

What Are You Trying to Say?

A practical chart to help you keep track of body language in your small group

Matthew 6:22

	GESTURE	WHAT IT CONVEYS	IF YOU'RE DOING IT
EYES	Avoiding Eye Contact	May mean she's shy. Or lying or trying to provoke you. May also be a nonverbal sign to cue someone to stop talking. May also be a cultural issue—in some cultures, avoiding eye contact is a sign of respect.	Unless you know of a cultural issue, always strive to maintain comfortable and gracious eye contact. Too much can make the listener feel under scrutiny, and too little may indicate a lack of interest on your part.
	Darting Eyes	Usually perceived as a sign of lying or hiding the truth.	Don't. Make comfortable eye contact.
	Rolling Eyes	Usually perceived as a sign of disrespect, condescension, disagreement, or frustration. Almost always an aggressive action.	Don't!
	Staring At You	Could be intense concentration, or could be rude and aggressive.	Be sure to break your gaze at comfortable intervals, or when the listener breaks. You don't have to win the stare-down.
	Staring Into Space	Could be intense concentration, or could indicate disagreement or disinterest. May be a "dissing" action or a nonverbal stop sign.	Don't. Train yourself to maintain comfortable eye contact.
FACE	Furrowing the Brow	May be a sign of thinking, disagreement, or questioning; or perhaps the listener can't hear or understand you.	Relax your face while talking. Clarify using words rather than gestures.
	Frowning	May mean the listener is unhappy or uncomfortable with the discussion. Or it might just indicate concentration or trying to figure something out.	Relax while talking. Smile and/or nod while listening. Clarify using words rather than gestures. Explain why you are frowning.
	Grimacing	Usually a sign of displeasure or discomfort. But it may just be a normal expression.	Relax your face and smile if appropriate. If something caught you off guard, explain your reaction.
	Lip Biting	May feel confused, perplexed, or uncomfortable. Or may be trying to come up with an answer—real or phony.	Relax and smile. Admit your discomfort.
	Lip Pursing	Pursing or twisting lips to the side may indicate thinking or an attempt to hold back an angry comment.	Relax and smile. Admit your discomfort.

	GESTURE	WHAT IT CONVEYS	IF YOU'RE DOING IT
HEAD	Tilted Head	When gently tilted to either side, this indicates friendliness or receptivity. When lifted high, it may indicate aloofness, disagreement, or resistance to your authority.	Watch your head position. Tilt slightly right or left, and slightly forward, indicating your interest in what the person has to say.
	Shoulder Shrug	May signal resignation, uncertainty, or surrender.	Try to be more definitive in your communication.
ARMS AND HANDS	Squared Shoulders	Usually a sign of confidence and certainty, but may also be a sign of resistance.	Relax and smile. Don't use your body to force your point.
	Hunched Shoulders	May signal uncertainty or a cringing spirit.	Try to remain relaxed and confident. Remember that you are a child of God.
	Crossed Arms	May be a conscious or subconscious effort to put distance or an emotional barrier between the speaker and listener. May indicate rejection of the speaker or idea. Or may just be the most comfortable position.	Consciously relax your arms and lean forward slightly. Try for an open position with arms at your side or behind your back.
	Crossed Legs	May be a conscious or subconscious effort to put distance or an emotional barrier between the speaker and listener. May indicate rejection of the speaker or idea. Or may just be the most comfortable position.	Consciously relax your legs and lean forward slightly.
LEGS	Tapping Feet or Legs	Probably indicates nervousness at a conscious or subconscious level.	Try to keep your feet and legs still. Your tapping will make other participants nervous.
	Angle	People tend to angle toward those they like or agree with and away from those they dislike or disagree with.	Be sure you aren't distancing yourself from the one to which you're speaking.
POSTURE	Comfort Zone	Each culture has a comfort zone—the distance we place between ourselves. Pay attention to how the person responds and how close they are comfortable being.	Stay alert. If the other person backs up, you are too close; if they keep moving forward, they may want more closeness.
	Slouching	May indicate disrespect or a lack of interest. Or it may simply be an adapted position.	Stand or sit using good posture. Slouching can collapse the chest and make breathing more difficult, resulting in a feeling of nervousness.