

How to Look Confident Even When Nervous

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Confidence gives you an advantage in any situation. Your physical bearing, voice projection, and uniform appearance in the law enforcement profession is known as Command Presence. You're more likely to ace an interview, impress others, or be more persuasive if you are sure of yourself and abilities. Half of having others believe in you is to believe in yourself. Just looking like you're confident is often enough to make you more persuasive and successful.

*If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too...
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!*

Excerpt from "If," by Rudyard Kipling

Our behavior tends to shape our thinking, so acting assertive will help make your doubts and fears lessen. Individuals in distressing circumstances will gravitate to a calm on-scene officer because of the emotionless and confident demeanor displayed. It is understandable you may have never faced exactly the same situation, but know that every challenge is an opportunity to learn and grow. Very seldom does an officer have all the facts in the midst of a chaotic situation, but the job demands restoration of order, and the community expects it. Fear is not an uncommon reaction when placed in command of an incident, but the skills amassed through the display of confidence in previous situations can further the chance of success.

Even if the thought of confronting your boss or speaking in public makes you nervous, you can appear calm and collected. Try these tips for training yourself to look confident under pressure.

Using Body Language to Help You Look More Confident:

- **Adjust your posture.** The way you hold yourself and move around plays a significant role in determining your mood and how others see you. Make it a habit to sit and stand with your back straight and your shoulders back. Distribute your weight evenly and tighten your abdominal muscles. Here is an exercise to check your posture; put your heels, back, and head against a wall in a room with a mirror; without changing position, move away from the wall and turn sideways to the mirror to reveal your perfect posture. Alternatively, imaging a string supporting your body attached to the top of your head - dangling from this string your posture would be straight.
- **Make eye contact.** Some individuals have "Eye Contact Anxiety," but with practice, the fear can be overcome. Hold your head and your gaze up. Establish eye contact before you start speaking. If you find it uncomfortable to look someone in the eye, **try focusing on different areas of their face for a couple of seconds at a time.** The results will be about the same. Practice this in a mirror and video yourself until you can exceed one minute without diverting your gaze. You do not need to stare at the person the entire time, but can practice the "50/70 Rule." Look at a person 50% of the time when talking and 70% when listening. When breaking off eye contact, slowly move your eyes to the side without "darting away," and do not excessively blink, making you appear nervous. Practice frequently when out in public and be aware of how others react to your eye contact.
- **Shake hands.** What's your handshake like? We know from studies others may instantly judge your character from how you shake. Strive to be the first to extend your hand. Extend it naturally and not facing up or down. Push your hand deep into the other person's hand until the web between your thumb and index finger meets the same part of their hand. Check that your grip is reasonably firm, and hold on for about 5 seconds, and shake approximately 4 times. Working on your handshake may also remind you to keep your hands out of your pockets. Discretely dry your palm before having to shake someone's hand - no one likes to shake a wet hand. Apply firm pressure and quickly adjust to the pressure you receive back.

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- **Open up.** Overall, think in terms of taking up whatever space is available to you. Uncross your arms and legs. Plant your feet about a foot apart. Lean toward someone while they're talking to you. Leaning back, turning sideways, or crossing your arms and legs are negative body language indicative of nervousness. Keep your hands out of your pockets, and try not to fidget or rock back-and-forth on your heels.
- **Slow down.** If you tend to move faster when you're nervous, experiment with doing the opposite. Make your gestures and speech more deliberate and relaxed. Recognize when you are feeling anxious or nervous and purposefully counter those feelings.
- **Smile wide.** A happy face looks more confident and attractive. Think about how you feel when someone beams at you and share that joy with others. Frowning or having tight lips is a telltale sign of nervousness. Smile or laugh when appropriate, but do not force it when not natural to do so.

Other Ways to Look More Confident

- **Males get a haircut, and females wear a conservative hairstyle.** Careful grooming reminds yourself and others that you're worth caring about. Treat yourself to a makeover if needed to boost your confidence. When applying to a law enforcement agency, your hair cannot be too short. Males can expect if attending an academy, hair will be required to be extremely short if not "buzz cut." Females should pull their hair back, place it in a bun, or attempt to keep it out of your eyes and shoulders.
- **Exercise regularly.** It's easier to look and feel confident when your body is strong and limber. Find a variety of physical activities you enjoy and will want to maintain. Fitness should be a lifetime endeavor and allow you to maintain a healthy weight. Use fitness apps to track progress and increase accountability and motivation.
- **Avoid fillers.** Upgrade your communications by cutting the "ums" and "ahs" from your vocabulary. Replace those fillers with a strategic silent pause instead. To assess how often you use this filler, video yourself telling your life story for at least one minute and then review counting how often you use them.

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- **Breathe deeply.** Use your breath to calm and center yourself. Lengthening your exhalations helps you to feel braver and manage stress. Download the "Calm" App and use it regularly to practice controlling your breath.
- **Prepare small talk.** Conversation skills can be improved. If you often struggle to find something to chat about, brush up on interesting news stories or funny anecdotes you can share at parties or networking events. If you are meeting with a specific person find out as much as you can about their interests or hobbies.
- **Express interest.** Your anxiety levels decrease when you focus on others. Listen attentively, show enthusiasm, and ask relevant questions. You may make new friends and feel more connected to your old ones. People are losing their communication skills in an ever increasing electronically connected world by constantly staring at their phones. Do not talk and look at your phone. Put your phone on Do Not Disturb, turn it off or vibrate and put it in your back pocket. If you find it hard to remember the conversation you had with a person you are not paying enough attention.
- **Think positive.** Pay attention to the things you like about yourself and others. Make a list of the events and experiences that you're grateful for. Being upbeat will help you to appreciate your strengths and aim higher. Do not discount self-help websites, podcasts, or personal improvement programs. We all can identify our weaknesses and improve our behaviors.
- **Create a mantra.** Your self-talk can undermine your efforts or boost your sense of self-worth. Find some words and phrases that uplift you. Post them somewhere you can see them and repeat them to yourself a few times each day.

It's natural to feel nervous in high-stakes situations like business presentations and social situations. The more you practice looking confident, the more effective your communications with others will be. You will make a positive impression on others and strengthen your belief in yourself.



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