

Body Language 54

Doubt

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The physical manifestations of doubt are pretty easy to spot. We have a special way of contorting our face and upper torso to convey the message.

This kind of analysis is very much culturally specific, as are many body language gestures. This article is focused on facial and upper torso expressions in a Western Society.

We need to pay close attention when we see signs of doubt, because it has a direct impact on the trust between people. I will describe some tips to use at the end of this article.

While the facial postures below may be observed in association with various other emotions in some circumstances, these are the ones that are typically involved with an expression of doubt. When you see many of these gestures at the same time, it sends a strong message conveying doubt by the person doing them.

Eyebrows

Typically, you will see one eyebrow up and the other normal or slightly down (if the doubt has a tinge of anger associated with it). Sometimes both eyebrows can be raised at the same time. That would normally signal surprise along with doubt.

If both eyebrows are down and furrowed, that indicates anger or frustration with some amount of doubt.

Forehead

The forehead of a person who is experiencing doubt will often be wrinkled, especially if the eyebrows are raised.

Head Tilted

Usually the head will be slightly tilted for a person who is experiencing doubt. The gesture goes along with a pondering stance that suggests analysis on the part of the

person with feelings of doubt. You will rarely see a doubtful person with a completely erect head.

Eyes

For a person who is experiencing doubt, the eyes are usually looking to the side, and often upward. The connotation is that the person is trying to reason something but cannot reconcile it in his or her mind. The eyes looking sideways and upward indicate mental activity trying to rationalize what is going on.

Nose

The nose is neutral when a person is in doubt. For example, you will not see a person wrinkle his nose as part of this gesture. If you see that, the other person is likely experiencing some form of disgust along with the doubt.

Mouth

There is a lot going on with the mouth for a person in doubt. Most likely you will see the mouth pulled slightly to one side. The mouth may be open, showing teeth, or completely closed. If the upper lip is curled up, then the doubt is usually accompanied by some disgust or distrust.

The corners of the mouth may be down as a sign of bewilderment or negative feelings about what is going on.

Chin

If the doubt is a part of puzzlement, then the chin is often stroked or grabbed by one hand.

Hands

Sometimes you can see the hands held up with palms up to either side of the body. The connotation there is “what the heck is going on?”

The gestures associated with doubt are numerous and usually easy to decode. Look for a cluster of the ones mentioned above. When you see it in a Western Society, you can be pretty sure the person is having feelings of doubt.

What to do

If you see this cluster of gestures, do not just ignore it. Instead, try to gently understand the genesis of the concern. Ask open-ended questions that will give the other person a

safe way to describe what is bothering him or her. Listen carefully to the response, and do not try to correct the person on the spot.

Ponder the input and see if you can create a helpful discussion about what alternative approaches might have led to a different outcome. Thank the person sincerely for sharing some insight about what you did that you might not have known otherwise.

These sincere opportunities for closure can go a long way toward making a large trust deposit with the other person. Congratulations! You took a negative situation and turned it into a trust-building moment between you and the other person.

This is a part in a series of articles on "Body Language" by Bob Whipple "The Trust Ambassador."