

Information sheet

Non-verbal communication

For most people, non-verbal communication signifies body language. However, there are many different types of non-verbal communication and here we will raise your awareness of the nonverbal signals that can enhance your relationship with your learners.

Body movements

Whether you are talking or listening, you are sending a continuous stream of information from:

- the way you hold your head;
- the angle at which you hold your body;
- what you do with your limbs;
- your changing – or unchanging – facial expressions.

Silence

When you allow silence in your conversations, you are letting learners know that you:

- genuinely want to listen to them;
- are willing to hold back from giving advice or opinions;
- are seeking collaboration, rather than telling them what to do.

Watch out for ...

If a silence lasts more than about five or six seconds, the learner will begin to feel uncomfortable. So be prepared to make a gentle intervention, perhaps with a slightly different question, a prompt, or an empathic suggestion such as “I guess it’s hard to think of an answer right now”.

Paralinguistics

When you listen, you will rarely stay completely silent for long. You will make sounds (like 'Mmm', 'Ah', 'Hmmm') that are difficult to capture in writing but that signal that you are listening. Used in a neutral way, they invite a learner to continue talking.

Watch out for ...

Some of these sounds are not neutral. They can express disapproval, disappointment or even lack of interest. Guard against sending negative messages.

*Ted Daszkiewicz and Paul Lalgée supported the development of the 'motivational dialogue' resources for the Standards Unit E2E resources. The resources are based on:

Miller W.R. and Rollnick S., *Motivational interviewing: preparing people for change*, 2nd edition, New York, Guilford Publications, Inc.

Further information can also be found at: www.motivationalinterview.org