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Revealed: The secret eye signal that will instantly get you what you want, according to scientists

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Sometimes, we just wish our partner knew what we were thinking.

For example, when you're bored at a party and want to leave, or when you wish they'd subtly top up your glass of wine.

In fact, there are many scenarios where you might not want to verbalise what you really need.

Now, experts have pinpointed the most effective way to signal a request – without uttering a word.

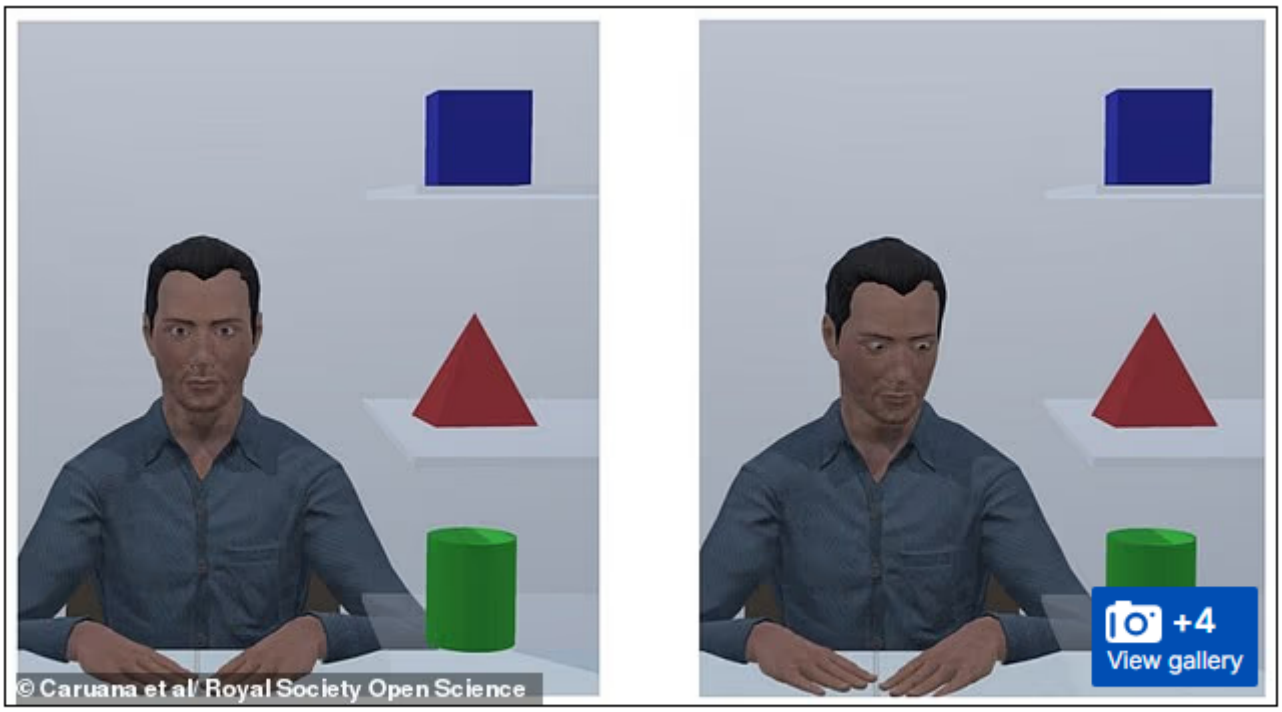
A team from Flinders University in **Adelaide**, **South Australia**, examined the role of eye contact in how we understand and respond to others.

They discovered the best way to indicate what you want is to look at an object, make eye contact with a person, and then look back at the same object.

This gaze sequence and timing made people most likely to interpret the gaze as a call for help, they found.

And it could help you make a swift exit from that next tedious dinner party.

Researchers discovered the best way to indicate what you want is to look at an object, make eye contact with a person, and then look back at the same object. Pictured: Mr Bean - who hardly speaks - is renowned for having incredibly expressive eyes



Researchers asked 137 people to complete a block-building task with a virtual partner, during which they had to decide if someone was inspecting or requesting one of three objects. Pictured: One of the avatars used in the study

'We found that it's not just how often someone looks at you, or if they look at you last in a sequence of eye movements, but the context of their eye movements that makes that behaviour appear communicative and relevant,' lead author Dr Nathan Caruana said.

His team asked 137 people to complete a block-building task with a virtual partner, during which they had to decide if someone was inspecting or requesting one of three objects.

Writing in the journal **Royal Society Open Science**, they said: 'Participants were most likely, and fastest, to perceive a request when eye contact occurred between two averted gaze shifts towards the same object.'

The team said their findings could be useful for those who want to effectively communicate with others in social contexts that rely on non-verbal communication.

This could include in competitive sports, during military operations or in a loud environment, they said.

They discovered that people also responded the same way to the gaze behaviour when it was carried out by a robot.

'Our findings have helped to decode one of our most instinctive behaviours and how it can be used to build better connections whether you're talking to a teammate, a robot or someone who communicates differently,' Dr Caruana said.

'Understanding how eye contact works could improve non-verbal communication training in high-pressure settings like sports, defence, and noisy workplaces.

‘It could also support people who rely heavily on visual cues, such as those who are hearing-impaired or autistic.’

Another way that eye contact can prove useful, according to a previous study, is when defending your chips from pesky seagulls.

Dr Neeltje Boogert, a research fellow in behavioural ecology at the University of Exeter, said keeping your gaze trained on the birds can act as a deterrent.

‘Gulls find the human gaze aversive and are less likely to approach your food when you’re staring them down,’ she explained.

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