

When Your Body Talks...

“When the spirit is fed with holy virtues, then is the body joyous . . .” —Abdu’l-Bahá

When you pass a friend in the hall at school, you may smile and wave at each other. Without a word, you convey friendliness. But what if the person waves with a frown? What are they saying?

We constantly send messages with our body language—facial expressions, gestures, posture, and tone of voice. When you’re aware of what your body is saying, you can avoid sending mixed messages.

When your words say one thing and your body says something different, people can get confused. For example,



you may want to make new friends at a party, but you might not realize that your crossed arms and stern expression are saying, “Leave me alone!” When someone growls, “I’m not mad!” with clenched teeth and tight fists, it’s hard to believe their words.

Body language has different meanings across cultures. You might be greeted with a hug in Mexico and a bow in Japan. Check out these tips for positive nonverbal messages in U.S. culture.



Body Talk Tips



Posture

Sitting or standing up in a straight, relaxed manner tells people that you’re alert and interested. Being slouched or hunched over may convey that you’re bored, tired, or upset. Crossing your arms and legs is called a closed posture, and it tells people to stay away. An open posture, with arms and legs uncrossed, invites interaction.

Gestures

Positive gestures make you appear friendly and approachable. You might nod while listening or invite someone to join you with a beckoning hand. Fidgeting, biting your lips, or putting your hand over your mouth give an impression of anxiety or disinterest.



Face

Your facial expression can show lots of emotions, from happiness to fear. An expression that matches your actions makes it easier for people to relate to you. Be aware of your resting face—how you look when you’re not interacting with anyone. A pleasant resting face helps people feel good around you.



Appearance

Your clothing, neatness, and cleanliness send a message to others. You might wear casual clothes to hang out with friends and a more formal outfit at a wedding. Being clean and neat, no matter what you’re wearing, sends positive signals.

Eyes

Making eye contact shows that you’re confident, sincere, and engaged. Avoiding someone’s eyes may convey fear, disinterest, or dishonesty.



When you’re aware of how your body talks to others, you can express yourself more clearly and confidently.

What Do People *Hear*?

Understanding body language is a vital skill we use every day. It helps us make friends and get along with others. You interpret nonverbal signals when you talk to a kid who has an open posture and friendly expression, instead of one who's hunched over and scowling. If your brother is

frowning with concentration over a school project due tomorrow, you know it's not a good time to ask him to play a game.

You use these "listening" skills to interact with everyone around you. When you send and interpret signals successfully, your relationships can be clear and harmonious.

At this block party, what makes the nonverbal messages positive, neutral, or negative? Circle the 10 people whose positive, friendly body language is clearly visible.

