

HELP!

AM I

Don't wait for the stifled yawn, here's how to know if your conversation will be remembered for all the wrong reasons. By Chelsea Clark

**N**o-one wants to be called boring. But before you think it's a tag reserved for people who talk endlessly about themselves, you might be surprised to learn that no matter what your conversation is about, if you don't engage the other person in an interesting way, you could be labelled the big B as well.

"I think we're usually bored when we can't find common experiences or interests to discuss," says author of *The Happiness Project*, Gretchen Rubin. "Of course, people who drone on, who tell stories in excruciating detail, or who won't engage in a proper exchange are also boring."

Life coach Claire Hall says low self-esteem can also be the culprit. "A person can be perceived as boring when in fact they suffer from a lack of self-confidence," she says. "They could be nervous when in conversations and might not voluntarily share information out of fear of judgement."

If you're worried that you might be boring other people, Hall says to start by "giving yourself a break". "Stop being so hard on yourself and giving yourself the label 'boring' – it can become a self-fulfilling prophecy," she says.



# BORING?

“Work out why you think you may be boring. Possibly, ask a trusted friend to give some feedback on your conversational skills. Chances are you are not boring, just talking to the wrong people.”

So, how do you actually know if the subject you're passionate about and could talk about for hours isn't precisely what someone else might find tedious and dull?

You don't but, according to Rubin, – who says her favourite 'boring' topic is Winston Churchill – there are signs to look out for that will help you know when you've become monotonous.

➤ **First, Rubin says to be aware of the danger that you might be boring!** “If you see signs of it in the person you're talking to, switch subjects,” she says. These signs include no interruptions or simple questions. “People who are interested ask more complicated questions that show curiosity, not just politeness,” says Rubin.

➤ **Check their posture:** People fidget and lean when they're bored so if you notice your conversation partner shifting their weight, fiddling with their clothes or jewellery or moving position to lean on something, it might be time to change the subject. Rubin says attentive people fidget less. “An audience that's sitting still and upright is interested, while an audience that's horizontal and squirmy is bored,” she says.

➤ **One word responses and simple questions:** A person who repeats, 'Oh really? Wow. Oh really?

Interesting!' isn't engaged in the conversation, says Rubin. Similarly, people who are bored ask simple questions. “A person who is sincerely interested in what you're saying will ask you to elaborate or to explain,” says Rubin. ‘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, she says.

➤ **Imbalance of talking time:** “I suspect that many people wrongly suppose they usually do 80 per cent of the talking because people find them fascinating,” says Rubin. Not so! If you find yourself waffling on, stop and take stock of how your audience is behaving. “In general, people who are interested in a subject have things to say themselves,” says Rubin. “They want to add their own opinions, information and experiences. If they're not, they're probably keeping quiet in the hope the conversation will end faster.”

## DON'T MENTION IT...

Rubin says in the right context and with the right person any topic can be interesting, but if you want to give the 'boring' label a wide berth, here is her hit-list of topics to avoid.

1. A dream.
2. The recent changes in your child's nap schedule.
3. The route you took to get here.
4. An excellent meal you once had at a restaurant.
5. The latest additions to your wine cellar.
6. An account of your last golf game.
7. The plot of a movie or play – in particular, the funny parts.

## CHANGE THE TOPIC

If you're worried you might be boring other people, Hall says a good tip is to turn the conversation back to the other person. “Ask an interesting question about what the other person thinks about something,” she says. “People love to talk about themselves as a rule so they'll jump on the chance.” If you find it hard to think of things to talk about, check the news right before you go.