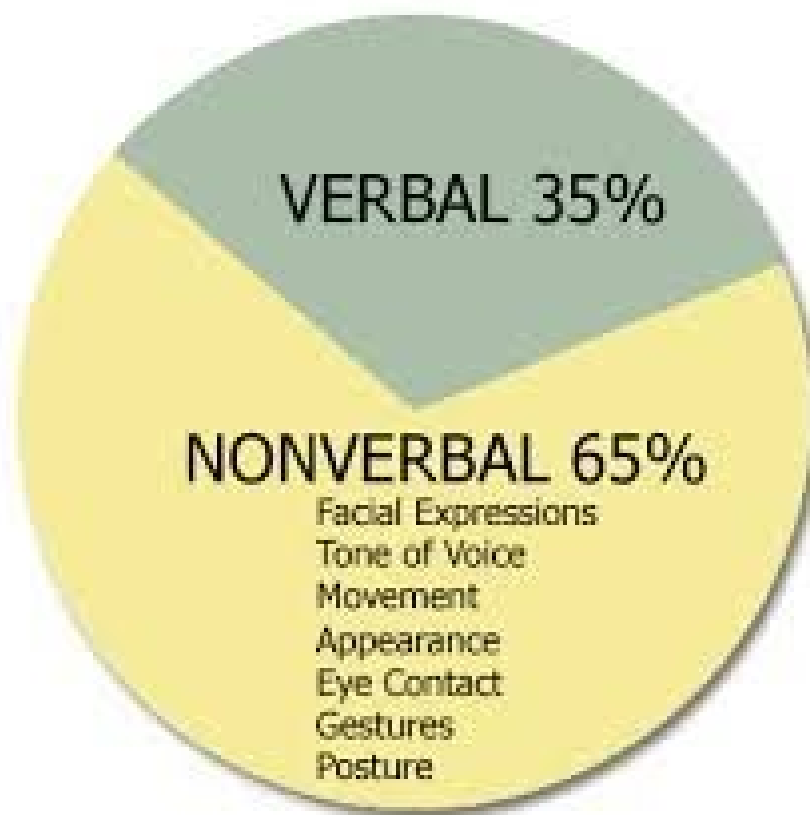


Non Verbal Communication

YouthZone Life Skills

When we think of communication, we most often think primarily about words and how we use them. The order, complexity and precision of words. What we often fail to consider is how much of our communication takes place silently or without actual language. In reality, verbal communication makes up only about a third of our communication.



The more aware you can be of how you are communicating to the world, the better you will be able to communicate your needs and goals.

Facial expressions

Of all the different communication forms that are nonverbal, this might be the most prominent. It is also one that has a universal understanding. Any people or culture can understand a simple smile or frown.

Different cultures may have some variations on how facial expressions are interpreted, but the core emotions shown through the face are universal. A smile is the same no matter where you are in the world. If you frown in Moscow, it's understood the same way if you were to frown in Glenwood Springs.

The face can not hide a sense of joy or concern, and all people share these strong emotions. Seeing a small child's face fill with a sense of wonder and joy can be understood across any age and culture. Facial expressions can convey our many feelings without having to say a thing.

Gestures

Gestures are unlike facial expressions as they are subject to greater influence by the culture. For example, holding up a peace sign backwards in England is the equivalent of showing someone your middle finger in the United States. And while a thumbs up in much of the world is good, in some parts it can be insulting. A wave in West Africa could mean come here. Showing the bottom of your feet in much of Asia is seen as a very serious insult.

Despite gestures having different meanings in different cultures, all cultures have their own set of gestures that are central to everyday communication.

Paralinguistics

Paralinguistics aren't what you say, but more *how* you say it. Like gestures, the volume, inflection, and pitch change meaning with different languages but are central to how we communicate. Think of how much harder it is to understand what someone means through text than it is over the phone. How we emphasize how we are feeling and it can be as important as the words we use.

The sentence,

I never said she stole my money

has seven different meanings depending on which word is being emphasized. Try it, read the sentence seven times out loud, each time put a different word.

Notice *how* you put emphasis on different words. How did your voice change? Did the pitch go up or down?

Body Language

The way you present yourself with your body may communicate more about you than you could ever do with words. Simple things like your posture give insights into how you're feeling and the impression you want to convey. Someone who stands tall with their hands visible conveys openness. Whereas someone who is slouching their shoulders and hiding their hands behind their back or in their pockets conveys to the other person that they are perhaps hiding something and will be viewed with greater distrust.

Personal hygiene plays a crucial role in how you are perceived by the world. Unfair or not, if someone smells bad, is wearing dirty clothing, has dirt under their nails or some other obvious sign of lax hygiene, people will subconsciously judge negatively and will be less receptive of what that person wants to communicate.

Body language is used by law enforcement as a window into someone's inner thoughts and intentions. Watch the first ten minutes of this video [Former FBI Agent Explains How to Read Body Language](#) You can also search for “Tradecraft body language video” on wired.com. Feel free to watch the whole movie, if you like.

Answer the following questions:

What is the pinocchio effect?

What is the importance of a handshake?

What are the body language myths that are busted in this video?

Proxemics

This might be an unfamiliar word, but you probably know it better as ‘personal space’. Everyone has their own preference as to how comfortable they are when people get close to them. This is a form of nonverbal communication that may work better than words. The distance you are comfortable standing to someone else is heavily influenced by culture. Most people of any given culture agree on the appropriate distance to stand apart when speaking to someone. So while the diagram below is appropriate in the United States, it would seem too small in much of the world.

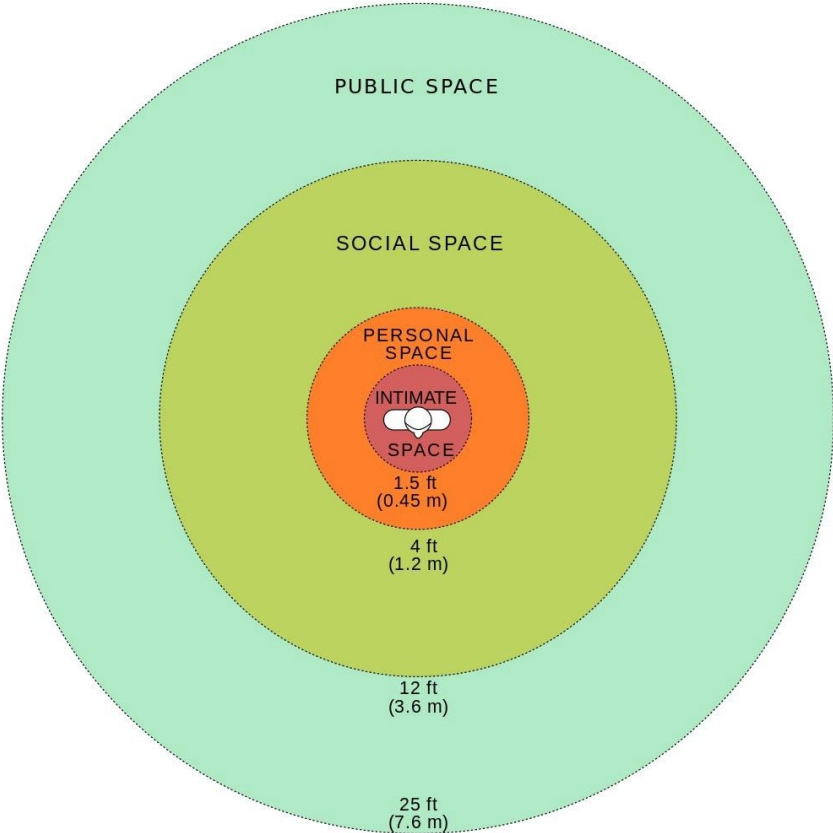
Standing too close to someone may bring on feelings of discomfort. If someone comes into the personal space sphere, it can be read as a threat, often subconsciously. If a person feels uncomfortable, they will often take a small step back to enter the social distance space. Even the difference of a few inches can change the dynamic. You can also see this with people speaking to groups: they may have to move back a little from everyone and this is the way they convey the space level they need to feel comfortable.

Look at the diagram below.

How does this compare to your feelings of space?

Our personal space has changed drastically in 2020, how has this affected you?

Do you think we will resume the eighteen inches we used to be comfortable with when the pandemic has passed?



Eye Contact

Eye contact is another form of communication that is nonverbal and universal. Keeping eye contact with someone shows that you are engaged and interested while not maintaining it shows the opposite. When speaking, people look for clues that what they are saying is being received and eye contact communicates that along with confidence and trustworthiness.

Like personal space, we have an intuitive understanding of how long a gaze should last and we subconsciously interpret the eye contact accordingly. If someone holds the gaze for too long, it can be read as a threat or dominance. If they break the eye contact too soon, the person can be perceived as being evasive and untrustworthy.

Communicating Through Touch

We also know this as '*haptics*' and it can be a way to share warmth with another person. A soft touch can convey more in a brief second than 100 words. A gentle touch from another person may stay with you for a long time. Nothing needs to be said, but we can share everything in that one touch.

We as humans require physical contact, not only to boost our mood but for reassurance and security. Appropriate touch is a basic human requirement and a very important part of communicating.

We touch to share love, affection, and familiarity. Touch is used to comfort others and to communicate how we are feeling while saying nothing. We can use even the simple act of a handshake to connect and bond with another person.

Conclusion

Non-verbal communication is far more valuable than it is usually given credit. Think of this information in the coming days and weeks and observe how you respond to the non-verbal communication of others as well as how people respond to you. Once you get a handle on it, you can modify your behavior in ways that will encourage people to be more open to your ideas and plans. As the poet Maya Angelou said,

People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people
will never forget how you made them feel.

Please answer the questions on the following page

Define the Following Words:

Paralinguistics

Haptic

Dynamic

Subconscious

Intuitive

Write about a time when someone communicated something to you without saying a word:

Write about a time when there was a miscommunication due to non-verbal communication. How was it resolved?

How are gestures and facial expressions different in the way they are affected by culture?