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Gretchen Rubin
The Happiness Project

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Eight Tips to Know If You're Being Boring

Although it sounds rude, interruption is actually a good sign.

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Reviewed by Ekua Hagan



'Tis the season of merry-making, which means you're probably more likely than usual to find yourself making polite and perhaps awkward chit-chat. One of the challenges of the holidays!

If you have trouble talking to a stranger in those situations, here are some [tips](#) to consider.

But once you're talking, how do you know if the other person is interested in your conversation or not? One challenge is that the more socially adept a person is, the better he or she is at hiding boredom. It's a rare person, however, who can truly look fascinated while bored.

I'm sure someone has made a proper study of me, but these are just my observations (mostly from noting how I behave when I'm bored and trying to hide it):

1. **Repeated, perfunctory responses.** A person who repeats, "Oh really? Wow. Oh really? Interesting." isn't particularly engaged.
2. **Simple questions.** People who are bored ask simple questions. "When did you move?" "Where did you go?" People who are interested ask more complicated questions that show curiosity, not mere politeness.
3. **Interruption.** Although it sounds rude, interruption is actually a good sign, I think. It means a person is bursting to say something, and that shows interest. Similarly...
4. **Request for clarification.** A person who is sincerely interested in what you're saying will ask you to elaborate or to explain. "What does that term mean?" "When exactly did that happen?" "Then what did he say?" are the kinds of questions that show that someone is trying closely to follow what you're saying.
5. **Imbalance of talking time.** I suspect that many people fondly suppose that they usually do 80 percent of the talking because people find them fascinating. Sometimes, it's true, a discussion involves a huge download of information desired by the listener; that's a very satisfying kind of conversation. In general, though, people who are interested in a subject have things to say themselves; they want to add their own opinions, information, and experiences. If they aren't doing that,

get a word in. Recently, I was talking to someone who, though fascinating, didn't want to let me contribute to the conversation. I enjoyed it, but not as much as if I'd been able to talk, too.

6. Abrupt changes in topic. If you're talking to someone about, say, the life of Winston Churchill (I have a tendency to dwell at length on this particular subject), and all of a sudden the other person says, "So how are your kids?" it's a sign that he or she isn't very interested or perhaps not listening at all. When someone makes this kind of switch, I have to fight the urge not to drag the topic back to what I want to talk about — but the fact that someone has introduced a completely different subject is a sure sign that the subject is not engaging.

7. Body position. People with a good connection generally turn to face each other. A person who is partially turned away isn't fully embracing the conversation. Along the same lines, if you're a speaker trying to figure out if an audience is interested in what you're saying, then consider...

8. Audience posture. Back in 1885, Sir Francis Galton wrote a paper called "The Measurement of Fidget." He determined that people slouch and lean when bored, so a speaker can measure the boredom of an audience by seeing how far from vertically upright they are. Also, attentive people fidget less; bored people fidget more. An audience that's sitting still and upright is interested, while an audience that's horizontal and squirmy is bored.

there's a good chance the other person may be bored, too. Time to find a different subject. (Here's a [list](#) of some topics to avoid, if you don't want to risk boring people.)

Have you figured out any ways to tell if you're boring someone?



About the Author



Gretchen Rubin is the author of *The Happiness Project* and *Better than Before*, a *New York Times* bestseller that explains how to form good habits and break bad ones.

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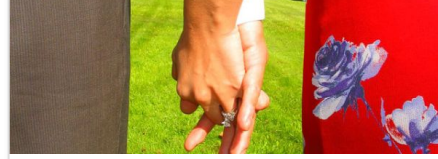
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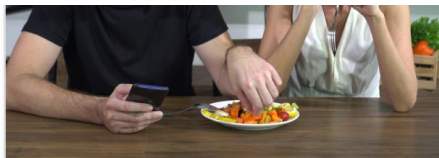
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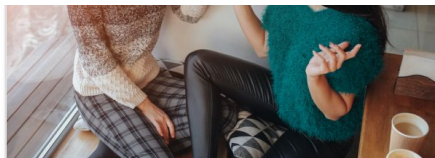
The attraction women feel for gay men tends to be emotional in nature.



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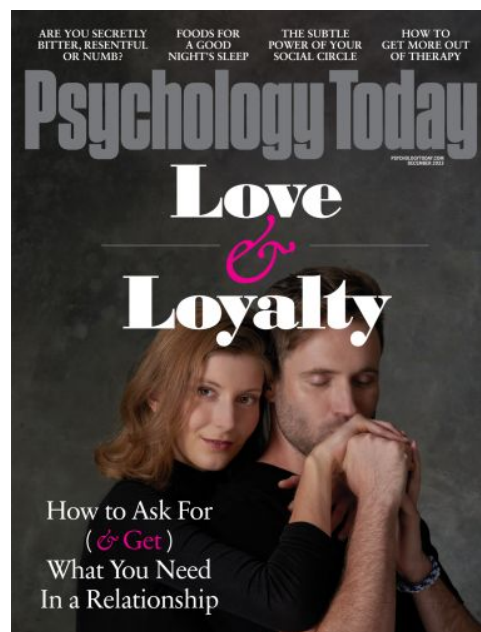
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