

SUN LIFESTYLE

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A body doesn't lie

Listen to non-verbal cues to find out the true state of your relationship

By JOANNE RICHARD, SUN MEDIA

TORONTO -- Think you and your mate have lost that loving feeling?

Well, you better listen up to the non-verbal cues in your relationship to find out, because body language speaks loud and clear about what's going on - it's an actual "problem predictor."

When there's trouble brewing, body language verbalizes true emotions and feelings - even if words say otherwise. Saying "I love you" just isn't enough, says Dr. David Givens. Love signals are the true indicator. "It's much more powerful to be touched and have a caring voice."

According to a world-renowned anthropologist, there's an unspoken vocabulary of love that builds attachment and loyalty over time and gives marriage staying power.

Struggling couples merely talk, successful couples touch, says Givens.

"Gestures work better than words in keeping a mate and keeping the bond going."

He says, "non-verbal signals rouse deeper parts of the emotional brain, where mating instincts lie," says Givens. "Facial expressions, body movements and postures register with more immediacy than do the linguistic sounds of speech."

It's all about Love Signals, the name of his new book published by St. Martin's Press, which explores the non-verbal signs, signals and cues human beings exchange to attract, win and keep their mates.

According to Givens, "the burden of keeping the love connection going is on the guy by keeping the love signals flowing." But often, once mated, he says, men let the tactile signals go dead, especially the caring tone of voice.

"The pair bond is much healthier when the guy keeps the signals coming. Women know this

intuitively but they pull back when they're not getting feedback, and the pair bond weakens."

According to body language expert Patti Wood, "No matter what someone says, their signals and cues are more honest and revealing - they speak volumes."

Wood says we give out thousands of non-verbal cues per minute, so tune out the words and tune into action.

"Sometimes their actions are yelling and screaming at us, but we choose to take their words because it's more comfortable," says Wood, a non-verbal communication and behaviour expert based in Atlanta.

So, just what are love signals that bind? "A non-verbal sign of companionate love is the shoulder embrace," says Givens, adding that established couples communicate love and caring by touching each other's shoulders and upper arms with their fingertips and opened palms.

Non-sexual touching has a healing effect. "More immediate and far more powerful than words, touching, hugging and hand-holding are essential signs to reassure that you care," says Givens, adding that they also increase the flow of pleasure-producing endorphins released into the nervous system.

"Hug your partner twice a day to care for, comfort and show your love," advises Givens.

Also, another way to reconnect is to share the "20-second kiss. Lengthy labile contact raises the male's testosterone level as it simulates feelings of attachment and closeness in the female."

Consider shoulder, hand and foot massages: "Linked to emotionally sensitive nerves, lips, shoulders, hands and feet feel emotionally stimulated when touched."

According to Wood, little caretaking signals are essential to a healthy relationship - such as pushing hair behind the ear, patting the front of the shirt, bringing water, putting a coat around their shoulders if they're cold.

"These can disappear in any relationship but can easily be put back in to strengthen the relationship," she says, adding that when couples care about one another, there's lots of hands on, leaning in and standing physically close to one another.

"An effective way to show you care is to put down your newspaper, mute the TV, lean forward and give eye contact as you listen to your partner's words," says Givens.

According to a study, non-verbal displays of humour, friendliness and affection are strong predictors of marital success, reports Givens. "The more you laugh together, the closer you become.

"As with touching, hugging and a loving voice, daily doses of synchronous laughter significantly strengthen companionate love," he says.

So why do relationships end? Says Givens, "women complain they receive too few affectionate cues; men complain about a partner's whining tone of voice."

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