

# Understanding **CONFLICT**

# Non-verbal communication

## Objective

- Understand how non-verbal communication can be interpreted differently and how that can affect a conflict situation.

## Audience

High school and above

## Time

20 minutes

## Supplies needed

- Copies of the non-verbal cues, cut into strips (on next page)

## Source

Ruth Perlstein, and Gloria Thrall. 1996. *Ready-to-use conflict resolution activities for secondary students*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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## Background

**C**ommunication plays a key role in life, and the same can be said for conflict situations.

But how much of communication is actually said, and how much of it is unspoken? It's been said that 90% of communication is non-verbal. Therefore, non-verbal communication can play a major role in a conflict.

It's important to consider non-verbal communication when dealing with a conflict situation because it is true that what you don't say can speak louder than what you are trying to say out loud.

We will explore the basics of non-verbal communication and raise awareness of what mixed messages your non-verbal signals might be sending and how that can contribute to a conflict situation.

## What to do

### Activity 1: Reading non-verbal cues

1. Break the group into small groups (3-4 people maximum per group).
2. Give each group slips of paper with the following actions printed on each (on next page):
  - Drumming fingers on a desk
  - Leaning forward in a chair
  - Crossing arms tightly
  - Pointing a finger at you
  - Shrugging shoulders
  - Lowering eyes when spoken to
  - Pulling at ears or hair
  - Slapping one's forehead with the heel of your hand
3. Have participants in each group take turns acting out the actions (actor should not speak). While the actor is portraying the action on the card, the others in the group should be trying to interpret the feeling behind the body language.
4. Processing: (discuss in the large group)
  - What was it like trying to identify the specific emotion the actors were trying to portray?
  - Was it difficult at times to figure out what they were portraying?
  - Did people come up with different feelings/ emotions than the actor was trying to display?
  - Actors: After you read the non-verbal cue, was there a particular feeling you were trying to portray? Did the non-actors correctly identify the same feeling as you? Did they guess something different?
  - Were any of their guesses off by a long shot? Or were their interpretations fairly close? Any examples of large discrepancies?



# Reading non-verbal cues

## Activity 2: Reading non-verbal expressions

1. Select a few minutes of your favorite T.V. show, movie, or a few photographs to share with the group.
2. If it is a video clip, show the clip on mute to the group. If photographs, just share them with the groups, not providing any background of what is happening in the photos.
3. Processing (in large group):
  - What emotions were they trying to show?
  - What non-verbals did you pick up from their expressions?
  - Was it difficult at times to figure out what they were trying to portray?
  - Was there a lot of variation within the larger group of what emotions were being displayed?
  - How can the varying perceptions of emotions contribute to a conflict situation?

## Summary

**N**ot everything that contributes to a conflict is from verbal communication. A lot of what could cause the conflict is non-verbal communication. Many people perceive non-verbals differently, which can add to the discrepancy between what is said and what is meant. It's important to be aware of non-verbal communication, because what you aren't saying is just as important as what you are.

Drumming fingers on a desk

Leaning forward in a chair

Crossing arms tightly

Pointing a finger at you

Shrugging shoulders

Lowering eyes when spoken to

Pulling at ears or hair

Slapping one's forehead with the heel of one's hand