeah, it might seem silly but no one is watching you. This will give you good feedback on how you look to other people and give you an opportunity to practise a bit before going out into the world.

Another tip is to close your eyes and visualize how you would stand and sit to feel confident, open and relaxed or whatever you want to communicate. See yourself move like that version of yourself. Then try it out. You might also want to observe friends, role models, movie stars or other people you think has good **body language**. Observe what they do and you don't. Take bits and pieces you like from different people. Try using what you can learn from them.

Some of these tips might seem like you are faking something. But fake it til you make it is a useful way to learn something new. And remember, feelings work backwards too. If you smile a bit more you will feel happier. If you sit up straight you will feel more energetic and in control. If you slow down your movements you'll feel calmer. Your feelings will actually reinforce your new behaviours and feelings of weirdness will dissipate.

It's the **total package**: Above all, remember, we are communicating with the sum total of all our tools, ie. our body language, tone of voice, facial expression, energy level, words etc. The other person is perceiving with all their senses at the same time.

**1. Don't cross your arms or legs** – You have probably already heard you shouldn't cross your arms as it might make you seem defensive or guarded. This goes for your legs too. Keep your arms and legs open.

**2. Have eye contact, but don't stare** – If there are several people you are talking to, give them all some eye contact to create a better connection and see if they are listening. Keeping too much eye-contact might creep people out. Giving no eye-contact might make you seem insecure. If you are not used to keeping eye-contact it

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might feel a little hard or scary in the beginning but keep working on it and you'll get used to it.

**3. Don't be afraid to take up some space** – Taking up space by for example sitting or standing with your legs apart a bit signals self-confidence and that you are comfortable in your own skin.

**4. Relax your shoulders** – When you feel tense it's easily winds up as tension in your shoulders. They might move up and forward a bit. Try to relax. Try to loosen up by shaking the shoulders a bit and move them back slightly.

**5. Nod when they are talking** – nod once in a while to signal that you are listening. But don't overdo it and peck like Woody Woodpecker.

**6. Don't slouch, sit up straight** – but in a relaxed way, not in a too tense manner.

**7. Lean, but not too much** – If you want to show that you are interested in what someone is saying, lean toward the person talking. If you want to show that you're confident in yourself and relaxed lean back a bit. But don't lean in too much or you might seem needy and desperate for some approval. Or lean back too much or you might seem arrogant and distant.

**8. Smile and laugh** – lighten up, don't take yourself too seriously. Relax a bit, smile and laugh when someone says something funny. People will be a lot more inclined to listen to you if you seem to be a positive person. But don't be the first to laugh at your own jokes, it makes you seem nervous and needy. Smile when you are introduced to someone but don't keep a smile plastered on your face, you'll seem insincere.

**9. Don't touch your face** – it might make you seem nervous and can be distracting for the listeners or the people in the conversation.

**10. Keep you head up** - Don't keep your eyes on the ground, it might make you seem insecure and a bit lost. Keep your head up straight and your eyes towards the horizon.

**11. Slow down a bit** – this goes for many things. Walking slower not only makes you seem more calm and confident, it will also make you feel less stressed. If someone addresses you, don't snap you're neck in their direction, turn it a bit more slowly instead.

**12. Don't fidget** – try to avoid, phase out or transform fidgety movement and nervous ticks such as shaking your leg or tapping your fingers against the table rapidly. You'll seem nervous and fidgeting can be a distracting when you try to get something across. De-clutter your movements if you are all over the place. Try to relax, slow down and focus your movements.

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**13. Use your hands more confidently** – instead of fidgeting with your hands and scratching your face use them to communicate what you are trying to say. Use your hands to describe something or to add weight to a point you are trying to make. But don't use them too much or it might become distracting. And don't let your hands flail around, use them with some control.

**14. Lower your drink** – don't hold your drink in front of your chest. In fact, don't hold anything in front of your heart as it will make you seem guarded and distant. Lower it and hold it beside your leg instead.

**15. Realise where your spine ends** – many people (including me until recently) might sit or stand with a straight back in a good posture. However, they might think that the spine ends where the neck begins and therefore crane the neck forward in a Montgomery Burns-pose. Your spine ends in the back of your head. Keep your whole spine straight and aligned for better posture.

**16. Don't stand too close** –one of the things we learned from Seinfeld is that everybody gets weirded out by a close-talker. Let people have their personal space, don't invade it.

**17. Mirror** - Often when you get along with a person, when the two of you get a good connection, you will start to mirror each other unconsciously. That means that you mirror the other person's body language a bit. To make the connection better you can try a bit of proactive mirroring. If he leans forward, you might lean forward. If she holds her hands on her thighs, you might do the same. But don't react instantly and don't mirror every change in body language. Then weirdness will ensue.

**18. Keep a good attitude** – last but not least, keep a positive, open and relaxed attitude. How you feel will come through in your body language and can make a major difference.

You can change your **body language** but as all new habits it takes a while. Especially things like keeping your head up might take time to correct if you have spent thousands of days looking at your feet. And if you try and change too many things at once it might become confusing and feel overwhelming.

Take a couple of these **body language** bits to work on every day for three to four weeks. By then they should have developed into new habits and something you'll do without even thinking about it. If not, keep on until it sticks. Then take another couple of things you'd like to change and work on them.

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## Examples of Body Language

NON VERBAL BEHAVIOR	INTERPRETATION
Brisk, Erect Walk	Having Confidence
Standing with hands on hips	Readiness, aggression
Sitting with legs crossed, foot kicking slightly	Boredom
Sitting, legs apart	Open, relaxed
Arms crossed on chest	Defensiveness
Walking with hands in pockets, shoulders hunched	Dejection
Hand to cheek	Evaluation, thinking
Touching, slightly rubbing nose	Rejection, doubt, lying
Rubbing the eye	Doubt, disbelief
Hands clasped behind back	Anger, frustration, apprehension
Locked ankles	Apprehension
Head resting in hand, eyes downcast	Boredom
Sitting with hands clasped behind head, legs crossed	<u>Confidence</u> , superiority
Open palm	Sincerity, openness, innocence
Pinching bridge of nose, eyes closed	Negative evaluation
Tapping or drumming fingers	Impatience
Steepling fingers	Authoritative
Patting/fondling hair	Lack of self-confidence; insecurity
Tilted head	Interest
Stroking Chin	Trying to make a decision
Looking down, face turned away	Disbelief
Biting nails	Insecurity, nervousness
Pulling or tugging at ear	Indecision



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