

Eye Contact: Romantic Interest or PowHERful Glance?

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By Kirstin Carey

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If you ask a child if she took a cookie from the cookie jar, how will she respond if she is indeed guilty of stealing an Oreo? Of course, she will avoid eye contact as she tells you that she was nowhere near the forbidden dessert.

This is similar to the response you will get from an adult who feels he has betrayed your confidence or has bad news to tell. People in Western Culture who don't make eye contact are viewed as untrustworthy, unbelievable, or unsure. Confident people make solid eye contact.

Be careful, however, not to overpower a shy person with too much eye contact. If you feel that you are conversing with an unsure or overly shy person, don't stare at them too much in an attempt to make eye contact. You don't want to overwhelm them.

Too much eye contact may also be viewed as a romantic interest. I recently presented a speech to an organization of executive women. One audience member, a tall, attractive, confident woman asked several questions about warding off unwanted romantic advances. Her eye contact was powerful and deep, and she held her eye contact longer than most people.

Studies of how people play the "flirting game" found that eye contact was the number one tool used (knowingly or not) when trying to attract a partner. The longer the eye contact was held, the stronger each person felt the attraction was. So, like the woman in my audience, if you find that you are receiving too many unwanted romantic advances, you may want to reevaluate your use of eye contact. You could be sending out signals you didn't know you were sending.

So, the moral of the story here is to find a good balance of eye contact and understand the power of eye contact. Send the message you want to send and make sure you use the power wisely!

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Kirstin Carey is an award-winning speaker and consultant and Principal of Orange Tree Training & Speaking Group. She works with organizations on effective and persuasive communications. Her company also has a special division which focuses on helping women advance and succeed through more effective communication skills without having to communicate like a man. To find out how Kirstin can help you, call (800) 380-6520 or go to www.powHERful.com

Use Eye Contact Effectively in Conversations

By Royane Real

Have you ever wondered why some people seem to make conversation easily, and turn their conversation partners into friends quickly, while others struggle with conversation and friendship?

Researchers have discovered that one of the most striking differences between people who are socially confident and those who are shy, is that confident people have much more frequent eye contact with their conversational partners.

Many shy people never make eye contact at all, tending to look downward or away, instead of looking at their conversation partner's face.

Most North Americans, especially Caucasians, prefer to have a lot of eye contact when they are talking with someone. When a person doesn't make eye contact with them, North Americans tend to assume that person is hiding something.

When you are speaking with someone who is from a culture that prefers a lot of eye contact, be sure to keep looking at that person frequently while you are talking, even while you are wondering what to say next. You don't need to use a piercing stare, a friendly gaze will do.

If it really bothers you to look directly into another person's eyes, you can look at the person's face without focusing solely on the eyes. If you gaze generally at the eyebrow area or the bridge of the nose, this is close enough to the eye region that you will appear to be looking at the person's eyes.

You may find that it eases your own discomfort if you let your vision go slightly out of focus.

Whenever you are in conversation with someone, keep the majority of your focus on the other person. If you glance around the room too much, or look too frequently at other people, your conversation partner may assume that you are bored, or that you are looking around for someone else you would rather talk with.

If you have difficulty knowing exactly how to make eye contact, you can benefit from practicing in front of a mirror, or with another person.

While some people have difficulty maintaining eye contact during conversations, others have the opposite problem. They stare too intently into other people's eyes when they are talking to them,

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often making their conversation partners feel very uncomfortable.

It can be very unpleasant to be on the receiving end of an intense stare, particularly at close range.

In many animals, the use of staring is part of a power struggle to determine which animal is dominant over the other. In humans too, a struggle for dominance over another can often be signaled by a staring contest. Avoid intense, prolonged staring into another person's eyes, except in very rare situations.

Although some people use staring intently as a deliberate tactic to intimidate others, not all people who stare piercingly at others mean it as an act of aggression or dominance. Some people who stare very intently into the eyes of others are quite unaware of the negative impression they are creating.

If it has been your habit to stare intently into the eyes of other people without looking away, you may have been making your conversation partners very uncomfortable.

You can lighten the impression you are making by smiling more often, nodding, and by gazing at the entire face as well as the eyes. In addition, you can frequently glance away for brief periods.

Although most North Americans like to have a lot of eye contact with their conversational partner, this is not true of all people. If you have grown up in a cultural group that expects eye contact, it can be a shock to find out that eye contact is not always welcomed.

There are many countries in the world where looking someone in the eye is considered to be disrespectful and an invasion of privacy. Even within North America, there are some cultural groups that prefer not to make very much eye contact.

In many cultures around the world, averting your eyes and keeping them lowered is considered the polite, desirable thing to do. In North America, people of African American and First Nations origin usually prefer to make far less eye contact than Caucasians do.

If you are dealing with someone who has different cultural practices than what you are used to, make an effort to be sensitive to the expectations of the other person if you want to have a smooth relationship.

This article was written by relationship expert Royane Real. Learn more relationship tips. Download her special report "Your Guide to Making Friendly Conversation" at

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