

## Body Language 73

### Coy

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How can you tell if another person is being coy? In this article I will give some tips to recognize the body language gestures associated with being coy and give some tips to deal with the situation.

I will start with being coy in a business setting and then cover the same topic from a social point of view. The former usually involves someone being somewhat evasive while being coy in a social setting runs the gamut between deception all the way to overt flirtation.

#### What is being coy?

The definition of coy is “pretending to be shy or modest.” Another definition from Merriam-Webster’s 11<sup>th</sup> Collegiate Dictionary is..”marked by cute coquettish or artful playfulness.” A third perspective of being coy includes a reluctance to make a commitment or give details about something regarded as sensitive.

#### Eyebrows

When a person is being coy, he will usually have one eyebrow noticeably raised. You do not see both eyebrows raised, because that gesture would normally be associated with the emotion of surprise.

The clandestine look is what gives the gesture the appearance of some mystery. That can be what creates the playfulness of the gesture. The uncertainty of what he is thinking enhances the effect.

#### Eyes

A coy person will usually be looking sideways. He does not look up or down, but the eyes are noticeably looking to the side. It is an evasive kind of movement, like he is making an effort to hide something.

He rarely will make direct eye contact when being coy because that would reduce the mystery effect.

## **Cheeks**

When a person is being coy, you usually see only one cheek as he will turn his head and not look at you straight on. He may also have a tilted head to accentuate the expression.

## **Mouth**

There is often a slight pulling back of the one cheek in an effort to make a mysterious smile. Alternatively, the mouth can also form a sober frown, as in the picture.

## **Chin**

Often the chin is lowered a bit as if to hide something. It would be unusual to see a coy person with his head held high. Part of the secret look is to lower the chin.

## **In a Business Setting**

Being coy in a business setting means that there is something a person wants to express but prefers to only hint at until the other person begins to get a message. It can also mean reluctance to give information the other person wants.

The desired outcome is rarely sexual, as in social expressions of being coy. Many of the body language signals will be the same, as is shown in the picture above of a male being coy in a work setting.

Perhaps he knows something, but he does not trust the other person enough to reveal it. Perhaps he is playing some kind of game where he wants to stall for time for some reason. This is not necessarily negative since a person can have valid reasons for keeping something private.

One approach to break the tension is to ask the person if he is uncomfortable at the moment. If he agrees, then you have the opportunity to make open ended questions in an attempt to find out the root cause of the discomfort.

Being coy is also used in marketing when an organization wants to build anticipation for a new product but is not quite ready for the grand announcement.

The art of being coy is often seen in political situations where a candidate is not ready to announce his or her true intentions. This application often comes across as artful dodging, which tends to lower trust because people recognize they are not getting the full truth.

## Being coy in a social setting



The most well-known examples of being coy occur in a social setting, rather than a business or political setting, as in the attached picture.

The gestures are usually intended to be provocative and involve another person. People would not make these movements if they were alone.

The smile may be slightly pulled to the side reminiscent of the Mona Lisa look. The half-smile is an indication of potential pleasure. She may also exhibit pursed lips as if in a mock kissing gesture.

### Conclusion

When a person (male or female) is being coy, you have to recognize that there is some kind of agenda going on. Be careful to not misinterpret the coyness as attraction. There could be a number of things going on. The best advice is to remain unsure until you have other indications for why the person is making these gestures.

Look for the opportunity for some dialog. Observe more and try to ask open ended questions for more data. If the person begins to open up, then you can improve the accuracy of your understanding and not make unwarranted assumptions.

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