

HOW TO READ PEOPLE through BODY LANGUAGE

50 Nonverbal Cues and What They Might Mean

Looking away?
Thinking, distraction
or discomfort?



Rubbing the neck?
Stress, thought or
physical discomfort?



Looking directly at you?
Attention? Interest?
Habit? Context matters.



Hand near the mouth?
Hesitation?
Not proof of lying.



Arms crossed?
Cold, habit,
discomfort—or a
resting position?



Stepping back?
More space—or
simply
repositioning?

➤ Lying or dishonest?
➤ No single gesture proves deception. ➤

OBSERVATION PRINCIPLES USED IN PROFESSIONAL INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEWING

Including approaches discussed by experienced FBI and law-enforcement interviewers

REAL-WORLD
EXAMPLES

PRACTICAL
TIPS

EVIDENCE-INFORMED
RESEARCH

USE IN EVERYDAY
LIFE

NOTICE MORE. ASSUME LESS. CONNECT BETTER.

PUBLICATION NOTES

HOW TO READ PEOPLE THROUGH BODY LANGUAGE

50 Nonverbal Cues and What They Might Mean

Life Made Clear™ — Simple Guides for Real Life

HO3 Publishing

First digital edition, 2026

About the illustrations

The images are AI-generated teaching illustrations, designed and reviewed to make observable behaviors clear. They are not documentary photographs or records of anyone's feelings. Before-and-after frames are illustrative sequences, not measured experiments.

About the examples

The everyday situations are fictional teaching examples. They show how a cautious response can improve a conversation; they do not establish the cause of a gesture in real life.

About the evidence

Research notes identify relevant studies and reviews, including limits on what can be inferred. The practical questions and suggested responses are editorial guidance, not validated tests of personality, emotion or truthfulness.

THE FIVE RULES

Before You Read Anyone: The 5 Rules of Body Language

01 **Look for a baseline.**

Compare the person with themselves in similar situations. Familiar habits give a change context. When you do not know someone well, acknowledge that their baseline is unknown.

02 **Look for changes.**

Notice what changed, when it changed and what happened just before it. A new topic, a noisy room or a physical task may matter more than the isolated movement.

03 **Look for clusters, not single gestures.**

Consider words, voice and behavior together across time. Several ambiguous cues still do not become proof merely because they occur together. Look for information that could challenge your first impression.

THE FIVE RULES

Keep the explanation open.

04 Consider context.

Ask what the setting, task, relationship and shared conventions make relevant. Consider comfort, access needs, language and ordinary physical adjustments. Do not assign a preference from age, gender or nationality.

05 Never confuse clues with proof.

Use an observation to guide a question or a considerate action. Avoid using it to decide that someone is lying, attracted to you, hostile or incapable. If their answer changes the picture, update your view.

Try the distinction

Observation: "Their arms crossed as the meeting began."

Interpretation: "They dislike the proposal."

Question: "What do you think of the plan?"

The first statement describes a posture. The second is a hypothesis. The question gives the person a chance to tell you something you cannot see.

Describe first. Ask when useful. Stay ready to revise.

CUE 07

Pressing the Lips Together

Notice the movement before naming the feeling.



① Lips resting gently together



② Lips pressed flatter

What You See

The upper and lower lips press together, making their visible outline flatter or narrower. Notice when the movement begins, how long it lasts and whether it changes.

Context Check

Did it follow a question, or was it already happening? Consider ordinary mouth discomfort, eating, speech and the person's usual expression.

Read the situation.

What It Could Mean

POSSIBLE EXPLANATION

Lip pressing can occur while someone is thinking, pausing, concentrating, self-regulating or simply making a physical mouth adjustment. The movement alone cannot tell you which explanation applies.

But Don't Assume...

A pressed mouth does not tell you that someone is angry, lying or disagreeing. Dry lips, a habitual movement or a brief physical adjustment could also explain what you see.

Look for These Other Clues

- 01 Do their words express a concern, uncertainty or agreement?
- 02 Does their speaking pace or tone change at the same time?
- 03 Does the mouth relax while they continue talking?

Real-Life Example

You suggest a weekend plan. Your friend's lips briefly press together. Instead of deciding they dislike the idea, you ask what works for them. They explain that they are checking a family commitment.

What To Do

Leave room for an answer. Try: **"What do you think?"** If a concern is raised, discuss it rather than continuing to inspect their face.

Remember: One cue is a clue, not proof.

RESEARCH FINDING

A broad review found that facial movements do not map reliably and uniquely to specific emotions across people and settings. It does not validate lip compression as a diagnostic cue. [1]

[1] Barrett et al. (2019). DOI: 10.1177/1529100619832930.

CUE 46

Pausing Before Answering

Leave room for an answer to take shape.



ILLUSTRATIVE TIMING

■ Question ends

Pause

■ Answer begins

No universal time limit. A gap does not establish why the answer took time.

Illustrative sequence only; the gap has no universal diagnostic meaning.

What You See

A gap occurs between a question ending and an answer beginning. It may include stillness, gaze shifts or a breath. Timing must be heard across the exchange; the portrait alone cannot show a delay.

Context Check

How complex or unexpected was the question? Consider recall, language, hearing, processing time, conversational norms and connection delays during a call.

Read the situation.

What It Could Mean

POSSIBLE EXPLANATION

The person may be thinking, finding a word, checking memory, deciding how to respond or waiting to be sure the question is finished. The duration cannot tell you which process applies.

But Don't Assume...

POPULAR CLAIM — LIMITED SUPPORT

Response delay is not evidence of lying. A quick answer does not prove truthfulness either. Do not treat silence as agreement or hurry someone into an answer they have not had time to consider.

Look for These Other Clues

- 01 Was the question clear and limited to one point?
- 02 Does the person ask for clarification or time?
- 03 Is technical lag affecting both people's timing?

Real-Life Example

Asked when a decision was made, a coworker pauses and then checks her calendar. You wait for the date. The pause gave her time to answer more carefully; it was not evidence of concealment.

What To Do

Allow a natural gap. If useful, say **“Take your time—we can check the details.”**
Evaluate the answer through relevant information, not a stopwatch.

Remember: One cue is a clue, not proof.

RESEARCH FINDING

A ten-language study found both common patterns and variation in response timing. Deception reviews caution against unreliable behavioral shortcuts; a delayed reply is not a lie detector. [29, 15]

[29] Stivers et al. (2009). DOI: 10.1073/pnas.0903616106. [15] Vrij et al. (2019).

LIFE MADE CLEAR

Notice more. Assume less. Connect better.

This free preview contains eight original pages from How to Read People Through Body Language, followed by this reading guide. The full English PDF includes 126 pages, 50 illustrated cues, practical examples and 37 numbered references.

Explore the complete guide

[View current price and buy on Payhip](#)

Original page numbering is retained. Read the possibilities and limits together. This educational guide cannot establish what another person is thinking or prove deception.

HO3 Publishing | Simple Guides for Real Life.
lifemadeclearguides.com