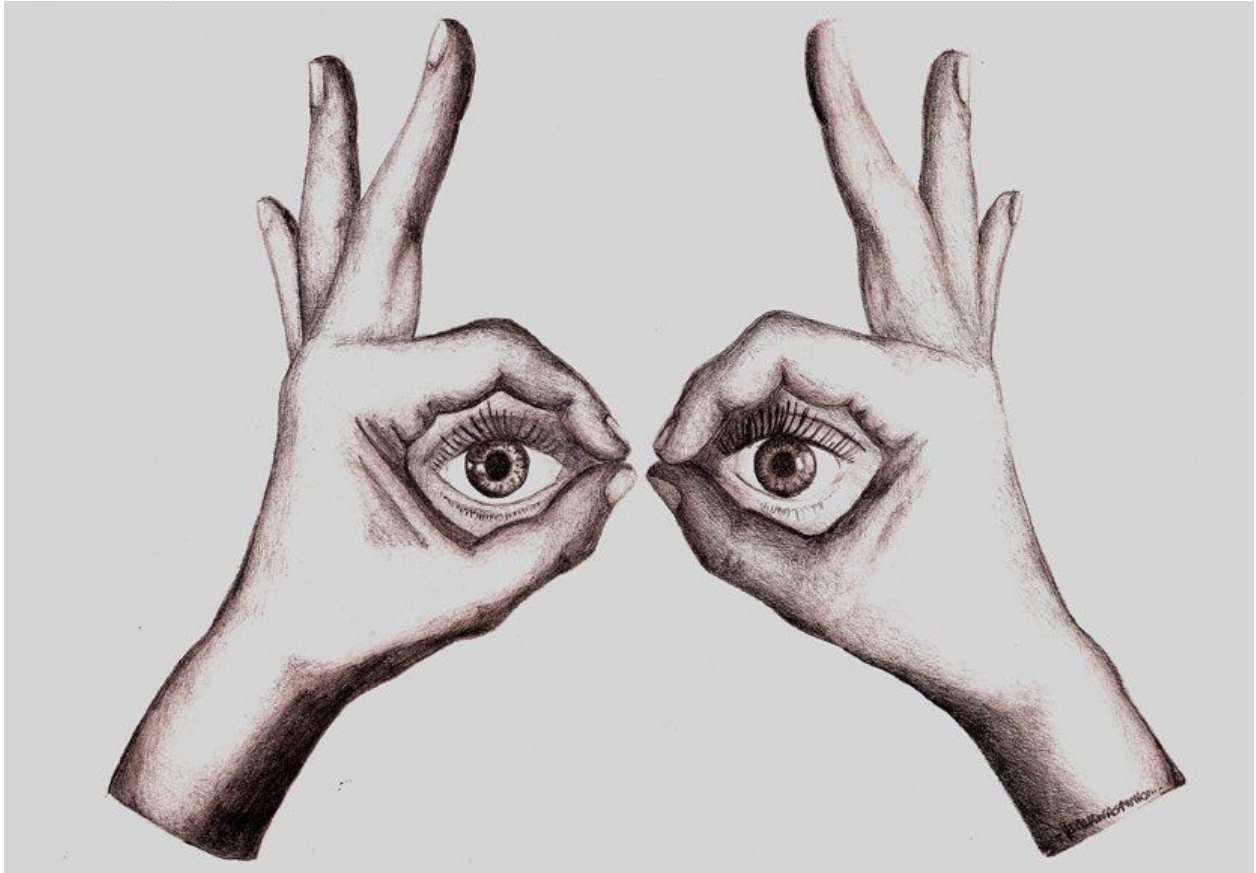


why eye contact is so awkward?



Eye contact is one of the most important forms of nonverbal communication. We use eye contact every day to indicate interest while we listen and speak. And it makes it all easier to track someone's attention and notice when their interest drops down. Looking someone directly in the eyes during a conversation is the key to making any social, professional or romantic connection.

Our sensitivity to eye contact begins incredibly early. Infants of just two days of age prefer looking at faces that gaze back at them.

We are more likely to believe statements made by a person who looks us in the eye. Yet maintaining eye contact with too much intensity is seen as a feature of psychopaths. Research has shown that it takes just a few seconds for a gaze to go from

comfortable to creepy. Luckily, in a study recently published in Royal Society Open Science, a team of British psychologists claim to have figured it out: On average, the ideal length of eye contact — enough that you don't seem shifty, but not so much that you're creepily intense — is 3.3 seconds.

A number of emotional states can cause someone to avoid eye contact while trying to communicate, such as shyness, embarrassment, or guilt. The problem is the fact that we all have varying levels of comfort when it comes to locking eyes. The data showed that withdrawal, which is related to feeling of vulnerability, was the key feature that explained the desire to avoid eye contact. It is also a very common feature of people suffering from **social anxiety**.

As mentioned before, one of the most common reasons that people avoid eye contact is from simple insecurity. Eye contact invites more interaction, and you might not want people to take a closer look at you because of how you feel about yourself. People with higher-status make more eye contact when they are speaking to others, while those who feel they are of lower-status will make less eye contact and be the first to avert their gaze. This lack of confidence can be rooted in insecurity over one's physical appearance, or the state of mind. A study was done where college students were shown faces which looked at the participants with different kinds of gazes—averted or direct. The students then ranked the faces on whether they seemed approachable or avoidable. Then a survey was given to the participants that evaluated their mental health. The students who ranked the faces that had a direct gaze as approachable were found to be more emotionally stable than those who found the direct gaze faces avoidable.

To sum up, we reduce eye contact when we are talking about something shameful or embarrassing, when we are sad or depressed, and when we are accessing internal thoughts or emotions.

As Hietanen points out “nowadays, our gaze is quite often directed to computer screens or to our mobile screens, even when being together with other people,” he says. “It's pretty self-evident that this is not beneficial for smooth social interaction.” Eye contact has always been fraught with awkwardness; now, though, that may be truer than ever.

FURTHER READING

→ Cultural background modulates how we look at other persons' gaze

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23585703>

→ Psychology of eye contact

<https://digest.bps.org.uk/2016/11/28/the-psychology-of-eye-contact-digested/>

→ The Neuroscience of Making Eye Contact

[https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-athletes-way/201403/the-neuroscience-making-eye-cont
act](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-athletes-way/201403/the-neuroscience-making-eye-contact)

→ The Silent Language of Leaders: How Body Language Can Help--or Hurt--How You Lead

[https://www.amazon.com/Silent-Language-Leaders-Help---Hurt--How/dp/0470876360/ref=sr_1_1?ie=
UTF8&qid=1449012634&sr=8-1&keywords=the+silent+language+of+leaders+how+body+language+can
+help--or+hurt--how+you+lead](https://www.amazon.com/Silent-Language-Leaders-Help---Hurt--How/dp/0470876360/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1449012634&sr=8-1&keywords=the+silent+language+of+leaders+how+body+language+can+help--or+hurt--how+you+lead)