

Reducing Conflict 81 Body Language

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One way to reduce conflict between people and groups is to observe the body language. We communicate much more with our body language than we do with the words we utter. Pay attention, and you can get vital information before people boil over.

My long history with body language

I have studied body language in the work setting since my wife bought me the book *How to Read a Person Like a Book* by Nierenberg and Calero in the late 1970s. In 2020 I wrote a series of 100 articles on observations about body language. If you would like to browse the topics, here is an index with links to use.

<https://thetrustambassador.com/2020/11/15/body-language-100-final-thoughts-and-index/>

Once you become adept at reading body language and controlling your own, you can reduce conflict in your world. We will explore some of the points to look for in this brief article.

The role of facial expression in body language

You can get most of the information you need by just observing facial expressions. Be alert for changes in expression. If a person normally has a pleasant expression but switches to a scowl after something you just said, that is a signal.

The eyebrows tell much of the story. A raised eyebrow signals skepticism while a furrowed brow indicates irritation.

Another facial feature to look for is a clenched jaw. You can see the muscles on the side of the face start to bulge out when the other person is getting upset. This is often accompanied by a slight reddening of the skin tone around the jaw.

Watch the hand gestures

When hand gestures switch from open hands with palms up to rigid fists, the person is getting ready for a fight. Another telltale sign is when people start pointing at each other. Again, the important thing is to look for stimulus and response.

A change is rather easy to pick up. You want to cool things down while there is still some level of control. Often a [Socratic Question](#) can get to the root of the irritation. You need to use questions with judgment to not pour gasoline on the flame.

Make sure your tone of voice is calm and soothing. If you deliver your comments with an edgy tone, you will deepen rather than reduce the conflict.

Be alert for body stiffness

When we change state to one of more irritation, we usually stiffen up our spine. This rigidity is often accompanied with some arm gestures like folding of the arms. When you see this kind of change, you should suspect something negative is happening with the person.

These are the common changes that go along with enhanced agitation

There are many other signals to look for as well. I like to view clusters of signals. If you see many different signs that are all pointing in the same direction, you can be more sure. Look into the source of agitation, but do so in a loving and gentle way. That way you can de-escalate the conflict in that situation.

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