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Air Kissing

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A very common gesture when people greet each other is a kind of mock kiss called “air kissing.” The movement occurs more in social than in business settings, although in some cultures the gesture is used in business settings routinely.

Air kissing should not be confused with “blowing a kiss,” which always starts with kissing one’s hand then blowing the kiss to the other person.

With air kissing, there is always some form of loose embrace going on. The two people move their faces to the right of the other person’s face as they move toward each other to embrace.

It appears as if they were going to actually kiss the cheek of the other person. The gesture can be awkward, and with the heightened attention to sexual harassment, it is best to refrain from using an air kiss unless it is initiated by the other person. This is particularly important in a business setting.

The air kiss is often associated with movie stars, rock stars, or other celebrities. In entertainment settings, the air kiss is depicted as a way to demonstrate super-star power when greeting someone.

Rather than actually contact the cheek with the lips, a kissing motion is made with the mouth while the two cheeks are touching. It is a way to show affection without spreading a lot of germs, so it has become quite popular. The French phrase for air kissing is *les bises*. Sometimes the air kiss is accompanied by a verbal sound imitating a kiss, e.g. “Mwah.”

The only confusing part of the air kiss is a kind of awkward situation where as the two parties come together, one person assumes this is a situation for an actual kiss on the cheek or even the lips while the other person wants to perform the air kiss move. Sometimes that movement can result in kissing an unintended area of the face.

Kissing is a common gesture that is highly culture specific. You need to use care to understand the culture of the other person to do the right thing. Here are a few examples of how the gesture differs in specific cultures. This information, plus a lot

more detail, is available as a reference in a book titled "[Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands](#)" by Morrison, and Conaway.

Saudi Arabia

A traditional Saudi greeting consists of shaking the right hand while placing the left hand on the right shoulder of the other person and exchanging kisses on each cheek of the other person. In this culture they use an actual kiss rather than an air kiss.

India

The correct greeting gestures in India vary greatly as there are several subcultures involved between the different religious sects: Hindu, Muslim, Sikhs, Christian as well as several others. Indians of all ethnic groups disapprove of public affection between people of the opposite sex. Do not touch (except in handshaking), hug, or kiss in any form when greeting someone of the opposite sex.

Egypt

Men may kiss men and women kiss women as a greeting in Egypt, but avoid the gesture with a person of the opposite sex. It is not uncommon for a businessman to kiss another businessman who he knows well on the lips in Egypt.

Indonesia and Malaysia

In Indonesia, and Malaysia, it is common to air-kiss an elder's hand as a traditional form of respectful greeting. Instead of pursing one's lips, the younger person exhaling through his nose softly on the hand before drawing the hand to the younger person's forehead.

Inuit Nose rubbing

The kunik or so-called Eskimo Kiss consists of rubbing both noses together as a sign of affection usually practiced by family members or loved ones. It is a non-erotic but intimate greeting used by people who, when they meet outside, often have little except their nose and eyes exposed.

Around the world, you will see the practice of air kissing or some other variant as described here. The precaution is to use this gesture sparingly, especially if you are not among good friends or family. It works better in a social setting than in a business application, although you will find it used in both in several cultures. As with all body language gestures, if you are unsure of the suitability of the action with a particular person or in a specific situation, it is best to refrain from using it.

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

