

Indians tend to shake their heads from side to side to convey "yes," while in Canada it would be interpreted as "no." Similarly, when an Indian repeatedly nods his or her head during a discussion, it means "yes, I'm listening," not "yes, I agree." When in doubt, clarify what is being communicated non-verbally.

Eye contact

Long ago, Indians made eye contact only with people of equal status. Today, they generally prefer to look everyone in the eye when speaking. People of lower social class and those who are low in an organizational hierarchy sometimes avoid eye contact with superiors out of respect for authority. However, as a general rule, failure to establish direct eye contact is a sign of untrustworthiness.

Middle- and high-ranking female employees in the public and private sectors now look directly at the people they address and expect the same from their male colleagues. This was not the case in the past. Practices have changed as a result of education and women's exposure to, and demand for, equal status. You may, however, still find a woman behaving differently at home if she comes from a family that is bound by tradition.

Personal space

It is essential that you understand the limits of your Indian partner's

personal comfort zone. Desmond Morris (1978) says that it is a finger tip distance in Western Europe, a wrist distance in Eastern Europe and an elbow distance in the Mediterranean. In India, personal space varies according to status and gender. When talking to a member of their peer group, Indians normally stand in close proximity. This distance increases when they address their boss, as a sign of respect. When addressing subordinates or those of a different social class, people maintain an even wider distance. Generally, you should avoid close proximity, an indication of familiarity, when communicating with an Indian woman.

Terms and terminology

Try to minimize misunderstandings by avoiding unfamiliar terminology, jargon and idiomatic expressions.

Financial terms should be communicated in writing. Always indicate amounts of money in words, as well as in figures to avoid misunderstanding. Indians use lakhs and crores to demarcate large sums, while Canadians use hundreds, thousands and millions. The different conventions can cause confusion. For example, Indians write Rs. 24,00,000, and read it as "Rupees twenty-four lakhs." Canadians write the same amount as Rs. 2,400,000 and read it as "2.4-million Rupees." Take extra caution in such matters to avoid error.