

Body Language 25

Ears and Hearing

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP



Interpreting the body language associated with ears is challenging sport. For the most part, ears are receivers of information rather than providers. Ears rarely move; they are just stuck on the side of the head to enable listening. However, if you know how to observe them, ears can send some strong signals about what is going on with a person.

You can wiggle your ears by contracting the muscles on the back of your head. Other than that, ears do not move much. One exception was my father, who could actually wiggle his ears without moving his facial muscles. I could never figure out how he did that.

If you observe someone who is wiggling his ears while listening or speaking, he may have an uncontrollable tick or other nervous disorder. How else, other than movement, might we gain insight from observing the ears? The answer is color.

Normally the ears are the same color as the cheeks, but there are several situations that can cause the ears to blush or become red. Let's examine some of these conditions.

Anger

When a person becomes enraged, the blood naturally flows to the ears and they will become much redder than the surrounding body parts. Of course, to read this type of body language, one must be able to see the tops of the ears. Women or men with hair covering up the tips of their ears have the ability to hide this condition under most circumstances.

Arousal

The ears become reddened when a person is aroused. Anything from a mild desire to raw passion will affect the color of the ears. I have not seen a study to indicate that the exact shade of the ear correlates with the level of passion. I would be interested in knowing this if anyone knows of such a study.

Embarrassment

The ears may also become red if a person is feeling embarrassed. However, usually when this occurs, the rest of the face will turn red as well.

Stress

Extreme stress can also cause the ears to become red for some people.

Temperature

Just as very cold temperatures can cause the ears to appear slightly blue, very hot conditions or intense exercise can create red ears. In this case you would know the reason because the face would be red and the forehead would be showing perspiration. Other conditions causing ears to become red rarely cause the sweat glands to secrete as well.

Sound Modulation

When a person cups his hand behind his ear, it is a call for more volume. Likewise, hands over the ears means too much volume, or it might be an indication the person is just not wanting to hear what is being said.

When communicating with another person audibly, make sure your volume is adequate for the other person to really hear the input. It is best to be in the same room with a person you want to communicate with, because that allows the other person the ability to view your entire body language and even read your lips as you speak.

If a person has a hearing condition, such as tinnitus (ringing or hum in the ears), you need to take that into account to provide enough volume for the person to really hear you. Sometimes hearing loss is so subtle that the person is unaware of a problem. The antidote for this is to get a periodic hearing test.

Make sure there is not another source of sound closer to the listener than you. For example, if I am standing next to a molding machine you need to raise your voice or I am not going to hear your input. This situation is intuitively obvious, but it is often a source of poor communication at work and in the home.

If you have a particular person who often does not receive the full message, he or she may have a hearing condition or you may be communicating in a way that does not allow the person to hear you accurately. It could be that audio input is not the preferred channel of communication for the person. Check it out and modify your speaking pattern accordingly.

This is a part in a series of articles on “Body Language.” The entire series can be viewed on <https://www.leadergrow.com/articles/categories/35-body-language> or on this blog.

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