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Different forms of nonverbal communication

Non-verbal communication offers a forum for individuals of varying language skills to interact with each other. Without using words, individuals can convey information through observation, body gestures and facial expressions. Non-verbal activities can engage individuals prone to kinesthetic or dramatic movement, as well develop interpersonal skills between individuals who do not verbally interact. Best of all, non-verbal activities are fun, easy and require few resources to implement. Mix up a "follow the leader" game by changing leaders frequently, suggests the website [creativekidsathome.com](#). Choose the first leader, then let her initiate actions which the rest of the group must follow. However, she may designate the next leader, by eye contact or gesture. Changing leaders democratizes the game and also encourages players to observe an array of different leadership styles. Within a group of people, entangle your limbs, then try to unravel them, suggests Winona State University. If the group size warrants, divide the group into two smaller teams. Have each group sit in a tight circle, whereby they can extend their arms and grab hold of a person not directly seated beside them. You can become tangled at any speed that feels appropriate, but detangle carefully, to prevent injury. Refrain from speaking during the entire process, encouraging players to use gesture. Dramatize a text using just your hands, face and body gestures, recommends the website [teachingenglish.org.uk](#). For dialogues or conversations requiring multiple characters, let students work together to try to embody and convey the text. You should encourage observers to guess the content and context before using words to discuss the challenges the group faced and their specific intent. Divide the group into teams and challenge them to collaborate on drawings based on a specific idea or theme, recommends the website [businessballs.com](#). Keep a firm five-second time limit and cue each person to contribute to the drawing, then pass it on. Make sure all individuals contribute to the picture, then create a second image, changing the order of the contributors. Alternatively, you should request that teams exchange unfinished pictures or swap artists mid-way through the process. What people don't say can be just as important as what they do say. Words are just one form of communication. Facial expressions, body language or style of clothing are other critical components in communication, called nonverbal communication. This type of "language" goes beyond words. According to Gareth R. Jones and Jennifer M. George's book, Contemporary Management, nonverbal communication is "the encoding of messages by means of facial expressions, body language, and styles of dress." According to Walter Mischel, Yuichi Shoda, and Ronald E. Smith's book, Introduction to Personality, people can look at other's faces and naturally obtain information about "happiness, surprise, fear, anger, disgust/contempt, interest and sadness." It does not take special training to recognize basic forms of nonverbal communication. However, it may take more extensive training to become self aware of how you are portraying your nonverbal communication to others. A congruence between verbal and nonverbal communication can ensure that a common understanding has been established, such as a genuine smile that accompanies a positive agreement with another person. However, people can also inadvertently express nonverbal communication that contradicts their verbal communication. People tend to have less control over their nonverbal communication. For example, an attempted positive agreement may reveal underlying discontent through a grimace. Body language and facial expression can reveal underlying emotions, such as love and hate. For example, according to a British Broadcasting Corporation report, crossing arms and legs while standing can be interpreted as a defensive gesture that implies a person wants to be left alone. However, when seated, this can represent empathy or sympathy. Feet also can signal attraction when your feet are pointing toward a romantic prospect. Eyes have commonly been said to be "the window to the soul." When someone is attracted to another person, he maintains eye contact longer and the pupils dilate. Disgust universally is expressed by wrinkling up noses and raising the upper lip. When people say that someone is making a "fashion statement," this is true in terms of nonverbal communication. Examples of styles of dress are casual, formal, conservative and trendy. Style of dress as a form of nonverbal communication is evident in the top corporate managers. According to Jones and George, for example, "top managers in General Motors wear slacks and sports jackets rather than suits to communicate or signal that GM's old bureaucracy has been dismantled and that the company is decentralized and more informal than it used to be." There is a trend toward increasing workforce empowerment, so managers dress informally to communicate that employees are a team and not part of a hierarchy. Does this scenario seem familiar? You're talking to a friend about an upcoming social event and you don't want to tell him you're skipping it. You tell him how great it's going to be and that you'll definitely be there. At the end of your conversation, your friend says, "So you aren't going to be there, are you?" You did your best to convey interest. You even explicitly said the words, yet your friend saw right through you. What happened here is a great example of nonverbal communication, or metacommunication. You probably didn't realize it, but while you were talking, it's likely your eye contact, body language and perhaps even the tone and inflection in your voice changed. All of these nonverbal clues told your friend to question the words you were saying. This is an example of how nonverbal cues can give away a fib and work against you. But there are also ways the same nonverbal "language" can be an effective communication tool and work in your favor. Over the years, linguists, sociologists and other researchers have conducted a great deal of research on nonverbal communication. Many of these studies indicate that the actual words we use play a very small role in how we communicate. What really gets a message across are facial expressions, hand gestures, posture, voice and eye contact. Even touch and the amount of personal space you allow or insist upon play a part in how you communicate with someone. To consider how effective metacommunication can be, let's look at a few scenarios. Consider the human face. Expressions like scowls, smiles, looks of shock, surprise and rage are almost completely cross-cultural. You can be dropped in most any part of the world without the benefit of knowing the language and communicate basic thoughts and feelings through facial expressions and hand gestures. Think about how important tone and inflection are in a conversation. You can convey several different meanings for the same sentence by merely emphasizing different words. Sarcasm is a great example of using inflection as a nonverbal cue. Even silence is a form of metacommunication. Remaining silent can be an effective way to get someone to reveal something. A constant, intense stare can be more intimidating than angry words. Maintaining good eye contact says more about your interest in a conversation than insisting (with words) that you're listening. A firm handshake was once the measure of a man in some circles, and a gentle touch can be much more comforting to someone than a sincere statement of empathy. These are just a few examples of nonverbal cues humans use every day to effectively communicate something. An infinite amount of nonverbal nuances impact how what we say is perceived. In some cases, perhaps we don't need words at all. Let's say that you're traveling to a country where you don't speak the language. You didn't have time to pick up a dictionary or a book of common phrases, so you'll have to get around using only hand gestures. At a restaurant, you try to indicate which dishes you'd like by nodding or giving the server a thumbs-up, but all you get is the opposite of what you wanted and an offended look. No one will look you in the eye, and one person seemed downright affronted by your attempts to point out on a map where you'd like to go. What gives? We may think that nonverbal communication is universal, but it's not. Every culture interprets body language, gestures, posture and carriage, vocal noises (like shrieks and grunts), and degree of eye contact differently. In the example above, the poor traveler might have expected that nodding his or her head up and down would indicate yes, but in some countries, it means just the opposite. In the Middle East, nodding the head down indicates agreement, while nodding it up is a sign of disagreement; in Japan, a up-and-down nod might just be a signal that someone is listening [source: Wang, Li]. The thumbs-up signal is vulgar in Iran. The "OK" signal made by forming a circle with the thumb and forefinger refers to money in some countries, while in others it's an extremely offensive reference to a private body part. Point with the wrong finger, or with anything less than your entire hand, and you risk offending somebody, and while some cultures value eye contact as a sign of respect, averting your eyes may be the sign of respect in others. The list goes on and on: Some countries consider a handshake rude, and it's always rude to hand an object to another person with your left hand in the Middle East -- after all, that hand is reserved for matters of personal hygiene. While burping after a meal is considered the height of uncouthness here in the U.S., a hearty belch is a sign of appreciation for the cook in India. In some places, people value a certain degree of personal space in conversation, while those from the Middle East might get right up in your face when they want to converse. In Latin America, it's expected that you'll get very touchy-feely with both strangers and friends -- perhaps exchanging a hearty embrace -- whereas in the U.S., such contact might be considered sexual. And restrain the desire to pat a child on the head in Asia; there's a belief that such a touch would damage the child's soul. Facial expressions might be the only form of nonverbal communication that could be considered universal. It was Charles Darwin who first proposed that all cultures express emotions the same way with their faces, a hypothesis that was supported by laboratory studies in the 1960s. Researchers determined that there are six universal facial expressions: anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness and surprise [source: Matsumoto]. In more recent years, other researchers have argued that looks of contempt and embarrassment may also constitute universal expressions. No matter where you are, it seems, you must remember that your body is always saying something, even when you're not speaking. Nonverbal communication is a natural way of communicating through body language -- from your face, to your feet. 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