

Responding to Different Emotional States – Activity Guide

To better understand people's moods, we can watch for behaviors that indicate their emotional mode. While we may not always be accurate in our interpretation, paying attention to non-verbal behaviors and emotions can help align communication behaviors more effectively.

Use this activity to become more observant of others, by learning how to interpret the non-verbal behaviors associated with different emotional states to gain insight into how people are reacting to you and to what is being communicated. You can also use it to plan an appropriate response to use the next time you encounter each behavior.

Interpreting Emotional States

Body language communicates how people are reacting to your spoken messages. For a more accurate interpretation of moods, look for "clusters" of behaviors associated with different emotional states.

Reflective

- leaning back
- moving only minimally
- holding an open posture or body position
- aligning body directly with yours
- holding direct eye contact
- placing hand on, or stroking, the chin
- tilting the head while listening
- glancing occasionally to the side
- lowering the brows slightly
- passively accepting

Responsive

- leaning forward with an open position
- holding the hands open with palms turned up
- smiling with a relaxed mouth
- nodding the head to indicate agreement
- tilting the head to the side showing amiability
- mirroring your body language
- sitting on the edge of the chair
- sitting with the feet under the chair
- sitting with the knees apart
- actively accepting

Defensive

- leaning back
- folding the arms tightly across the body
- adopting a closed posture or body position
- crossing the legs
- touching the lips with fingertips
- pointing the feet towards door
- angling the body away from you
- bowing the head forward submissively
- holding no eye contact
- passively rejecting

Responding to Emotional States

Complete the chart by selecting one or two team members or customers that you have observed to be expressive in their non-verbal behaviors. Determine the natural emotional state or mode of each person. Then identify one of the behaviors you have seen used frequently and plan an appropriate response to use the next time you encounter the behavior. Three examples have been provided.

Emotional modes

Co-worker/ customer	Non-verbal Behaviors	Emotional State	Appropriate response
John	Tense facial expression	Defensive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is something wrong? • You look distraught. • Has something happened?
Peter	Glaring eyes	Combative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you angry with me? • Did I say something to upset you?
Mary	Hesitation in voice	Reflective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You sound unsure. • How are you feeling about that suggestion?