

Body Language

How do humans and other animals communicate with each other? Of course, humans communicate verbally by talking and making other sounds like laughing. Most other mammals also communicate by making sounds as well. Sophisticated intelligent mammals, especially dolphins and whales, possess well-developed verbal skills and communicate with high pitched sounds that carry through the water. Researchers are actively working on deciphering and interpreting these sounds in order to understand dolphin and whale language.



Verbal communication is accompanied by non-verbal body language that also conveys meaning and emotion. Body language includes facial expression, posture, position of the arms and many other cues that help in understanding the meaning of verbal communication. In the absence of verbal communication body language can be sufficient to convey meaning. Sometimes merely a stern look from Mom or Dad or a teacher lets you know that you are not behaving properly; no words are necessary!

Compare these two scenes. Your brother hides a rubber snake under the covers of your bed. Smiling, you toss it at him and say, "I hate you!" In scene two, shaking with rage, you hurl it at him and yell, "I hate you!" In these two scenes the verbal communication, the words spoken, is identical but the body language is entirely different. It's easy to see from these two cases how important non-verbal body language is in how verbal communication is interpreted by someone else. The best actors not only speak well but also use subtle changes in facial expression and overall body language when portraying a character to make the character real.

Some body language is a result of automatic body responses. For example, people automatically react to an unexpected loud noise. Successful people are aware of their body language and its effect on others. As a result, they learn to control their body language. Have you heard the term "poker face?" Good poker players control their facial expression and other body language so their opponents have no idea whether they have a winning hand or are just bluffing.