

## Body Language 51

### Slouching

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP



Slouching is the opposite of sitting or standing erect. It is most often seen as a sign of tiredness or apathy, but there are many other things that can cause a person to slouch.

Be alert for other possible signals before assigning a meaning to a slouch.

Physically, there are a number of different types of slouches. When sitting, the slouch usually occurs when a person puts most of the weight on the lower spine rather than the buttocks. It comes across as half sitting and half lying down.

The slouch can also occur when sitting by leaning forward and holding the arms out to the side. A depressed person will sometimes assume this position.

When standing, the telltale sign of a slouch is forward-drooping shoulders rather than having the shoulders held high and pulled slightly backward. The slouching position forces the arms to dangle precariously from the shoulders in front of the body rather than at the sides. This position is usually accompanied by sticking out the belly and pulling in the buttocks. The spine takes on a more pronounced curvature a little like the letter "S."

There are several different meanings of a slouch, regardless of how it is done physically. Let's take a closer look at conditions that typically cause people to slouch.

#### **Overtired**

This gesture is a signal that the other person is so tired that he or she can hardly stay awake. The person is saying, "I just need to get some rest."

#### **Apathy**

Alternatively, the slouch can signal a negative reaction to another person or thing that is going on. The person is signaling that he or she just does not care. The slouch signals lack of alertness or interest.

## **Heavy Weight**

A slouch can be caused by grief or extreme sorrow. If a person is in a personal crisis, you may see the slouch gesture as an indication of needing some help.

## **Yawn**

Slouching can also be a signal of boredom. Most people tend to slouch a bit when watching TV. It is a way to relax the body and just take things in without having to respond in any way.

## **Captive**

Students will frequently slouch as a way to signal the teacher that they are bored with the topic and wish they could be doing something else.

## **Detached**

You can frequently observe people slouching in the pews during a church service. In some churches the exact opposite is true: people are hopping up and down to upbeat music or sitting erect and fully engaged in the service.

## **Physical condition**

Some people have physical issues that cause them to slouch much of the time. There can be a number of medical causes for this condition that render the person nearly incapable of sitting or standing up straight.

For people with habitual slouches, there are some body braces that can help keep them erect. I have never worn one of those contraptions, and they don't look very comfortable to me.

When you see a person who is slouching, first ascertain if the person is doing it most of the time or in reaction to something that is currently going on. That knowledge will help you interpret the most likely meaning of the slouch.

*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.*