

Body Language 52

Winking

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A wink is a very interesting gesture because it can be easy to misinterpret, leading to all kinds of embarrassing situations.

The most common meaning of a wink is to signal an inside joke between two people. The wink is to let the other person know that what was just said was in jest.

A wink is also used as a signal between two people that what a third party just said is not credible. In this case, the wink is intended to be seen only by the other person and not by the third party.

Flirting

The wink can be a form of come-on gesture where one person wants to signal that he or she is physically attracted to the other person. The gesture can occur between people of both genders or between people of the same gender. You have to consider the context of what is happening to decode a wink properly, and even then, there is a risk that you will interpret it wrong.

The mouth

Notice how the shape of the mouth contributes to the interpretation of a wink. In the picture above, the woman has her mouth wide open, indicating a kind of joke. If her mouth was closed and was pulled to one side, she would be signaling doubt, suspicion, or being unimpressed.

Lying

When exaggerating or lying, a person will often wink to let the other person know he or she is telling a little white lie. The interpretation is "I am saying this, but I do not really mean it." People who tell you a lie without the intention of it being detected will not accompany it with a wink.

Responding to a wink

What is interesting to me about winking is how the other person should react after receiving a wink. I suppose you could wink back, and in some circumstances that may be appropriate.

In other situations, you would just absorb the wink and not make any overt response yourself. You might smile and give a little positive nod to indicate, “message received.”

You could also show a puzzled look, like you were asking, “what was that all about?”

Frequency

Some people tend to wink a lot as a way to endear themselves to others. The connotation is that “you and I are close enough to share these private thoughts without speaking.”

I believe that a wink from someone who rarely uses that gesture sends a much more powerful message. Once you realize that a particular person tends to wink a lot, you take that into consideration when interpreting the signal.

Facial asymmetry

Notice how the eyebrow above the non-winking eye is always pulled higher on the face. It is physically difficult to have both eyebrows low when doing a wink.

The wink is a common gesture in body language that can have many different meanings. Never assume that the wink is a signal of physical attraction when you are in conversation with another person. It may be attraction, but it may not be. If the wink is coming from someone whom you do not know and is coming from across the room, then be alert that you may have encountered a predator.

This is a part in a series of articles on “Body Language” by Bob Whipple “The Trust Ambassador.”