

Gestures & Body Language

Let's get started...

Before you begin discussing today's topic, think about your first impression of the U.S. Share it with your group.

New words and Idioms:

Gesture, body language, impression, firm, offensive, observe, inappropriate, vulgar, surprised, polite, rude, twiddle, react, greeting, signal, "hand it over," "at his/her fingertips," "hand in hand," "to stick your neck out for someone," "twiddle your thumbs," "to give someone the cold shoulder," "to try your hand at something," "empty handed," "rule of thumb," "to be wrapped around someone's finger," "it's out of my/your hands," etc.

Background:

Even before people begin to talk, you can learn about how they are feeling by *observing* their *body language* and *gestures*. Gestures and body language often have more than one meaning. It is common for the same gesture to have different meanings from one culture to the next. Therefore, learning about the meanings of gestures and body language can help you understand a new culture.



In pairs for 5 minutes, ask and answer these questions:

Demonstrate a gesture to your partner that is common in your native country. Then ask your partner the following questions:

- What do you think the gesture means? Do you think it is impolite to use this gesture? Why?
- Do you have the same gesture in your native country? Does it mean the same thing in your country?
- Have you seen this gesture before among Americans? When? Where? What do you think this gesture means to Americans?
- Do you think it is more common among young people or adults to use this gesture? Why?

Share your partner's answers with the group.

Discussion Questions:

- *In the US it is very important to give a firm handshake when you meet someone for the first time. This is the way that we greet people in business and often in the community. It is considered rude if you don't shake someone's hand if that person has extended his or her hand to you.*

How do you greet people in your culture? Do you touch hands? Do you smile?

Do you greet people differently if they are your friends or family than you would greet a businessman?

Do you think Americans use a lot of gestures when speaking?

Is there any *greeting* that is considered rude in your culture?

Do people in your culture use body language when speaking? How often? Can you show us an example?

Are there positive and negative gestures? Which is more common in your culture?

Have you ever been *offended* by an American gesture? Why?

Has an American ever been *surprised* or offended by a gesture that you made? What did you say or do?

- *In the US, there are some gestures that are inappropriate. For example, most people consider it rude to pick your nose or teeth in public.*

What are some things that are considered rude in your native country?

Why is it considered rude?

How would people in your native country *react* if someone did something rude, or made a rude gesture in public? Would you react the same way too?

In your native country, what kinds of gestures or body language *signal* friendliness?

Are they similar to any gestures you see here in the United States?

Do you think it means the same thing, or not?