

Nonverbal Communication

Sharing the Word with everyone

How beautiful are the feet of those who bring Good News Sharing the gospel is a common mission for every believer. But how do we share the Word with someone who has limited use of language? This is a question anyone sharing the gospel needs to answer. To begin, we need to understand that most communication is non-verbal! Things like talking with your hands, facial expressions, emojis, or *italicizing* or **bolding** words all convey more than simple words can provide. But communication is a two-way street. So, what are some ways our non-verbal friends communicate?

1. **Body language**

While we don't want to over-interpret body language in a global sense (crossed arms don't always mean someone is standoffish), we can learn what an individual's body language means. You may need time to learn to "speak" your friend's body language, but be assured, their posture is saying something!

2. **Tone**

Even wordless vocalizations convey meaning through their tone. Many parents can tell the difference between their baby's cry for a diaper change and being hungry? When you pay attention, these subtle nuances become apparent! Understanding requires focus and effort, but it is possible.

3. **Facial expression & eye-contact**

To the Western world, steady eye-contact and a smile seem to be the most natural way to show someone you're friendly and engaged. But this is not always the case! In places like Japan, extended direct eye contact between people is viewed as rude. The way eye contact is used is largely a cultural matter! And for some people, such as those with autism, eye contact can feel uncomfortable and unnatural.

4. **Language support**

Sometimes, we can help supply words to promote communication. This may be as simple as asking "yes" or "no" questions. One church invites non-verbal children to participate in bible memorization by arranging laminated words in the right order to indicate understanding. Assistive technology such as a story board, a yes/no board, or an iPad using software like Proloquo that verbalizes their thoughts can assist with communication.

(Over)

Communicating with people who are nonverbal After listening, we need to learn to communicate in a way that our friends can understand. How can we help make our message as clear and easy to understand as possible?

1. Establish trust and friendship

There's an old adage that says, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." Establishing a relationship through spending time together, playing a game, or engaging a person's interests can make communication more fruitful later. Enter their world. A strong relational foundation not only invites people to listen to what you say, but gives you a chance to observe the ways they communicate. Listen before you talk!

2. Use simple, concrete language

Less is more. Don't use two words when one suffices. Identify what is essential to understand the lesson or story you are sharing. Describe things literally using real life examples. Don't use metaphors or hyperbole. Instead of saying, "Invite Jesus to live in your heart," say, "Ask Jesus to be a part of your life so that you can think and act like him."

3. Use symbols, icons, and pictures

A picture is worth a thousand words, especially when describing abstract concepts. A visual timer moves time from being abstract to concrete. A picture of Christ on the cross or carrying the cross brings understanding to something we do not see in everyday life. Symbols are another form of communication. We see this intuitively in things like uniforms and name badges. Symbols allow you to communicate information like, "Anyone wearing a red lanyard can help," or "Anyone holding the talking stick is allowed to speak."

4. Engage multiple senses

Engaging more than one of the listener's senses when telling a story or teaching a lesson will help them remember. Some people respond to a tactile component more than an oral component. You can show them a mustard seed when teaching about faith or let them hold a ball of wool when talking about a shepherd. Putting a Bible verse to a melody will help some to learn more easily.

5. Leave space for a response!

Many people find silences awkward or uncomfortable. Allowing for a moment of silence gives your friend time to respond and communicate.