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Skeptical

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There are many different ways we can express skepticism without using any words. This article will highlight some of the typical body language gestures that can be seen if a person is skeptical.

There are numerous facial cues you can use to identify a skeptical person and also some telltale hand gestures. We will start by observing the eyes.

Eyes

A skeptical person will often look at you with a sideways glance. The message is “do you expect me to believe this?”

Alternatively, the person may be squinting at you like what you are saying is painful or just does not compute.

A third option with the eyes is having them wide open in a somewhat surprised stance or looking over the rims of his glasses.

Eyebrows

The eyebrows will often be raised as the person contemplates what was just said. The connotation is – really?? Sometimes the eyebrows will be pulled toward the bridge of the nose as an indication of confusion, concern, or disbelief.

Head tilt

Often you will see a tilted head when observing a skeptical person. The message being conveyed is that the person is thinking something is definitely wrong with what you just said or did but cannot quite figure out what it is.

Mouth

The most often mouth gesture for a skeptical person is a kind of pout. Alternatively, you might see the mouth pulled slightly to one side and either be open or shut. The connotation is that the person is straining to believe what you just said.

Hand gestures

There are many different hand gestures associated with a skeptical person. A common one is stroking the chin area. The person is trying to rationalize what was just said, so he is pondering the meaning.

Another common hand gesture is with arms extended and the hands palm up and open. It is like the person is trying to feel the weight of what you just said.

You might see an extended index finger pointing at you or even a “time out” signal with the tips of one hand touching the palm of the other hand.

What to do

If you see a cluster of these kinds of gestures, you can be pretty certain the other person is skeptical about what is going on. The best approach is to invite dialog with a question. Here are a few examples of questions that may draw the other person out.

Do you find this hard to believe?

You seem doubtful – what’s wrong?

Can you tell me how you feel about what I just said?

Does this seem right to you?

Is there another way of looking at this?

Then, pay particular attention to the response you get and try to avoid getting defensive. The other person is entitled to his or her opinion, and you need to handle the conversation with tact in order to start rebuilding any lost trust.

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