

# 1.10 Body Language

## Aim

- To understand the importance of Body Language in communication
- To teach good manners and grooming - an essential part of being a good communicator.

## Procedure

- Ask for four volunteers from the group and have them seated on the four sides of the teacher's table. Assign a chairperson, secretary, member and treasurer.
- Assume that this is a student committee that represents all the students in the college pre-novitiate.
- Mention a contentious issue that has been going on lately around campus and ask them to discuss it with the aim of coming up with a uniform stand of the direction ahead. E.g. Disappearance of books from library, first-comers finish up 'good food'.
- Have the other class members write down the body language they observe from the volunteers as they go along discussing this issue.
- Before they come up with a consensus, ask the class members to state which committee member will be satisfied with the final decision and which members won't, based on their observations.
- Next, ask the class members to state which key signs gave them a clue as to which group member will be satisfied with the final decision and which ones will not.
- Invite the participants to list the most common body language signals they encounter in daily life.
- Invite them to share their lists. Make sure they demonstrate the gestures they have listed.

## Input

- Whenever we talk to or come across someone, either an acquaintance or an unknown person, we communicate with the person through numerous gestures.
- These gestures reflect our mental state of how we are feeling or observing things. If we are not in a good mood or are a little desperate, we become rather irritated and give out defensive gestures. When happy, we feel rather relaxed and active. Our mood predominantly controls most of our body gestures and signals.
- Even the people we meet try to read our gestures. And, what they think of our personality is reflected through their remarks like, "You are looking smart today," or, "Has anything wrong happened?" or "Hey! Whom are you going to kill today?" This particular ability to read others' gestures is acquired through experience.
- When we call someone perceptive 'intuitive', we basically refer to his or her ability to read another person's gestures. Women are generally more perceptive than men, perhaps because of the inherent maternal instinct in them, which gives them the ability to understand the non-verbal cues of their children.
- The different codes of non-verbal communication may be listed as follows:
  1. Bodily contact/ Haptics: Touch is an important ingredient in the transmitting of information, especially in the young when other channels of communication such as speech are undeveloped. In most societies touching begins to diminish as one reaches adulthood. As an adult, touch especially between members of the opposite sex is often seen as a sexual indicator unless applied by validated 'touchers' such as doctors, tailors and hair dressers. In moments when words fail us or when words are not necessary such as in illness, stress, grief or great happiness, touching becomes more necessary and acceptable. Touching communicates reassurance, affection, friendship, courage-giving, support, sharing, understanding, invitation, desire, etc...
  2. Proximity/Proxemics: Spatial relationships are also an important part of body language. It is the analysis of space as a dimension of nonverbal communication. Within three feet is intimate, up to about eight feet is personal; over this distance is semi-public or social. The proximity between two communicators will differ according to the nature of the message and according to the variety of cultural and class factors. Proxemics also extend

## Materials Required

- Copies of the Input
- 4 Volunteers



to the way we allocate space to those extensions of ourselves such as our rooms, houses, towns, cities and the manner in which we occupy these extensions. Thus the way we dress, the way we keep the space we occupy say as much about us than our bodies and the way we behave do.

3. Chronemics: The time spent in relating to another is also important to body communication. We usually have plenty of time for those we love but hardly any for those we do not. We have scheduled time and pre-arranged time for business relations.
  4. Orientation: How we angle ourselves to others can say a lot about our relationship with them.
  5. Appearance: Our dress sense may tell people about our lifestyle and status in society, but it also reveals much about the attitudes and values we live by. Not all dress codes are acceptable everywhere. Where emphasis on roles is more important than individuality, uniform dress codes are maintained.
  6. Head nods: Each of us has a very unique way we use our head - to indicate 'yes' or 'no', to emphasis what we are saying, to plead, to draw attention, etc.
  7. Facial expressions: They include eye signals and smiling gestures. All in all, facial expressions are too numerous to outline within the space of this book. Please refer to a book on body language. A book I would recommend is 'The art of reading gestures and postures' by Pustak Mahal. It is available at the Catholic Bookshop- Nairobi.
  8. Gestures/ Kinesics: Gestures include smiling gestures, hand-and-arm gestures, overall body gestures and courtship gestures. Read more about gestures from the book: The art of reading gestures and postures by Pustak Mahal.
  9. Posture: How one carries oneself communicates much about one's self-perception and attitude to life.
  10. Eye-movement/ Oculesics: Since long we have been describing eyes in different ways as per their appearance. Some of these descriptions are: 'She has beautiful eyes' 'He has big baby eyes' and 'He has evil eyes'. When we describe eyes in this way, we are basically talking about a person's pupils or gaze behaviour. When a person is excited, his/her pupils dilate to four times the normal size but when one is angry, the pupils contract sharply. An old saying goes 'Look a person in the eye when you talk to him'. So, when you are negotiating or communicating with others, better look into the pupils, as they can tell you about the feeling of the person.
  11. Para-linguistic: Vocal, non-verbal utterances also carry meaning. Some examples include: whispering, shouting, sighing, grunting, etc...
  12. Para-language may also be added here, although it is proper to language. It conveys emotions, such as sarcasm, disgust, humour, stress, to name but a few.
- There are many genetic, learned and cultural signs through which we communicate with others. Some expressions like smiling, crying, shouting and weeping are considered inborn or genetic signals. These are common in all the primates. Likewise, some gestures like crossing our arms on our chest are also genetic signals. Still, much confusion prevails regarding the origin of some basic gestures-whether these are genetic or cultural or learned. For instance, most men put the coat first on their right arm, while women put it on their left. Similarly, when a man walks in a crowded corridor and passes by a woman, he usually turns his body towards her, while she turns her body away from him.
  - The amount of body communication in different cultures varies considerably in range, emphasis, frequency and meaning. In Western cultures, raising the forehead shows that someone doubts something the communicator has said. In East Africa, it simply means yes. Beating the top of the left fist with the right open hand has an obscene meaning in Germany. In Luganda, it simply means full or filled. Establishing and maintaining eye contact is considered very important in Western speech but the possibility of establishing eye contact depends on the hierarchical position of the person in Africa. If the person is in a low tribal/social position, he/she is not allowed to establish eye contact with somebody who is superior. This feature of social hierarchy is often encountered among children and women.

## Review

1. Our gestures at any one time reflect our mental state of how we are feeling or observing things.
2. The different codes of non-verbal communication are:
  - \* Bodily contact/ Haptics
  - \* Proximity/ Proximics
  - \* Chronemics
  - \* Orientation
  - \* Appearance
  - \* Head nods
  - \* Gestures/ Kinesics
  - \* Posture
  - \* Eye-movement/ Oculesics
  - \* Para-linguistic
  - \* Para-language
3. Expressions like smiling, crying, shouting and weeping are considered inborn or genetic signals. These are common in all the primates. Some gestures like crossing our arms on our chest are also genetic signals.
4. Establishing and maintaining eye contact is considered very important in Western speech but the possibility of establishing eye contact depends on the hierarchical position of the person in Africa.

## Reflection

Body-language is said to be 80% body-language. As a religious, what you say and do will largely be interpreted through your body-language. Therefore, reflect on your inner attitudes about the people you minister to and attempt to align them to what Jesus will have you think about them.

## Relevant Skills

Observe people talking from a distance e.g. from a field, and try to suggest the relationship between them depending on their body language e.g. distance between them, their reactions as they speak etc.

## Resources

BOSCOM-INDIA. 'SHEPHERDS' FOR AN INFORMATION AGE. Matunga: Tej Prasarini, 2000.

## References

<http://www.establishyourselfny.com>

<http://www.expertvillage.com>

<http://www.norvax.com>

