

**Family Living**  
**Focus**  
 by  
 Adams Co.  
 Extension Agent  
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**The Eyes Have It**

Reality really sets in as a parent of a young child when you start to see your own behavior in your child's behavior.

Can any of you relate to that? I'll never forget the day I corrected my oldest who was three at the time, at the supper table. Garrison tilted his head to the side a bit and looked right at me with a real stern prolonged stare. I had a hard time looking at him looking at me.

Quickly he said "Mommy look at me" and continued to give me the glare.

You know it's hard to discipline when those cute little eyes are looking back at you and it seems Garrison knew that too! He had learned that his eyes are a powerful communication tool.

Obviously I must do a fair amount of disciplining with my eyes without even saying a word. And, gee, how many times have I said to him, "Look at me when I'm communicating with you!"

Did you know that when speaking, our words only have a 7 percent impact on what message the listener receives. Nonverbal expressions account for 93 percent of the message the listener decodes. Truly our

actions speak louder than words.

So you say, why is this important to me? Our degree of success in many roles in life such as spouse, employee, business person, employer, father, mother, child or friend depends on good communications. In this article today, we'll start to think about our body language and how we can develop an awareness of the importance of nonverbal behavior as you strive to continue building better relationships in our lives.

Let's begin by thinking about our facial expressions and eye contact. Ralph Waldo Emerson was quoted as saying "Eyes of men converse as much as their tongues, with the advantage that the ocular dialect needs no dictionary, but is understood the world over."

Facial expressions are the most readily observed group of gestures. Stop and think about common facial expressions you are familiar with. Many have a commonly accepted meaning. At some time or another many of us have experienced a "look that could kill," an "I don't understand look," or an "I'm bored" expression.

What does the expression

"poker face" mean to you? Universally people express and recognized four basic emotions: happiness, sadness, anger and disgust.

Do you know a spouse, relative or co-worker so well that you can tell how they feel about something you talk with them about without them even saying a word? At our house, Russell has this little thing he does with his eyes when I talk about doing something he doesn't agree with or necessarily want to do. He doesn't even realize he's doing it.

Our eyes are often a clue to thoughts and feelings the sender may be trying to hide. In normal conversations, you glance at a person for about a second and then glance away to show the speaker you are listening but not staring. If you avoid eye contact, it will probably be interpreted as a sign of low self-esteem, weakness or guilty feeling. A longer meeting of the eyes is uncommon, and therefore can have special importance, indicating anger, challenge or sexual attraction for example.

Research also indicates that people tend to maintain a higher degree of eye contact with those they believe will be approving or supportive of them.

Our experience with interpreting facial expressions starts very early in life. Babies at birth learn to begin interpreting expressions. Sustained mutual gaze between parent and child begins at four weeks of age. By six weeks of age, caregiver and child can play at making and breaking eye contact. Research shows that babies are attracted to anything reassembling eyes.

We focus our eyes on the face more often than on any other part of the body. That must be why many women spend lots of money on eye make up

Did you know that in order to initiate a conversation with someone, you need to first make eye contact?

If you don't believe me, try this little experiment at home or work. Try to initially start talking to someone without first having direct eye contact. It will seem awkward and it will appear that the other person

isn't listening.

It's true we do listen with our eyes during conversations.

When someone talks to you, are you an active listener, maintaining quality eye contact? Or are you easily distracted seemingly disinterested?

Have fun this holiday season and take notice how you communicate with your eyes

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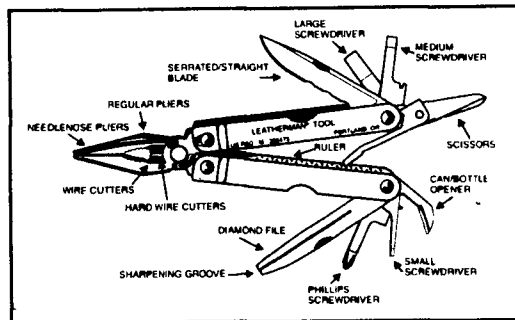
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