

Nonverbal communication is the unspoken language of love that conveys safety, interest and understanding. In communication that is both sent and received nonverbally, we present ourselves to others and communicate our ability to recognize their individuality. Behavior – rather than words – makes those we care for feel cared for.

Nonverbal behavior is expressed and experienced by:

- * what we absorb that informs us about the other – the wordless signals that enable us to recognize and respond to the unique qualities and needs in another

- * what we do – the way we look at someone, speak to or listen to the other

- * what we don't do – the absence of tender gazes, gently delivered words or rapt attention

- * when we act – the timing of our actions (for example, general tenderness or only under special conditions)

- * how we act – our level of self awareness, degree of focus, state of inner balance and the authenticity of our emotions

- * why we act – whether our actions are on our own behalf, on behalf of the other, or in the interests of both?

These elements will produce a sense of trust, excitement and desire for closeness – or they will generate fear, confusion, distrust and disinterest.

Nonverbal communication is emotionally-driven communication that answers the questions: “Are you listening?” and “Do you understand and care?” Answers to these questions are expressed in the way we talk, listen, look, move and react.

Regardless of the nature of our upbringing, the most influential factors in sending and receiving nonverbal communication are:

* eye contact – the visual sense is dominant for most people and therefore especially important in nonverbal communication. Is this source of contact missing, too intense or just right?

* facial expression – universal facial expressions signify anger, fear, sadness, joy and disgust. What is the face we show loved ones? Is it mask-like and unexpressive, or emotionally intense and filled with interest?

* tone of voice – the sound of the voice conveys moment to moment emotional experience. What is the resonant sound of our voice? Does our voice project warmth, confidence and delight or is it strained and blocked?

* posture – the pose, stance and bearing described by the way we sit, slouch, stand, lean, bend, hold and move our bodies in space. Do our bodies look stiff and immobile or relaxed? Are shoulders tense and raised or slightly sloped? Are abdomens tight or is there a little roundness to our bellies that indicates we are breathing deeply?

* touch – finger pressure, grip and hugs that feel good to us and feel good to the other person. What “feels good” is relative; some prefer strong pressure, others light pressure. Do we know the difference between what we like and what the other person likes?

* intensity – a reflection of the amount of energy we project. Are we flat or so cool we seem disinterested, or are we over the top and melodramatic? Again, this has as much to do with what feels good to the other person as what we personally prefer.

* timing and pace – a reflection of the ability to be a good listener and communicate interest and involvement. What happens when someone we care about makes an important statement? Does a response – not necessarily verbal – come too quickly or too slowly? Is there an easy flow of information back and forth?

* sounds that convey understanding – sounds such as “ahhh, ummm, ohhh,” uttered with congruent eye and facial gestures, communicate understanding and emotional connection. More than words, these sounds are the language of compassion and love.

Together these nonverbal signals communicate our interest and investment in others.

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