

Reading Body Language



the goal

Body language is a form of communication that can either accentuate or override words. Students need to understand how to look at other people and determine what they are trying to communicate with their gestures, posture, facial expressions, proximity, and motions. They need to understand that messages are conveyed within all of these motions and gestures.

the objective



This exercise will help the students understand the importance of the messages people are sending through their body language.

exercise

- 1 Ask the students to describe how they communicate with other people.
- 2 Give the students the following scenario and ask them to demonstrate how they would communicate a message to a classmate.
- 3 Tell the students that they are on their way to class when they see smoke coming from under the door to the supply room. Ask the students to demonstrate how they would convey this message.
- 4 Ask the students to explain why they communicated the message in the manner they did? Are they likely to be taken seriously?

- 5 Explain to the students that the way a message is delivered is often more important than the words within the message.
- 6 Ask the students how they think it is possible to communicate without words, or is some other forms of communication more effective than words.
- 7 Explain to the students that body language can convey emotions, urgency, and interest.
- 8 Ask the students to think of as many different types of body language as they can. Make a list of each and be sure to include the following:
 - Eye Contact** – conveys attention and confidence or lack thereof
 - Facial Expressions** – conveys emotions and messages of acceptance or lack thereof
 - Gestures** – emphasizes expressions
 - Posture** – conveys openness or warns to maintain distance
 - Proximity** – indicator of comfort and familiarity
- 9 Talk with the students about each form of communication on the list. Ask them how these simple looks, gestures, stances, and positions can convey messages of anger, excitement, grief, jealousy, happiness, and fear.
- 10 Ask the students to draw a simple face and on this face convey the message of anger. Ask the students to defend their reasoning and explain each element of the drawing.
- 11 Ask the students to draw a simple face and on this face convey happiness. Ask the students to defend their reasoning and explain each element of the drawing.
- 12 Ask the students to draw two stick figures. Tell them to draw these two figures as if they did not like each other. Ask the students to defend their reasoning and explain each element of the drawing.
- 13 Finally, ask the students to draw a person who is obviously excited. Ask the students to defend their reasoning and explain each element of the drawing.

14 After the students have defended each drawing affirm for them that they do know how to read body language.

15 Now ask the students to identify the emotions you are conveying through the following facial expressions:

Happiness and Acceptance – Smile, make eye contact, and use open posture to convey acceptance

Anger – frown, furl the brow of your forehead, and cross your arms in a closed posture

Fear – open your eyes wide, make your mouth in the shape of an “O”, and bring your hand to your face as if covering it

Boredom – Half close your eyes, yawn, and stretch

16 Affirm for the students that they do have the ability to read the body language of another person. They just need to practice and understand why this is an important skill.

17 Explain to the students that they need to be able to read body language because people are constantly using it. It is important to know when someone is getting upset or angry because that person’s words may not be conveying that message.

18 Share the following with the students and ask them what they should do if they were Jack:

Jack and Leah are heading to Leah’s house after a first date. Jack has had a pretty good time, but Leah is not at all excited about Jack. Jack walks Leah to the door. As Leah walks up the sidewalk she keeps her arms folded and tries to keep a little distance between her and Jack. When they get to the door she continues to look at the ground as she turns to open the door and says, “Thanks for a nice time. Maybe I’ll see you later.” Leah never looks up at Jack as she enters the house shutting the door behind her..

19 Ask the students which of the following Jack should do:

- grab her arm, spin her around and kiss her
- call her the next day and ask for a second date
- punch the door and yell “thanks for nothing”
- go on about life and treat Leah as nice as any other friend

20 Ask the student to define the message Leah was sending. Was she interested in Jack? Would any advancement from Jack be wanted or appreciated?.

21 Explain to the students that Jack could potentially be embarrassed by not reading the signs Leah was sending because she could end up rejecting him in a much more vocal way. He could also get into trouble by forcing himself on her when she obviously isn't interested.

22 Remind the students that Leah said "Thanks for a nice time". Ask them if this means Leah was excited about the date and wanted a second one, or did it mean something else.

23 Point out that this is a simple demonstration of how words may not be the best indicator of the person's mood, intentions, or interests.

24 Now ask the students to think of people in their lives who tend to send body language messages. Ask them how they know:

- when a teacher is getting irritated
- when their mothers are mad
- when their friends are upset
- when a stranger could be dangerous
- when an acquaintance is jealous of someone else

Validate the student's' answers and talk with them about the importance of noticing, reading, and understanding the messages people are sending them.

summary

Communication is much more than simply hearing words. The students need to know and understand that they should be able to look at the messages another people are sending and determine those people's moods, intentions, and interests. They also need to understand that they are sending messages the same as everyone else and their body language message needs to be consistent with what they are saying..

outcomes

and hints



When giving the students the list of body language communicators, demonstrate each one making sure the students understands it before moving on.

As the students draw the examples of faces and figures ask them to explain each detail such as distance, eyes, facial expressions etc.

When using the story of Jack and Leah, talk with the students about how Jack's inability to read the messages Leah was sending could result in a bad consequence for Jack.

talking

points

- Talk with the students about how words are powerful, but they can be overridden by gestures and expressions.
- Talk with the students about why they should take notice of the messages people are sending.
- Talk with the students about how they send body language messages the same as anyone else.



probing

questions



- How can you tell if someone is angry even before they say anything? Why is this important?
- What does it say to other people when you will not look them in the eye and are instead constantly looking at the ground? Why?
- How can misinterpreting, or flat out not paying attention to, another person's body language get you in trouble?

Skills Lesson Recap



the goal

Body language is a form of communication that can either accentuate or override words. You learned how to look at other people and determine what they are trying to communicate with their gestures, posture, facial expressions, proximity, and motions. You learned that messages are conveyed within all of those motions and gestures.

exercise key points

- You described how you communicate with other people. You were then given a scenario and asked to explain how you would communicate the actions of this scenario to a classmate.
- Keeping in mind that the way you communicate a message is often more important than the words you use, you were asked to give examples of different types of body language.
- You used illustrations to give examples of different messages conveyed by body language by drawing pictures that represent various emotions. You then defended your drawings by explaining each element of the figure used to express the emotion.
- You identified people in your life who tend to send body language messages and explained how they do it. You then discussed the importance of noticing, reading, and understanding the messages people are sending you.

consequence of not

By ignoring what you are communicating with your body language, as well as the messages sent by other people's body language, you significantly reduce your ability to communicate effectively with others.

using this skill



benefits

of using this skill

Paying attention to what other people are attempting to communicate with their body language, as well as their spoken words, will allow you to gain a better understanding of what the entire message is that person is sending you.

Reading Body Language - part 1

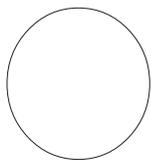
Describe how you communicate with other people.

Do you think it is possible to communicate without words, or for some other form of communication to be stronger than words? Why? _____

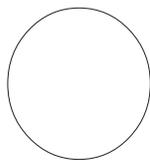
Make a list of each type of body language that you can.

TYPE OF BODY LANGUAGE	MESSAGES CONVEYED

Drawings: Use a simple drawing of a face to convey each of the following:



ANGER



HAPPINESS

Draw 2 stick figures in a way that clearly shows they dislike each other.

Draw a person who is obviously excited.

Student: _____ Facilitator: _____ Date: _____

Reading Body Language - part 2

Consider the following story:

Jack and Leah are heading to Leah's house after a first date. Jack has had a pretty good time, but Leah is not at all excited about Jack. Jack walks Leah to the door. As Leah walks up the sidewalk she keeps her arms folded and tries to keep a little distance between her and Jack. When they get to the door she continues to look at the ground as she turns to open the door and says, "Thanks for a nice time. Maybe I'll see you later." Leah never looks up at Jack as she enters the house shutting the door behind her.

Which of the following should Jack do? (circle one)

- grab her arm, spin her around and kiss her
- call her the next day and ask for a second date
- punch the door and yell, "Thanks for nothing"
- go on about life and treat Leah as nicely as any other friend

Define the message Leah was sending.

Was she interested in Jack? __Y __N Would any advancement from Jack be wanted or appreciated? __Y __N

Think of people in your life who tend to send body language messages. How do you know:

When the teacher is getting irritated: _____

When your mother is mad: _____

When your friend is upset: _____

When a stranger could be dangerous: _____

When an acquaintance is jealous of someone else: _____

Student: _____ Facilitator: _____ Date: _____