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81. Nonverbal Communication

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Introduction: Nonverbal communication is behavior, other than spoken or written communication, that creates or represents meaning. In other words, it includes facial expressions, body movements, and gestures. Nonverbal communication is talking without speaking a word. It is very effective, maybe even more so than speech. Remember the saying, “Actions speak louder than words.”

Resources and methods: Nonverbal communication researchers have investigated by such professors as Norman Miller, Julius Fast, T. Van Dyke.

Results: There are two main types of nonverbal communication. *Body language* is the first. Body language is body movements that depend on a person's attitude or feelings. Body language includes the way people walk, how they stand, and their facial features. In other words, any kind of meaning that is shown by a person's body attitude or movements. For example, when a boy is sad he may droop his head and walk slowly. Or, if a girl is happy, she might run and jump or stand up straight and put her hands in the air. People don't have to say anything to show how they feel about things. The color of people's skin may even show how they feel. For example, if people with light colored skin get embarrassed, their skin may turn red, or if they are worried, they might get pale. Body language can be voluntary (on purpose) or involuntary (a person can't help it). An interesting fact is that blind children will smile when happy even though they have never seen a smile.

The next main type of nonverbal communication is *gestures*. Gestures are communications like facial expressions, hand signals, eye gazing, and body postures. Examples include smiles, handshakes, waving, and raising certain fingers to say something. For instance, if you saw a friend at a noisy carnival, you might smile and wave at your friend. You might also point at the Ferris wheel if you wanted to meet your friend there. You could do all of these things without saying a word. Another great example is in baseball when the catcher signals to the pitcher the kind of pitch to use for the batter that is up.

There are three main uses of nonverbal communication. People often use allow them every day. The first use is for *greetings*. Greetings include waves, handshakes, hugs and salutes. For example, when you see your friends in the morning on the way to school, you may wave to them. A more formal greeting would be shaking hands with your boss at work. The salute is used in the armed forces when you see a person of a higher rank than you.

The next use is for *specific communication*. For example, workers may use signals at their jobs. One important use is in construction when a worker signals to a crane operator to keep everyone safe. These signals are very specific and tell the operator to move left, right, or raise and lower the hook. Another very important use is sign language. This form of communication is used for people who have hearing problems. They use hand signals and lip reading to communicate very specific things.

The third use is *involuntary nonverbal communication*. These are movements and attitudes that show how people feel. Most times, people don't even know they're communicating when they make these actions, because these actions are automatic. For example, a slumped posture may mean that the person is sad.

Expressions and gestures are not the same around the world. Some gestures, like the "thumbs up," which is a positive gesture in the United States, may mean something very different in other cultures. In Nigeria, the thumbs up gesture is a rude insult! In Australia it is an obscene insult. Another funny example is spinning your finger around your ear. This is known as the "you're crazy" sign in America and in some other nations. But in Argentina, it means "you have a phone call!"

Another gesture that can be taken completely differently depending upon where you live is nodding the head. In most parts of the world, it is a positive or "yes" gesture. In Bulgaria, and parts of Greece and the Middle East, it means no. It is important that government leaders know about these things. It could be bad if a president offended the leader of another nation because of a gesture that was misunderstood. At least an embarrassed smile will be understood between people from other countries.

Conclusions: Not all gestures and body language are for positive communication. One example of this is gang symbols. These are nonverbal communications that may tell something about whether or not someone is in a gang or lives in a certain area where some gangs are. For example, the way a person wears their shirt or how a cap is worn (like to the

left or right side) may tell others that the person is in a certain gang. The color of their clothes may mean something as well. Another communication that is used by gangs is special hand signs. These signs are used by one person to show another person that they are in a certain gang. These signs can be a threat sign to someone in a different or enemy gang.

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