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Bored

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Identifying when a person is bored seems very simple. The outward signs are pretty obvious and well known. You need to be careful, however, because the gestures for a person who is fatigued are almost the same as for one who is bored. Here are some tips to separate the two concepts.

First of all, consider what is going on around the person. If this is hour three of a four-hour lecture on pollution containing hundreds of

detailed PowerPoint slides, then when a person has his chin in his palm, it is likely out of boredom.

On the other hand, if a student is holding her head up with her hand, during a lively or funny class, you might want to inquire if she was up all night finishing her paper.

The eyes

The big difference between fatigue and boredom is in the eyes. A bored person is usually sitting and staring out with a blank stare and heavy, but not closed, eyelids. A tired person usually will have her eyes shut or nearly shut.

If you see a person unable to maintain focus with her eyes, then suspect boredom as the cause. You may also observe a rolling of the eyes with boredom but not fatigue.

The Hands

The usual position of the hand is for one hand to be propping up the head. Occasionally you may see both hands doing this at the same time, but the predominant gesture is just with one hand.

A person experiencing extreme fatigue will often put his or her head down on the table rather than try to hold it up with a hand.

The mouth

The telltale sign of a bored person is a yawn. Unfortunately, it is difficult to separate a yawn induced by boredom from one caused by being overtired. It is often the case that both fatigue and boredom may be occurring simultaneously.

It is interesting to observe how infectious yawning is. When a person sees another person yawn, it is common to see the first person yawn within about 10 seconds. You can observe yourself yawning shortly after observing another person doing it.

General posture

The most common forms of boredom occur when people are seated. People who are bored generally lean forward rather than backward. The opposite is often true for people who are fatigued.

Props

Look for fidgeting or doodling as another indication of boredom rather than fatigue. A tired person is trying to sleep, so there is no energy to play with a paperclip or make a paper airplane. A person who is bored has some energy that is likely to come out in the form of interfacing with a handy object, like a pencil.

What to do

Usually teachers or those who facilitate group activities will see these kinds of gestures. Obviously if many of the students are exhibiting these kinds of symptoms, you need to take note and call a break or an activity that will get people moving or engaged some other way.

With fatigue, you normally will see the reaction in only one or two people, while boredom can spread over an entire group. Be alert for the problem and change your methods to keep people engaged. When their outward gestures are extreme enough to see, they are not listening to you anyway.

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