
NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION



Extracts from Marshall Rosenberg books:
“Nonviolent Communication: A language of life”
“Nonviolent Communication: Companion workbook”
“Speak Peace in a world of conflict”
v.09.01

*When you're busy judging people,
you have no time to love them.*

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What people say about Nonviolent Communication (Compassionate Communication)

- NVC is a powerful methodology for communicating in a way that meets both parties needs.
- It brings a more loving, compassionate, and nonviolent way of understanding and functioning with others.
- NVC is a powerful tool for peace, it helps liberate us from ancient patterns of violence, transforming potential conflicts into peaceful dialogues. It show us how to teach peace, exploring the connection between language and violence.
- NVC shows us how to *listen emphatically* and also *communicate our authentic feelings and needs*. NVC connects soul to soul, creating a lot of healing.

Foreword by Arun Gandhi

We often don't acknowledge our violence because we are ignorant about it; we assume we are not violent because our vision of violence is one of fighting, killing, beating, and wars the type of things the average individuals don't do.

Nonviolence means allowing the positive within you to emerge. Be dominated by love, respect, understanding, appreciation, compassion and concern for others rather than the self-centered and selfish, greedy, hateful, prejudiced, suspicious and aggressive attitudes that dominate our thinking.

If we change ourselves we change our world and changing ourselves begins with changing our language and methods of communication.

INTRODUCTION

Nonviolent Communication is a giving and receiving of messages that centers on two very important questions: *What's alive in us?* and *What can we do to make life more wonderful?*

Based on the crucial role of language and our use of words, NVC is a specific approach to communicating –speaking and listening- that leads us to give from the heart allowing our natural compassion to flourish.

It requires great honesty and openness, developing a certain literacy of expressions, and overcoming deeply ingrained learning that emphasizes judgment, fear, obligation, duty, punishment and reward, and shame.

Everything we do is in service of our needs. When this is applied to our view of others we'll see that we have no real enemies, that what others do to us is the best possible thing they know to do to get their needs met.

**Everything we
do is in service
of our needs.**

Purpose of NVC

NVC is a combination of thinking and language, as well as a means of using power designed to serve a specific intention. This intention is *to create the quality of connection with other people and oneself that allows compassionate giving to take place*. In this sense it is a spiritual practice: All actions are taken for the sole purpose of willingly contributing to the well-being of others and ourselves.

The primary purpose of Nonviolent Communication is to connect with other people in a way that enables giving to take place: compassionate giving. It's compassionate in that our giving comes willingly from the heart. We are giving service to others and ourselves –not out of duty or obligation, not out of fear of punishment or hope for a reward, not out of guilt or shame, but for what I consider part of our nature. It's in our nature to enjoy giving to one another.

A way to focus attention

NVC guides us in reframing how we express ourselves and hear others. Instead of being habitual, automatic reactions, *our words become conscious responses based firmly on an awareness of what we are perceiving, feeling and wanting*. We are led to express ourselves with honesty and clarity, while *simultaneously paying others a respectful and emphatic attention*. In any exchange we come to hear our own deeper needs and those of others.

PART I - THE MECHANICS OF SPEAKING PEACE

The two questions

What's alive in us?

Nonviolent Communication as we'll see, suggests how we can let people know what's alive in us. It shows us how to connect with what's alive in other people, even if they don't have words for saying it.

The second question –and it's linked to the first one- is:

What can we do to make life more wonderful?

So these two questions are the basis of Nonviolent Communication: What's alive in us? What can we do to make life more wonderful?

The NVC Process

We focus the light of consciousness on four areas –referred as the four components of the NVC model.

1. The concrete actions we are *observing* that are affecting our well-being

First we observe what is actually happening in a situation: what are we observing others saying or doing that is either enriching or not enriching our life? The trick is to be able to articulate this observation without introducing any judgment or evaluation.

Four components of NVC:

- 1. observation**
- 2. feelings**
- 3. needs**
- 4. request**

2. How we *feel* in relation to what we are observing

Next we state how we feel when we observe this action: are we hurt, scared, joyful, amused, irritated, etc?

3. The *needs, values, desires, etc.* that are creating our feelings

Thirdly, we say what needs of ours are connected to the feelings we have identified.

4. The concrete action we request in order to enrich our lives

"Felix, when I ¹see socks under the coffee table I ²feel irritated because I am needing ³more order in the room that we share in common.

⁴Would you be willing to put your socks in your room or in the washing machine?"

Two parts of NVC

Part of the NVC is to express these four pieces of information very clearly. The other aspect of these communication consist of receiving these same four pieces of information from others.

1. *Expressing honesty* through the four components
2. *Receiving emphatically* through the four components

Listen for the feeling and need behind each statement without agreeing or disagreeing.

Connecting with Our Intention:

Find a place where you enjoy being and may be undisturbed for at least half an hour.

Take some conscious breaths to quiet your mind and body.

Notice your environment: what do you see, hear, smell, feel in this place?

Check to see how you feel and what your body is experiencing. Do you feel agitated, bored, tranquil, melancholic...? Are you holding tension in your face, shoulders, back...?

COMMUNICATION THAT BLOCKS COMPASSION (*life-alienating communication*)

Certain ways of communicating alienate us from our natural state of compassion and trap us in a world of ideas about rightness and wrongness –a world of judgments. Our attention is focused on classifying, analyzing, and determining levels of wrongness rather than on what we and others need and not getting.

I believe that *violence comes because of how we were educated, not because of our nature*. We have been educated in a way that makes violence enjoyable. This kind of education gets us disconnected from our compassionate nature. It started long ago with myths about human nature that framed humans as basically evil and selfish –and that the good life is heroic forces crushing evil forces. We’ve been living under this destructive mythology for long time, and it comes complete with a language that dehumanizes people and turn them into objects.

We have learned to think in terms of moralistic judgments of one another. We have words in our consciousness like *right, wrong, good, bad, selfish, unselfish*. And connected to these judgments is a concept of justice based on what we “deserve.” If you do bad things, you deserve to be punished. If you do good things, you deserve to be rewarded. Unfortunately, we have been subjected to this consciousness, this faulty education, for a long, long time. I think that’s the core of violence on our planet.

In the world of judgments, our concern on WHO “IS” WHAT.

Diagnosis, judgments, analysis, criticism, comparisons

Blame, insults, put-downs (critical remark), labels, criticism, comparisons, and diagnoses are all forms of judgment.

When we judge, as a result, we *increase defensiveness and resistance from others*. If they do agree to act in harmony with our values because they concur with our analysis of their wrongness, they will likely do so out of *fear, guilt, or shame*.

“The problem with you is that you’re *too selfish*.”

“She is *lazy*.”

"It is wrong."

"If you don't help me I won't lend it to you." (demand with punishment)

"It is going to be a shame if you don't show up." (demand with blame)

"Why can't you be like your brother?" (comparison)

"You are so stupid." (labeling and insult)

"You are so intelligent." (positive labeling)

It is important not to confuse *value judgments* and *moralistic judgments*. Value judgments *reflect our beliefs of how life can be best served*; for example we might value honesty, freedom, or peace.

There is a considerable less violence in cultures where people think in *terms of human needs* than in cultures where people label one another as "good" or "bad" and believe that the "bad" ones *deserve to be punished*.

In most of the violent TV programs children watch, the hero either kills people or beats them up. Viewers having been taught that bad guys deserve to be punished, take pleasure in watching this violence.

At the root of violence is a kind of thinking that attributes the cause of conflict to wrongness in one's adversaries, and a corresponding inability to think of oneself or others in terms of vulnerability –what one might be feeling, fearing, yearning for, missing, etc.

Denial of responsibility

We are each responsible for our own thoughts, feelings, and actions. The phrase "You make me feel guilty" is an example of how language facilitates the denial of personal responsibility for our own feelings and thoughts.

"I cleaned my room because *I had to*." – impersonal forces.

"I drink because *I am alcoholic*." – diagnosis or psychological history.

"I hit my child because *he ran into the street*." – action of others.

"I lied because *my boss told me to*." – dictates of authority.

"I start smoking because *all my friends did.*" – group pressure.

"I have to suspend you because *it is the school policy.*" – institutional policies rules, and regulations.

"I do it because *I am a husband and a father.*" – gender, social or age roles.

We can replace language that implies lack of choice with language that *acknowledge choice.*

"They made me sit there without moving for a whole hour" – denial or responsibility.

"I chose to sit there without moving for a whole hour because I wanted to try out the teacher's instructions." - NVC

Replace "I have to"
with "I choose to",
and "I should" with
"I might".

Communicating our desires as demands

A demand explicitly or implicitly threatens listeners with *blame or punishment* if they fail to comply. It is a common form of communication in our culture, especially among those who hold position of authority.

"You have to attend school until you're 16." – demand language

"We'd like you to attend school until you're 16 because we value a solid education." – without demand

Deserve reward and deserve punishment

Life-alienating communication is also associated with the concept that *certain actions merit reward while others merit punishment.*

"He deserves to be punished for what he did." It assumes "badness" and calls for punishment to make them repent and change their behavior. It is in everyone's interest that people change, not in order to avoid punishment, but because they see the change as benefiting themselves.

"People who hurt others deserve to be punished." – deserve oriented language

"I'd like to see people who hurt others be given the opportunity to make amends for harm they caused because I value healing and restoration of trust." - NVC

Think of the forms of life-alienating communication as the “Four D’s of Disconnection”:

- **Diagnosis, judgments, analysis, criticism, comparison**
- **Denial of responsibility**
- **Demand**
- **“Deserve” oriented language**

Most of us grew up speaking a language that encourage us to label, compare, demand, and pronounce judgments rather than to be aware of what we are feeling and needing.

Freeing ourselves from cultural conditioning

We can liberate ourselves from cultural conditioning. Passed down through generations, even centuries, much of this destructing cultural learning is so ingrained in our lives that we are no longer conscious of it. It takes tremendous energy and awareness to recognize this destructive learning and to transform it into thoughts and behaviors that are of value and of service to life.

The masses, discourage from developing awareness of their own needs, have instead been educated to be *docile and subservient to authority*.

Another disempowering self-talk that you should consciously avoid is limiting self-dialogue, like “I can’t,” or “I’ll never be able to...”

*“The only thing between you and your goals
is your own limiting thoughts.”
Dr. Eric Amidi*

OBSERVING WITHOUT EVALUATING

“You can observe a lot just by watching.”
- Yogi Berra -

One specific thing that a person did is what I call an *observation*. What do people do that we either like or don't like.

In order to tell people what's alive in us we need to be able to tell them what they're doing that is supporting life in us, as well as what they are doing that isn't supporting life in us. But it's very important to learn how to say that to people *without mixing in any evaluation*.

Example:

II was working with a woman who was concerned about something her teenage daughter didn't do.

Marshall: “What was it that your teenage daughter didn't do?”

Woman: “She is lazy”

I asked what the daughter *does* and she told me what she thought the daughter *was*, diagnosing her as “lazy.”

Any words we use that imply the wrongness of others are tragic expressions of what's alive in us. They don't lead to people enjoying contributing to our well-being. They provoke defensiveness and counter aggression.

The prevailing educational process is one of making people hate themselves for what they've done. The idea is, you have to get them to see how terrible they are, and then they will be penitent and change the error of their ways!

When I was driving, if someone else was driving in a way I didn't like and I wanted to educate them, I would open up the window and yell something like, “Idiot.” The theory is they're supposed to feel guilt and repent, and they're suppose to say, “I am sorry. I see that I was wrong. I've see the error of my ways.” That's quite a theory but it never worked.

Telling people what's wrong with them is suicidal and tragic –and besides, it's ineffective. We don't want these judgments to mix in when we try to tell people what they've done that we don't like. We

want to go *directly to the behavior without mixing in a diagnosis, judgment or evaluation.*

So this is the first step in trying to tell people what's alive in us. It's the ability to call their attention –concretely, specifically –what the person is doing that we like or don't like, without mixing in any evaluation.

The first component of NVC entails the *separation of observation from evaluation.* We need to clearly observe what we are seeing, hearing, or touching that is affecting our sense of well-being, *without mixing in any evaluation.*

When we combine observation with evaluation we *decrease the likelihood that others will hear our intended message.* Instead, they are apt to hear criticism and thus resist what we are saying.

NVC does not mandate that we refrain from evaluating. It only requires that we maintain a separation between our observations and our evaluations. Evaluations are to be based on observations *specific to time and context.*

*"Don't mix up what we can see
with what is our opinion."
- Ruth Bebermeyer -*

*"Observing without evaluating
is the highest form of human intelligence"
- Krishnamurti -*

For most of us, it is difficult to make observations of people and their behavior that are free of evaluation (judgment, criticism, or other forms of analysis, diagnosis or opinion). Even a positive or an apparently neutral label limits our perception of the totality of another person's being.

Distinguishing observation from evaluation

"John was *angry* with me yesterday *for no reason.*" – evaluation

"John told me he was angry" - observation

"John pounded his fist on the table" - observation

"My father is a *good man.*" – evaluation

"For the last 25 years my father has given one tenth of his salary to charity." - observation

"Janice work *too much*." – evaluation

"Janice spent over 60 hours at the office this week." - observation

"Henry is *aggressive*." – evaluation

"Henry hit his sister when she switched the television channel." - observation

"You *are a responsible child*." – evaluation (positive labeling)

"You *are too generous*." – evaluation (positive labeling)

"When I see you doing that *I think* you being too generous" - NVC

"You *are going to fall*" – evaluation (statement with no possibilities)

"Be careful, *I fear* that you could fall" – NVC

"He *is a poor soccer player*" – evaluation (negative label)

"He has not scored a goal in 20 games" – NVC (observation)

Exaggerations

Be careful with the words *always, never, ever, whenever, frequently*. Sometimes such words are used as exaggerations, in which case observations and evaluations are being mixed.

"You are *always* busy."

"She is *never* there when she's needed."

In such cases they often provoke defensiveness rather than compassion. Observations are to be made *specific to time and context*.

Examples

"My son *often* doesn't brush his teeth." – evaluation

"Twice this week my son didn't brush his teeth before going to bed." - observation

"Luke told me I didn't look good in yellow." - observation

"Pam was first in line every day this week." - observation

"My aunt *complains* when I talk with her." – evaluation

"My aunt called me three times this week, and each time talked about people who treated her in ways she didn't like." - observation

"One of the best ways to learn NVC is simply to practice, practice, practice." - evaluation

"*All the people in my practice group say that* one of the best ways to learn NVC is simply to practice, practice, practice." - observation

"Marshal said the only way to learn NVC is to practice." - observation

"*You lied me* about your grades." - evaluation

"I heard you say you passed all your courses, but this report card shows two F's." - observation

"My husband *hardly express any affection.*" - evaluation

"My husband hasn't kissed me for two weeks." - observation

"You are *arguing with me* for the fourth time this week." - evaluation

"This is the fourth time this week that you stated you disagree with something I'm saying." - observation

"They *made fun* of the fact I served pigs' feet for dinner." - evaluation

"When I served pig's feet for dinner, I heard laughter and someone saying, 'Where are the toenail clippers when we need them?'" - observation

"They are *destroying* the environment." – evaluation

"They have cut over 90% of this territory, and are still continuing." – observation.

"The doctor *refuses to explain* anything to me." - evaluation

"The doctor did not say anything to me about what causes the pain or what can be done." – observation

IDENTIFYING AND EXPRESSING FEELINGS

To say clearly what's alive in us at any given moment we have to be clear about what we feel and what we need. Let's start with the feelings.

Example:

One student in the university I was working with wanted to work on his roommate.

Marshall: "Ok, what is the behavior that your roommate does that you don't like?"

Student: "He plays the radio late at night when I am trying to sleep."

Marshall: "Ok, now tell me how do you feel when he does that?"

Student: "I feel it is wrong."

Marshall: "I am not making clear then what I mean by feelings. 'It's wrong' is what I would call a judgment of the other person. I'm asking you how you feel. What emotions do you feel? How do you feel?"

Student: "Well, I think that when a person is so insensitive to other people, it's evidence of a personality disturbance."

Marshall: "Hold it, hold it. You're still up in your head analyzing his wrongness. I'm asking, go into your heart, just listen to your body for a moment. How do you feel when he plays the radio late at night?"

Student: "I feel pissed off."

Marshall: "Ok, there are other ways of saying it, but that is Ok."

Feelings can be used in a destructive way if we try to imply that other people's behavior are the cause of our feelings. The cause of our feelings is not other people's behavior, it's our needs. It's not what other people do that can hurt you: it's how you take it.

Unfortunately, we were educated in guilt-inducing ways by authorities –teachers, parents, etc. –who used guilt to mobilize us to do what they wanted. They might have expressed feelings this way:

"It hurts me when you don't clean up your room."

"You make me angry when you hit your brother."

We've been educated by people who tried to make us feel responsible for their feelings so we would feel guilty. We don't want

to use feelings in a guilt-inducing manner. It's very important that when we do express our feelings we follow that expression with a statement that makes it clear that the cause of our feelings is our needs.

We learned that feelings were simply not considered important. What was valued was "*the right way to think*" – as defined by those who help positions of rank and authority. We are not trained to be in contact with ourselves. We learn to be "up in our head" wondering, "What is it that others think is right for me to say or do?"

We would gain a lot of benefits by strengthening our *feelings vocabulary* and by understanding the potential impact of *expressing one's vulnerability*. Allowing ourselves to be vulnerable by expressing our feelings can help resolve conflicts.

It is important to have a vocabulary of feelings that really does just describe what's alive in us and that in no way are interpretations of other people.

That means we don't want to use expressions like "I feel misunderstood." That's not a feeling; it's more how we are analyzing whether the other person has understood us or not. We can be angry or frustrated; it could be different things. Likewise, we don't want to use phrases like "I feel manipulated" or "I feel criticized." In our training they are not what we called feelings.

Feelings versus non-feelings

NVC distinguishes the expressions of actual feelings from words and statements that describe thoughts, opinion, assessments, and interpretations.

1. Distinguish feelings from thoughts (opinion, interpretations).

"I *feel* that you should know better." – thought ("I *think*...")

"I *feel* *frustrated*." – feeling

"I *feel* it is useless." – thought ("I *think*...")

"I *feel* *scared* when you say that" – feeling

"I *feel* *you don't love me*." – opinion ("I *think*...")

"I *am* *sad* that you're living" – feeling

"I *feel* you are annoying me on purpose." – opinion ("I *think*...")

"I am *upset* because *I think* you are annoying me purpose." – feeling

"I *feel* I am being unkind to them." – opinion ("I *think*...")

"I feel *regret* around how I am behaving towards them." – feeling

2. Distinguish between words that express feelings and those that describe *what we think we are* (self opinion).

"I feel *inadequate* as a guitar player." – opinion of my ability

"I feel (disappointed, impatient, frustrated) with myself as a guitar player." - feelings

3. Differentiate between words that express feelings and those that describe *how we think others are evaluating us*. (opinion).

"I feel *unimportant* to the people with whom I work." – how I think other are evaluating me.

4. Differentiate between words that express feelings and those that describe *how we think others are behaving towards (or around) us*.

"I feel *misunderstood*." – my opinion about the other person level of understanding.

"I feel *ignored*." – again it is an interpretation of the action of others rather than a clear statement of how we are feeling.

"When you don't greet me, I feel *neglected*." – interpretation

"When you don't greet me at the door, I feel *lonely*." - feeling

Interpretations (not feelings) we confuse with feelings

abandoned	diminished	put down
abused	distrusted	rejected
attacked	interrupted	unappreciated
betrayed	intimidated	unheard
boxed-in	manipulated	unseen
bullied	misunderstood	unsupported
cheated	neglected	unwanted
coerced	pressured	used
cornered	provoked	

Examples

"I am *happy* that you can come." – feeling

"I feel *disturbed*" - feeling

"I feel *like hitting you*" - opinion

"I'd be *furious too* if that had happened to me." – interpretation

"I feel *concerned* that this happened to you. I would have been furious if it had been me." – feeling

"You are wearing me out." – opinion (denial of responsibility)

"I feel exhausted." – feeling

General vs. specific emotions

In expressing our feelings, it helps to use words that refer to specific emotions, rather than words that are vague or general.

"I feel *good* about that." – could mean *happy, excited, relieved*.

"I feel *good* about what you did for me." – vague feeling (*relieved, gratified...*)

Building a vocabulary for feelings

By developing a vocabulary of feelings that allows us to clearly and specifically name or identify our emotions, we can connect more easily with one another.

Some feelings when needs are not fulfilled

Scared, Frightened, fearful, afraid

Impatient, anguished, disturbed, stressed

Concerned, distressed, worried, tired, anxious

Confused, nervous, puzzled, reluctant, hesitant

Angry, upset, annoyed, irritated, furious

Indifferent, lonely, distant, passive

Ashamed, embarrassed, guilty

Overwhelmed, shocked, surprised

Sad, hurt, sensitive, vulnerable

Discouraged, frustrated, disappointed, uncomfortable, unhappy

Helpless, Hopeless

Envious, Jealous

Some feelings when needs are fulfilled

Optimistic, excited, energetic, eager

Hopeful, confident, positive, trustful

Encouraged, inspired, stimulated

Interested, intrigued, curious

Amazed, surprised, delighted

Calm, comfortable, cool, relaxed

Peaceful, carefree, composed

Fulfilled, pleased, relieved, satisfied

Happy, joyous, radiant

Touched, moved

Thankful, gratified, grateful, glad

Tender, sensitive, warm

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

The third component of NVC entails the acknowledgment of the root of our feelings. What others say and do may be the *stimulus*, but never the *cause* of our feelings. We see that our feelings result from *how we choose to receive what others say or do, as well as our particular needs and expectations in that moment*.

With the third component, we are led to accept responsibility for what we do to generate our own feelings.

We accept responsibility rather than blame other people for our feelings by acknowledging our own needs, desires, expectations, values, or thoughts.

"*You disappointed me* by not coming over last evening." – denial resp. (blaming)

"I was disappointed when you didn't come over, because I wanted to talk some things that were bothering me." – NVC

Four options on how to receive a negative message

When someone give us a negative message, whatever verbally or nonverbally, we have four options as to how to receive it.

"You are the most self-centered person I've ever met."

1. Choose to take it personally, and accept the other person's judgment and blame ourselves (guilt, shame, depression.)

"Oh, I should've been more sensitive!"

2. Blame the speaker (and feel anger.)

"You have not right to say that! I am always considering your needs, You're the one who is really self-centered."

3. Shine the light of consciousness on our own feelings and needs.

"When I hear you saying that I am the most self-centered person you've ever met, I feel hurt, because I need some recognition on my efforts to be considerate of your preferences."

4. Shine the light of consciousness on the other person's feelings and needs as they are currently expressed.

"Are you feeling hurt because you need more consideration for your preferences?"

Being motivated out of guilt

The basic mechanism of motivating by guilt is *to attribute the responsibility for one's own feelings to others*. When parents say, "It hurts Mommy and Daddy when you get poor grades at school," they are implying that the child's actions are the cause of the parents' happiness or unhappiness. On the surface, feeling responsible for the feelings of others can easily be mistaken for positive caring. It appears that the child cares for the parent and feels bad because the parent is suffering. However, if children who assume this kind of responsibility change their behavior in accordance to parental wishes, they are not acting from the heart, but acting to *avoid guilt*.

Other ways of denial of responsibility

In each of these instances, we can deepen our awareness of our own responsibility by substituting the phrase:

"I feel ... because I ..."

1. Denial of responsibility by using impersonal pronouns:

"*It* really infuriates me when spelling mistakes appear in our public brochures."

"*I feel* infuriated when spelling mistakes like that appear in our public brochures, *because I* want our company to project a professional image." - NVC

"*That* bugs me a lot." – denial responsibility

"Little things people say sometimes hurt me." – denial responsibility

"Sometimes when people say little things, I feel hurt because I want to be appreciated, not criticized." – NVC

2. Denial of responsibility by mention only the actions of others:

"When *you don't call me on my birthday*, I feel hurt."

"Mommy is disappointed when *you don't finish your food*."

"*Mommy feels* disappointed when you don't finish your food, *because I* want you to grow up strong and healthy." - NVC

"You irritate me when you leave company documents on the conference room floor."

"I'm irritated when you leave company documents on the conference floor, because I want our documents to be safely stored and accessible." – NVC

"I feel frustrated when you come late."

"I feel frustrated when you come late, because I was hoping we'd be able to get some front-row seats." – NVC

"I feel happy that you received that award." – positive Denial resp.

"When you received that award, I felt happy because I was hoping you'd be recognized for all the work you'd put into the project." – NVC

3. Denial of responsibility by "I feel ... because you":

"I feel hurt *because you* don't love me."

"I feel angry *because the supervisor* broke her promise."

"*I feel* angry when the supervisor broke her promise, *because I* was counting on getting that long weekend to visit my brother." – NVC

"I feel disappointed because you said you would do it and you didn't."

"When you said you'd do it and then didn't, I feel disappointed because I want to be able to rely upon your words." – NVC

THE NEEDS AT THE ROOT OF FEELINGS

Let's look at the third component of expressing what's alive in us: needs. Many people associate needs with something negative. They associate needs with being needy, dependent, and selfish.

Again, I think that comes from our history of educating people to fit well into *dominant structures* so they are obedient and submissive to authority. Most governments, schools, companies – and even many families- operate as dominant structures.

The problem with people who are in touch with their needs is that they do not make good slaves. I went to school and I can't recall ever being asked what my needs were. My education didn't focus on helping me be more alive, more in touch with myself and others. It was oriented towards rewarding me for giving right answers as defined by authorities.

People who are in touch with their needs do not make good slaves.

People would not feel stimulated to help us if they do not clearly understand our needs. It is when people see the needs of another person that it stimulates their enjoyment of giving –because we can identify with needs. All humans have the same basic needs. We see each other humanness at the need level.

At this point we have listed the three pieces of information that are necessary to say what's alive in us: what we're observing, what we are feeling, and the needs of ours that are connected to our feelings.

"I feel as I do because I need ____."

Judgments, criticism, diagnoses, and interpretations of others are all alienated expressions of our own needs and values. When others hear criticism, they tend to invest their energy in *self-defense or counterattack*. If we are wishing for a compassionate response from others, it is self-defeating to express our needs by interpreting or diagnosing their behavior. Instead, the more directly we can connect our feelings to our needs, the easier it is for others to respond compassionately to our needs.

We are used to analyze and blame one another rather than clearly expressing what we need. When people begin talking about what

they need rather than what's wrong with one another, the possibility of finding ways to meet everybody's needs is greatly increased.

From emotional slavery to emotional liberation

In our development toward a state of emotional liberation, most of us seem to experience three stages in the way we relate to others.

1. Emotional slavery – we believe ourselves responsible for the feelings of others.
2. Obnoxious – we feel angry; we no longer want to be responsible for others' feelings.
3. Emotional liberation – we respond to the needs of others out of compassion, never out of fear, guilt, or shame. We accept full responsibility for our own intentions and actions, but not for the feelings of others.

At this stage, we are aware that we can never meet our own needs at the expense of others. Emotional liberation involves stating clearly what we need in a way that communicates we are equally concerned that the needs of the others be fulfilled.

Examples

"I feel angry when you say that, because I am wanting respect and I hear your words as an insult." - NVC

"I am sad that you won't be coming for dinner because I was hoping we could spend the evening together." - NVC

"I feel scared when you raise your voice."

"When you raise your voice, I feel scared because I'm telling myself someone might get hurt here, and I need to know that we're all safe." - NVC

"I am grateful that you offered me a ride because I was needing to get home before my children." - NVC

Some basic needs we all share

Autonomy

Choosing plans for fulfilling one's dreams, goals, values.
Choice, freedom, independence, space, spontaneity.

Integrity

Authenticity, honesty, presence.

Meaning

Celebration of life and dreams fulfilled.
Clarity, competence, consciousness, contribution, creativity, efficacy, effectiveness, growth, hope, learning, purpose, self-expression, stimulation, understanding.

Connection

Acceptance, affection, appreciation, belonging, cooperation, communication, closeness, community, companionship, compassion, consideration, consistency, empathy, inclusion, intimacy, love, mutuality, nurturing, respect/self-respect, security, stability, support, to know and be known, to understand and be understood, trust, warmth.

Physical Well-being

Air, food, movement, exercise, rest, sleep, sexual expression, safety, shelter, touch, water.

Play/ Spiritual Communion

Joy, humor, beauty, harmony, inspiration, order, peace.

REQUESTING THAT WHICH WOULD ENRICH LIFE

We have covered the first three components of NVC that address what we are *observing, feeling, and needing*. We are learning to do this without criticizing, analyzing, blaming, or diagnosing others, and in a way most likely to inspire compassion.

Now, let's turn to the other basic question: What can be done to make life more wonderful? To respond to this second basic question of how to make life more wonderful, you're going to make a *specific, clear request*. You are going to request of the other person what you like them to do to make life more wonderful for you.

Example:

A mother that want her daughter to clean up her room.

Marshall: "What need of yours is not met when your daughter has the room in the state it is?"

Mother: "Well, I think if a family member is going to be a family member, each one has to contribute."

Marshall: "Wait a minute. Hold it, hold it. Saying what you think is a distorted expression of a need. If you want your daughter to see the beauty in your request, she needs to see how life will be made more wonderful if she does what you are asking. So what is your need? What do you need that isn't being met?"

Mother: "I don't know."

I wasn't surprise to hear that response. We don't develop much a vocabulary of needs. How can we make a clear request when we're not clear about our needs?

The mother then became conscious that two needs of hers were involved in this: her need for order and beauty, and her need for support in getting her needs met.

Marshall: "Ok, then, let's get to your request. And let's express it in positive action language. Say to your daughter what you *do* want."

Mother: "Well, I want her to clean up the room."

Marshall: "We have to use action language. *Clean* is too vague. We have to use a concrete action to make our request."

So, what the mother finally came up with was that she would like the daughter to make the bed, to put clothes that were ready for the wash in the wash (and not leave them on the floor), and to take dishes she had brought into her room back to the kitchen. That would be a clear request.

Now, once we have made this clear request, we need to make sure it's not heard as a demand. Another form of communication that is very destructive in human relationships is a *demand*.

Using positive action language

Nonviolent Communication suggests that we make our request using *positive action* language. Your language is positive in the sense that it request what you *do want* the other person to do, rather than what you *don't want* or what you want them to *stop doing*. You want to request an action that involves them *doing* something.

The two problems commonly encountered when request are worded in a negative way: *people are often confused as to what is actually being requested*, and furthermore, *negative requests are likely to provoke resistance*.

"Please do not shout in this room." – negative request

"Please talk in low voice in this room." - NVC

"I want you to *stop drinking*." – negative request

"I want you to tell me what needs of yours are met by drinking, and to discuss with me other ways of meeting those needs." – NVC

Focus on what we want to do rather than what went wrong. We tend to notice what's wrong rather than what's right. One day before learning NVC my daughter told me, "Dad, are you aware how often you bring up what's gone wrong but almost never bring up what's gone right?"

Using specific action language

We would receive a more favorable answer if we ask for specific concrete actions that others can undertake rather than vague, abstract or ambiguous phrasing like "fair treatment". We can find ways to express our requests in *positive action* language. A vague

statement contributes to *internal confusion* and is likely to provoke a *defensive response*.

"I want you to *understand* me." – vague action

"I want you to tell me what you heard me say." – NVC

"I'd like you to tell me one thing that I did that you appreciate." – NVC

"I would like you to drive in a better way" – vague action

"I would like you to drive at or below the speed limit." – NVC

"I'd like you to *feel more confidence* in yourself." – vague action

"I'd like you to take a course in assertiveness training, which I believe would increase your self-confidence." – NVC

"I'd like you to *be honest* with me about yesterday's meeting." – vague action

"I want you to tell me how you feel about what I did and what you'd like me to do differently." – NVC

"I'd like to *get to know you better*." – vague action

"I'd like you to tell me if you would be willing to meet for lunch once a week." – NVC

"I would like you to *show respect for my privacy*." – vague action

"I'd like you to agree to knock before you enter my office." – NVC

Making requests consciously

- We are often not conscious of what we are requesting.
- It may not be clear to the listener what we want them to do when we simply express our feelings.
- Request unaccompanied by the speaker's feelings and needs may sound like a demand.
- The clearer we are on what we want back from the other person, the more likely it is that our needs will be met.

Asking for a reflection

If we are uncertain if our message has been received as intended, we need to be able to clearly request a response that tell us how the message was heard so as to be able to correct any misunderstanding. On some occasions, a simple question like, "Is that clear?" will suffice.

To make sure the message we sent is the message that's received, *ask the listener to reflect it back* and express appreciation when your listener tries to meet your request for a reflection.

"I'm grateful to you for telling me what you heard. I can see that I didn't make myself as clear as I'd have liked so let me try again."

Requesting honesty

After we express ourselves vulnerably, we often want to know:

a) what the listener is feeling.

"I would like you to tell me how you feel about what I just said."

b) what the listener is thinking.

"I would like you to tell me what you think about what I've said."

c) whether the listener would be willing to take a particular action.

"I'd like you to tell me if you would be willing to postpone our meeting for one week."

Requests Vs demands

Requests are received as demands when others believe they *will be blamed or punished if they do not comply*. When people hear us make a demand, they see only two options: submission or rebellion. Either way the person requesting is perceived as coercive, and the listener's capacity to respond compassionately to the request is diminished. The more people hear demands, the less they enjoy being around us.

We want to make clear, assertive requests, and we want other people to know that these are requests and not demands. First, you can't tell the difference by how nicely it is asked.

"I would like you to hang up your clothes when you are finished with them." Is that a request or a demand? We don't know yet. What determines the difference between a request and a demand is how we treat people when they don't respond to our request.

Observe what the speaker does if the request is not complied with. It's a demand if the speaker then criticizes or judges instead of empathizing.

S - "I am lonely and would like you to spend the evening with me."

L - "Jack, I'm really tired."

S - "You know how lonely I am feeling. If you really loved me, you'd spend the evening with me." - demand (guilt trip)

Also it's easy to forget things that you feel are imposed on you, things that are demanded of you. And when you don't do it, you get criticized. So make clear requests that people trust as requests. In order for them to trust that it's a request, they need to know that they can disagree and be understood.

Anytime somebody does what we ask out of guilt, shame, duty, obligation, or fear of punishment, we're going to pay for it. We want people to act on our request only when they're connected to a kind of divine energy that exists in all of us. We're not doing it to avoid negative consequences.

Nonviolent Communication suggests we get clear: Don't respond unless it's coming out of this divine energy. And you'll know it is when you are willing to do it. Even if it's hard work, it will be joyful if your primary motive is to make life more wonderful.

We can help others trust that we are requesting, not demanding, by indicating that we would only want the person to comply if he or she can do so *willingly*.

"*Would you be willing to set the table?*" rather than "*I would like you to set the table.*"

However, the most powerful way to communicate that we are making a genuine request is to empathize with people when they don't respond to the request. If we are prepared to show an

empathic understanding of what prevents someone from doing as we asked, then by definition, we have made a request, not a demand.

Camouflaged demands

Expressing genuine requests also requires an awareness of our objective. If our objective is to change people and their behavior or to get our way, then NVC is not an appropriate tool. The process is designed for those of us who would like others to change and respond, but only if they *choose to do so willingly and compassionately*.

The purpose is to create a quality of connection that allows us to give to one another out of the joy of compassionate giving. *It's not just to get what you want*. If the other person senses that we have single-mindedness of purpose to get our request complied with, it changes the game. Then it turns our requests into *camouflaged demands*.

Examples (observation, feeling, need and request)

"Your dog just made a mess on my lawn."

"When I see your dog leaving turds on the lawn, I feel upset. We have kids who play here and I want the yard to be safe, clean space for them. Would you be willing to use this plastic bag to remove the turds?"

"Yelling obscenities isn't going to get you what you want."

"When I hear you addressing me like that, I feel agitated because I need cooperation and a peaceful resolution of our differences. Are you willing to tell me what you are feeling and needing right now instead of what you think I am?"

"By putting your money in mutual funds, you are just supporting guns and tobacco and sweat shops and all the things we're trying to change in this world."

"When I hear you have put your money in mutual funds, I feel dejected because I'd like to see us put our resources into what we value, rather than to support guns, tobacco, and sweatshops. Would you be willing to tell me what you are feeling when you hear me say this?"

"Hey kids, flashlights aren't toys. Don't waste batteries. They cost money."

"When I see you kids playing with the flashlights under the blanket, I feel uneasy. I want these flashlights to last so they'll be available if we have an emergency. Would you be willing to put them away?"

"But you told me two weeks ago that it would be fine if I were to take a long weekend this month."

"When I hear you say 'no' to my taking a long weekend this month and then remember you saying two weeks ago that it would be fine, I feel frustrated and confused. I need more clarity and some reassurance that we are communicating accurately. Would you be willing to tell me what you just heard me say?"

Depression is the reward we get for being "good."

"What are you wanting that you are not receiving?"

My theory is that we get depressed because we're not getting what we want, and we're not getting what we want because we have never been taught to get what we want. Instead, we've been taught to be good little boys and girls and good mothers and fathers. If we are going to be one of those good things, better get used to being depressed. Depression is the reward we get for being "good." But, if you want to feel better, I'd like you to clarify what you would like people to do to make life more wonderful for you."

Very often, my clients were able to see how the lack of awareness of what they wanted from others had contributed significantly to their frustration and depression.

PART II – APPLYING NVC

Now I would like to share with you how Nonviolent Communication can contribute to our attempts to bring about change:

- with ourselves.
- In people whose behavior is not in harmony with our values.
- In the structure within which we're living.

The purpose of Nonviolent Communication is to create a connection that allows compassionate giving to take place. When we look at how Nonviolent Communication can contribute to change, remember this: We want people to change because they see better ways of meeting their needs at less cost, not because of fear that we're going to punish them, or "guilt" them if they don't. First, we'll look at how that change can occur within ourselves, then with other people whose behavior is not in harmony with our values, and then with social structures that are operating in ways that are not in harmony with our values.

CHANGE WITHIN OURSELVES

We have seen how NVC contributes to relationships with friends and family, at work and in the political arena. Its more crucial application, however, may be in *the way we treat ourselves*. When we are internally violent towards ourselves, it is difficult to be genuinely compassionate towards others.

We use NVC to evaluate ourselves in ways that engender growth rather than self-hatred. I'd like change to be stimulated by a clear desire to enrich life for ourselves or for others rather than by destructive energies such *shame or guilt*. Shame and guilt are forms of self-hatred, and actions taken in reaction to shame and guilt are not free and joyful acts. We would appreciate what we do if we are motivated purely by the *human desire to contribute to life*.

Translating self-judgments into needs

Self-judgments, like all judgments, are tragic expressions of unmet needs. A basic premise of NVC is that whenever we imply that someone is wrong or bad, what we are really saying is that he or she is not acting in harmony with our needs. If the person we are judging happens to be ourselves, what we are saying is. "I myself am not behaving in harmony with my own needs."

Learning from our limitations

"Learn to analyze any situation only once for the purposes of learning new lessons. If you are thinking about a mistake over and over again, then you need to stop! You should not even call it a mistake. Call it feedback."¹

*"Mistakes are the growing pains of wisdom.
Without them there would be no individual
growth, no progress, no conquest."
- William Jordan -*

First ourselves. Nonviolent Communication can be used within ourselves to learn from our limitations without losing self-respect.

¹ "The Secret Behind the Secret, *How to clear your path to greater manifestations*" - Dr. Eric Amidi

Example:

A woman told us she had been screaming at her child that morning before coming to the training.

Marshall: "What did you say to yourself?"

Mother: "I said *what a terrible mother I am. I shouldn't have talked that way to my child. What's wrong with me?*"

Unfortunately, that's how many people educate themselves. They educate themselves in a way people educated us when we did things that authorities didn't like. They blamed us and punished us. As a result, we often educate ourselves through guilt, shame, and other forms of violent, coercive tactics.

How do you know that we are educating ourselves in a violent way? Three feelings will tell us: depression, guilt and shame.

We need to learn, but without hating ourselves, without calling ourselves names. Learning that occurs through guilt or shame is costly learning.

We need to look behind these judgments to see the need at the root of them. That is to say, what need of yours wasn't met by the behavior?

And I asked this mother that very question:

Marshall: "What need of yours was not met by how you talked to the child?"

Mother: "I have a real need to respect people, especially my children. Talking to my child that way didn't meet my need for respect."

Marshall: "Now that your attention is on your needs, how do you feel?"

Mother: "I am sad."

Marshall: "How does that sadness feel compared with what you were thinking a few moments ago –that you're a terrible mother and the other judgments you were making of yourself?"

Mother: "It's almost like a sweet pain now."

When we get in touch with needs of ours that weren't met by our behavior, I call that mourning –mourning our actions. But it's mourning without blame, mourning without thinking there's something wrong with us for doing what we did. It's almost like a sweet pain compared with the depression, the guilt, and the shame

we feel when we are educating ourselves through blame and judgments.

- Marshall: "Let's look at the good reasons you did what you did."
Woman: "I was screaming at my child. What do you mean by *good reasons*?"
Marshall: "It's important for us to be conscious that we don't do anything except for good reasons. *Everything we do is in service of needs*. So, What need were you trying to meet when you talked to your child that way?"
Woman: "I really have a need for my child to be protected in life –and if this child doesn't learn how to do things differently, I'm scared of what could happen."

I'm suggesting that we learn to look at the needs we're trying to meet by doing what we do. We can learn best from it if we do two things.

1. See the need that wasn't met by the behavior.
2. Be conscious of the need we were trying to meet by doing what we did.

When we have our awareness focused on those two needs, I believe it heightens our ability to learn from our limitations without losing self-respect –without feeling guilty or depressed.

Marshall: "So, what you did didn't meet your need to respect other people. Now let's be conscious of what need of yours was met by doing it. You care for the child; you wanted to protect the child's well-being."

If we can learn how to emphatically connect with the needs of ours that wasn't met, and then look at the part of our self that was trying to meet the need, we're better prepared to see what's alive in ourselves and others –and to take the steps necessary to make life more wonderful.

In fact, I would say that if we're not able to empathize with ourselves, it's going to be very hard to do it with other people. If we are going to be violent to our self, how are we going to contribute to creating a world of peace?

Recognition of choice at every moment

A very important part of Nonviolent Communication is the recognition of choice at every moment, that every moment we choose to do what we do, and we don't do anything that isn't coming out of choice. What's more, every choice we make is in the service of a need.

"I had to do it, I had no choice." That's never true! We always have a choice. We don't do anything we didn't choose to do. We choose to behave that way to meet a need.

The word "should" creates enormous pain.

Translating "have to" to "choose to"

Step One: Look at those things that you tell yourself you have to do, any activity you dread but do anyway because you perceive yourself to have no choice.

Step Two: Clearly acknowledge to yourself that you are doing these things because you choose to do them, not because you have to. Insert the words "I choose to ..." in front of each statement.

Step Three: Get in touch with the intention behind the choice by completing the statement, "I choose to ... because I want ..."

A violent word: "should"

One of the most violent words human beings have ever developed is *should*. "I shouldn't have done that. I should have been more sensitive."

The word *should* comes directly from this game of violence that implies there's a good and a bad, a *should* and a *shouldn't*. If you don't do the things you should do, you should be punished; if you do the right things, you should be rewarded. This creates enormous pain.

Talking about what happened in the past

First of all, we talk very little if at all about what happened in the past. I have found that talking about what happened in the past not only doesn't help healing, it often perpetuates and increase pain. It's like reliving the pain. This goes very much against what I

was taught in my training in psychoanalysis, but I've learned over the years that you heal by *talking about what's going on in the moment, in the now*. Certainly it's stimulated by the past, and we don't deny how the past is affecting the present, but we don't "dwell" on it.

Sometimes I begin with empathy and say, "What's still alive in you as a result of what I have done?" See, we're not going into the past and talking about what I did, but about what's alive in you now that's still there from what happened in the past. We want to know what a person is feeling and needing at this moment.

Healing old hurts –Mourning versus Apology

Nonviolent Communication shows us a big difference between mourning and apology. Apology is basically part of our violent language. It implies wrongness –that you should be blamed, that you should be penitent, that you're terrible person for what you did- and when you agree that you are a horrible person and when you have become sufficiently penitent, you can be forgiven. *Sorry* is part of that game. If you hate yourself enough, you can be forgiven, you see.

Now, in contrast, when you go inside yourself and see what need of yours was not met by the behavior. And when you are in touch with that, you feel a different kind of suffering. You feel a natural suffering, a kind of suffering that leads to learning and healing, not to hatred of oneself, not to guilt.

Don't do anything that isn't play!

I believe that human beings are always acting in the service of *needs and values*. An important form of self-compassion is to make choices motivated purely by our desire to contribute to life rather than out of fear, guilt, shame, duty, or obligation. When we are conscious of the life-enriching purpose behind an action we take, when the sole energy that motivates us is simply to make life wonderful for others and ourselves, then even hard work have an element of play in it. Correspondingly, an otherwise joyful activity performed out of obligation, duty, fear, guilt or shame will lose its joy and eventually engender resistance.

NVC is a possible way to deepen our compassion for ourselves, to help us live our lives out of joyous play by staying grounded in a

clear awareness of the life-enriching need behind everything we do.

Cultivating awareness of the energy behind our actions

With every choice you make, be conscious of *what need it serves*. I am convinced that after we gain clarity regarding the need being served by our actions, we can experience them as play even when they involve hard work, challenge or frustration.

Acting for approval:

I find it tragic that we work so hard to buy love and assume that we must deny ourselves and do for others *in order to be liked*. In fact, when we do things solely in the spirit of enhancing life, we will find others appreciating us. Their appreciation, however, is only a feedback mechanism confirming that our efforts had the intended effect. The recognition that we have chosen to use our power to *serve life* and have done so successfully bring us the genuine joy of celebrating ourselves in a way that approval from others can never offer.

Acting to avoid shame:

If we do something stimulated solely by the urge to *avoid shame*, we will generally end up detesting it.

Acting to avoid guilt:

In other instances, we may think, "If I don't do this, people will be disappointed in me." We are afraid we'll end up *feeling guilty for failing to fulfill other people's expectations of us*. There is a world of difference between doing something for others in order to avoid guilt and doing it out of a clear awareness of our own need to contribute to the happiness of other human beings. The first is a world filled of misery; the second is a world filled with play.

Acting out of duty:

The most dangerous of all behaviors may consist of doing things "because we're suppose to." When we use language which denies choice, e.g. words such as "should," "have to," "ought," "must," "can't," "suppose to," etc., our behaviors arise out of a vague sense of *guilt, duty, or obligation*. I consider this to be the most socially dangerous and personally unfortunate of all the ways we act when we're cut off from our needs. When we speak a language that

denies choice, we give up the life in ourselves for a robot-like mentality that disconnects us from our own core.

As radical as it may seem, it is possible to do things only out of play. I believe that to the degree that we engage moment by moment in the *playfulness of enriching life* –motivated solely by the desire for its enrichment- to that degree are we being compassionate with ourselves.

RECEIVING EMPATHICALLY

In previous chapters we describe the four components of NVC: what we are observing, feeling, and needing, and what we wish to request to enrich our lives. Now we turn from self-expression to apply these same four components to hearing what *others* are observing, feeling, needing, and requesting. We refer to this part of the communication process as “*receiving empathically*.”

Responding to the messages of others

In Nonviolent Communication, half of the process is learning how to express ourselves in this way. The other half of the process is how we respond to other’s people messages, how to make empathic connection with *what’s alive in the other person* and *what would make life more wonderful for them*.

Empathic connection is an understanding of the heart in which we see the beauty in the other person, the divine energy in the other person, the life that’s alive in them. We connect with it. The goal isn’t intellectually understanding it, the goal is empathically connecting with it. It means we are *with* the other person.

If we’re mentally trying to understand the other person, we’re not present with them in this moment. We’re sitting there analyzing them, but we’re not *with* them. Empathically connection involves connecting with what is alive in the other person *at this moment*. It implies our *presence* in the moment.

Empathy lies in our ability to be present

Empathy is a *respectful understanding of what others are experiencing*. It is emptying the mind and listening with our whole being.

What is essential is *our ability to be present* to what’s really going on within –to the unique feelings and needs a person is experiencing in that very moment. We “say a lot” by listening for others people’s feelings and needs.

*“Mrs. Anderson, I don’t want you to do anything;
I just want you to listen.”*

When someone really hears you without passing judgment on you, without trying to take responsibility for you, without trying to mold you, it feels damn good... When I have been listened to and when I have been heard, I am able to re-perceive my world in a new way and go on. It is astonishing how elements that seem insoluble become soluble when someone listens. How confusions that seem irremediable turn into relatively clear flowing streams when one is heard. Empathy allows us to re-perceive our world in a new way and move on.

Instead of empathy, we tend instead to have a strong urge to give advice or reassurance and to explain our own position or feeling. Empathy, on the other hand, requires focusing full attention on the other person's message. We give to others the time and space they need to *express themselves fully and to feel understood*.

"Don't just do something, stand there"

- Buddhist saying -

Check whether advice or reassurance is wanted before offering any. Believing we have to "fix" situations and make others feel better prevents us from being present. We "say a lot" by listening for others people's feelings and needs.

"I'm as ugly as a pig" – daughter in front of the mirror, needing empathy

"You are the most gorgeous creature God ever put on the face of the earth." – father's "fix it" opinion.

"Are you feeling disappointed with your appearance today?" – NVC empathy

Non empathic usual responses

- Advising – "I think you should...", "How come you didn't...?"
- One-upping – "That's nothing; once I was..."
- Educating – "This could turn into a very positive experience for you if you just..."
- Consoling – "It wasn't your fault; you did the best you could."
- Story-telling – "That reminds me of the time..."
- Shutting down – "Cheer up. Don't feel so bad."
- Interrogating – "When did this begin?"
- Explaining – "I would have call but..."

- Correcting – “That’s not how it happened.”

Intellectual understanding of a problem blocks the kind of presence that empathy requires. When we are thinking about people’s words, listening to how they connect to our theories, we are looking at people –we are not with them. *The key ingredient of empathy is presence.*

Listening for feelings and needs

In NVC, no matter what words people use to express themselves, we listen for their observations, feelings, and needs, and what they are requesting to enrich life.

We learn to hear the feelings and needs behind the others statements. We can guess at other people’s feelings and needs and then check it out with them.

Husband statement: “What good does talking to you do? You never listen.”

- Woman: “Are you feeling unhappy *with me?*” – guilt input
- Marshall: Get the clue from the content of your husband’s message ‘What good does talking to you do? You never listen.’
- What is he needing that he is not getting when he says that? Better “Are you unhappy because you were needing...?”
- Woman: “Are you feeling unhappy because you feel like I don’t understand you?”
- Marshall: Notice you are focusing on what he is thinking and not on what he is needing. Instead of hearing that he’s unhappy because he thinks you don’t listen, focus in what he’s needing by saying, “Are you unhappy because you are needing...”
- Woman: “Are you unhappy because you are needing to be heard?”
- In that way it makes a big difference. I see what’s going on for him without hearing that I have done anything wrong.

Paraphrasing

After we focus our attention and hear what others are observing, feeling, and needing and what they are requesting to enrich their life's, we may wish to reflect back by paraphrasing what we have understood.

When we reflect a message back to the other party it offers them time to reflect on what they have said and an opportunity to dig deeper into themselves, and correct us if we misunderstood.

NVC suggests that our paraphrasing take the form of questions that reveal our understanding focusing on:

a) What you are observing:

"Are you reacting to how many evenings I was gone last week?"

b) How others are feeling and the needs generating their feelings:

"Are you feeling hurt because you would have liked more appreciation of your efforts than you received?"

c) What others are requesting:

"Are you wanting me to tell you my reasons for saying what I did?"

Incorrect paraphrasing:

Don't ask for information without sensing the speaker's reality. I've found that questions like these are not the safest route to obtain the information we seek.

a) "What did I do that you are referring to?"

b) "How are you feeling?" "Why are you feeling that way?"

c) "What are you wanting me to do about it?"

Pieces of advice

- It is safe to assume that speakers expressing intensely emotional messages would appreciate our reflecting these back to them.
- When we paraphrase, the tone of voice we use is highly important. When they heard themselves reflected back, people are likely to be sensitive to the slightest hint of criticism or sarcasm.

- When we are experiencing strong emotions and asking for information, better to first express our own feelings and needs.

All criticism, attack, insults, and judgments vanish when we focus attention on *hearing the feelings and needs behind the message*. The more we practice in this way, the more we realize a simple truth: behind all those messages we have allowed ourselves to be intimidated by are just *individuals with unmet needs* appealing to us to contribute to their well-being.

The goal is “connecting with the human being in front of us”, instead of applying the process “correctly” or trying to change the other person’s behavior.

Sustaining empathy

I recommend allowing others the opportunity to fully express themselves before turning our attention to solutions either to their request or to our own desire to express ourselves. An initial message is often the tip of the iceberg. By maintaining our attention on what’s going on within others, we offer them a chance to fully explore and express their interior selves.

Staying with empathy, we allow speakers to touch deeper levels of themselves.

Mother: “My child is impossible. No matter what I tell him to do, he doesn’t listen.”

Marshall: “It sounds like you’re feeling *desperate* and would like to find some way of connecting with your son” – reflecting her feelings and needs.

Mother: “Maybe it’s my fault. I’m always yelling at him.”

Marshall: “Are you feeling *guilty* because you would have liked to have been more understanding of him that you have been at times?” – (staying with the feelings.)

Mother: “I’m just a failure as a mother.” (going deeper)

Marshall: “So you are feeling *discourage* and want to relate differently to him?” - we continue to remain with the feelings and needs and persist in this manner until the person has exhausted all her feelings surrounding this issue.

We know the speaker has received adequate empathy when:

- a) we sense a release of the tension.
- b) the flow of words comes to a halt.

Example:

The Situation is a cancer dying husband, wife and NVC nurse, talking about the physical therapist.

Wife: She's a bad therapist.

Nurse: (*listen empathically to what the wife is feeling and wanting*) Are you feeling *annoyed* and wanting to see a different quality of care?

Wife: She doesn't do anything. She made him stop walking when his pulse got high.

Nurse: (*continue to hear the wife's feelings and wants*) It is because you want your husband to get better that you are *scared* if the physical therapist doesn't push him, he won't get stronger?

Wife: (*starts to cry*) Yes, I'm so scared!

Nurse: Are you scared of losing him?

Wife: Yes, we've been together so long.

Nurse: (*listening for other feeling behind the fear*) Are you worrying about how you would feel if he dies?

Wife: I just can't imagine how I am going to live without him. He's always been there for me. Always.

Nurse: So you're sad when you think of living without him?

Wife: There is no one else besides him. He's all I have, you know. My daughter won't even talk to me.

Nurse: It sounds like when you think of your daughter, you feel frustrated because you wish you had a different relationship with her.

Wife: I wish I did, but she is just a selfish person. I don't know why I have even bothered having kids. A lot of good it does me now!

Nurse: Sounds to me that you might be somewhat angry and disappointed because you want more support from the family during your husband's illness.

Wife: Yes, he's so sick; I don't know how I am going to get through this alone. I haven't anyone... not even to talk to, except with you here... now. Even he won't talk about it... Look at him! (*Husband remains silent and impassive.*) He doesn't say anything!

- Nurse: Are you sad, wishing the two of you could support each other and feel more connected?
- Wife: Yes. *(She pauses, then make a request)* Talk to him the way you talk to me.
- Nurse: *(wishing to clearly understand the need that is being addressed behind the wife's request)* Are you wanting him to be listened to in a way that helps him express what he's feeling inside?
- Wife: Yes, yes, that's exactly it! I want him to feel comfortable talking and I want to know what he is feeling.

Using the nurse's guess, the wife is able to first become aware of what she wanted and then find the words to articulate it. This is a key moment: often it is difficult for people to identify what they want in a situation, even though they may know what they don't want. We see how a clear request – "Talk to him the way you talk to me" – is a gift that empowers the other person. The nurse is now able to act in a way she knows to be in harmony with the wife's wishes. This alters the atmosphere in the room, as the nurse and the wife now "work together," both in a compassionate mode.

- Nurse: *(turning to the husband)* How do you feel when you hear what your wife has shared?
- Husband: I really love her.
- Nurse: Are you glad to have an opportunity to talk about with her?
- Husband: Yes, we need to talk about it.
- Nurse: Would you be willing to say how you are feeling about the cancer?
- Husband: *(after a brief silence)* Not very good.

The words "good" and "bad" are often used to describe feelings when people have yet to identify the specific emotion they are experiencing. Expressing his feelings more precisely would help him with the emotional connection he is seeking with his wife.

- Nurse: *(encouraging him to move toward more precision)* Are you scared about dying?
- Husband: No, not scared.

Notice the nurse's incorrect guess does not hamper the continued flow of dialogue.

Nurse: Do you feel angry about dying?

Because this patient isn't able to verbalize his internal experience easily, the nurse continues to support him in the process.

Husband: No, not angry.

Nurse: *(At this point, after two incorrect guesses, the nurse decides to express her own feelings.)* Well, know I am puzzled about what you may be feeling, and wonder if you can tell me.

Husband: I reckon, I'm thinking how she'll do without me.

Nurse: Oh, are you worried she may not be able to handle her life without you?

Husband: Yes, worried she'll miss me.

She is aware that dying patients often hang on due to worry over those they are leaving behind. Patients sometimes need the reassurance that love ones can accept their death before they can let themselves go.

Nurse: Do you want to hear how your wife feels when you say that?

Husband: Yes.

In this dialogue, the wife begin with a complaint about physical therapist. However after a series of exchanges during which she felt emphatically received, she is able to determine that what she really seeks is a deeper connection with her husband during this critical stage of their lives.

Examples

"You aren't God!"

"Are you feeling frustrated because you would like me to admit that there can be other ways of interpreting this matter?" – NVC

"How could you say a thing like that to me?"

"Are you feeling hurt because I said that?" – taking responsibility of others' emotions

"Are you feeling hurt because you would have liked me to agree to do what you requested?" – NVC

"I am furious with my husband. He's never around when I need him."

"You think he should be around more than he is?" – receiving only her thoughts

"So you're feeling furious because you would like him to be around more than he is? – NVC

THE POWER OF EMPATHY

While we may easily empathize with our peers and those in less powerful positions, we may find ourselves being defensive or apologetic, instead of empathic, in the presence of those we identify as our “superiors.” It’s harder to empathize with those who appear to possess more power, status or resources.

Empathy and the ability to be vulnerable

Self-expression become easier after we empathize with others because we will then have touched their humanness. The more we connect with the feelings and needs behind their words, the less frightening it is to open up to other people.

Using empathy to defuse danger

The ability to offer empathy to people in stressful situations can defuse potential violence. Empathize, rather than put your “but” in the face of an angry person.

People who seem like monsters are simply human beings whose language and behavior sometimes keep us from seeing their humanness.

“The more I was able to focus my attention on his feelings and needs, the more I see him like a person full of despair whose needs weren’t been met.” – Statement of a woman after a stressful situation wit a guy after using NVC.

Empathy in hearing someone’s “No!”

If we take someone’s “no” personally, we may feel hurt without understanding what’s actually going on within the other person. When we shine the light of consciousness on the feelings and needs behind someone else’s “no,” however, we become cognizant of what they are wanting that prevents them from responding as we would like. In other words, empathizing with someone’s “no” *protects us from taking it personally.*

Empathy to revive a lifeless conversation

We have all found ourselves in the midst of a lifeless conversation. This is common when people talk without consciousness of what they are feeling, needing, or requesting.

How and when do we interrupt a dead conversation to bring it back to life? I'd suggest the best time to interrupt is when we have heard one more word than we want to hear. Our intention in interrupting is not to claim the floor for ourselves, but to help the speaker to connect to the life energy behind the words being spoken.

We do this by tuning into possible feelings and needs. Thus, if an aunt is repeating the story about how 20 years ago her husband deserted her with two small children, we might interrupt by saying, "So, Aunty, it sound that you are still feeling hurt, wishing you'd be treated more fairly." People are not aware that it is often empathy that they are needing. Neither do they realize that they are more likely to receive that empathy by expressing the feelings and needs that are alive in them rather than by recounting tales of past injustice and hardship.

I have discovered that conversations that are lifeless for the listener are equally so for the speaker. What bores the listener bores the speaker too. Speakers prefer that listeners interrupt rather than pretend to listen.

SEEING THE BEAUTY IN OTHERS

Seeing the beauty behind the language (*don't take it personally*)

Nonviolent Communication also shows us a way of seeing the beauty in the other person at any moment, regardless of their behavior or language.

One student told me, "I was honest with one of my teachers. I said I didn't understand, and I asked her, 'Would you please explain it again?' and the teacher said, 'Don't you listen? I've explained it twice already.'"

Our tendency is to take others messages personally. If we can connect with the divine energy behind every message coming at us, we will hear the beautiful needs that are alive in them. Also, if we are sincerely trying to connect with the divine energy in another human being –their feelings, their needs at the moment- that shows the other person that no matter how they communicate with us, we care about what's alive in them. When a person trust that, we're well on our way to making a connection in which everybody's needs can get met.

Try to connect in a way that shows the other person you care about what's alive in them.

Notice this doesn't requires that we agree with the other person. It doesn't mean we have to like what they're saying. It means that we give them this precious gift of our presence, to be present at this moment to what's alive in them.

Now, when we put this all together, it looks like this: We may start a dialogue with the other person by telling then what's alive in us and what we would like them to do to make life more wonderful for us. Then, *no matter how they respond*, we try to connect with what's alive in them and what would make life more wonderful for them. And we keep this flow of communication going until we find strategies to meet everybody's need.

No matter how people respond, try to connect with what's alive in them.

If you are feeling you are losing connection, take a deep, deep breath and bring your attention back to the other person, saying, "So you're feeling..." and "you're needing..." to try to connect again.

If the other person say something else, and again you get triggered, slow down and take a deep breath to be able to keep coming back to what is alive in the other person.

How to open people to listen to other options

*"Progress is impossible without change,
and those who cannot change their minds
cannot change anything."*

- George Bernard Shaw -

As I've said earlier, punishment is a losing game. We want people to change their behavior, not because they're going to be punished if they continue, but because they see other options that better meet their needs at less cost.

When people feel that we are sincerely showing an empathic connection and that we understand what needs they're trying to meet, that we are not blaming them or judging them, they're more open to hearing other options. If they think we have single-mindedness of purpose to change them, or if they feel they're being blamed for what they're doing, it makes change difficult.

Once people don't have to defend themselves against our single-mindedness of purpose to change them, once they feel understood for what they're doing, it's much easier for them to be open to other possibilities.

If somebody is doing something I don't like, I try to begin with empathic connection with the needs they're trying to meet by doing what they're doing and, once I've understood that, I suggest looking for other ways of meeting their needs that are more effective and less costly.

That's how we use Nonviolent Communication with people who are behaving in ways we don't like. I start by empathically connecting to what needs of theirs are being met by doing what they do. Then I let them know what need of mine is not being met by what they're doing –the fear I feel by how they behave, or the discomfort I feel. And then we explore other ways that are more effective and less costly of meeting both of our needs.

EXPRESSING ANGER FULLY

The NVC process does not encourage us to ignore, squash, or swallow anger, but rather to express the core of our anger fully and wholeheartedly.

Distinguish stimulus from cause

The first step to fully expressing anger in NVC is to *divorce the other person from any responsibility for our anger*. We rid ourselves of thoughts such as, "He, she, or they made me angry when they did that." Such thinking leads us to express our anger superficially by blaming or punishing the other person. *The behavior of other may be a stimulus for our feelings, but not the cause*. We are never angry because of what someone else did. We can identify the other person's behavior as the stimulus, but it is important to establish a clear separation between stimulus and cause.

"I felt angry because they didn't respond to my request!"

By equating stimulus and cause, we trick ourselves in thinking that other's behavior is the cause of our anger. This is an easy habit to acquire in a culture that uses guilt as a means of controlling people. In such cultures, it becomes important to trick people into thinking that we can *make* others feel a certain way.

Where guilt is a tactic of manipulation and coercion, it is useful to confuse stimulus and cause. As mentioned earlier, children who hear, "It hurts Mommy and Daddy when you get poor grades" are let to believe that their behavior is the cause of their parent's pain. The same dynamic is observed among intimate partners: "It really disappointed me when you're not here for my birthday." Our language facilitates the use of this *guilt-inducing tactic*.

We use our language in many different ways to trick ourselves into believing that our feelings result from what others do. The first step in the process of fully expressing our anger is to realize that *what other people do is never the cause of how we feel*.

Anger is generated when we are finding fault –we choose to play God by judging or blaming the other person for being wrong or deserving of punishment. I would like to suggest that this is the

cause of anger. Even if we are not initially conscious of it, the cause of anger is located in *our own thinking*.

For example, if someone arrives late for an appointment and we need reassurance that she cares about you, we may feel hurt. If, instead, our need is to spend time purposefully and constructively, we may feel frustrated. If, on the other hand, our need is for thirty minutes of quite solitude, we may be grateful for her tardiness and feel pleased. Thus, this is not the behavior of the other person, but our own need that causes our feelings. When we are connected to our needs, whether it is for reassurance, purposefulness, or solitude, we are in touch with our life energy. We may have strong feelings, but we are never angry. *Anger is a result of life-alienating thinking that is disconnected from needs*. It indicates that we have moved up to our head to analyze and judge somebody, rather than focus on which of our needs are not getting met.

In addition to the third option of focusing on our own needs and feelings, the choice is ours at any moment to shine the light of consciousness on the other person's feelings and needs. When we choose this fourth option, we also never feel anger. We are not repressing the anger; we see how anger is simply absent in each moment that we are fully present with the other person's feelings and needs.

Use anger as a wake up call

When we judge others, we contribute to violence. I see all anger as a result of life-alienating, violence-provocative thinking. At the core of all anger is a need that is not being fulfilled. When we become aware of our needs, anger gives way to life-serving feelings.

Use anger as a wake-up call. I recommend connecting empathically with our own needs or those of others. This may take extensive practice, whereby over and over again, we consciously replace the phrase "I am angry because they..." with "I am angry *because I am needing...*"

Four steps to expressing anger

The first step is to *stop and do nothing except to breathe*. We refrain from making any move to blame or punish the other person. We simply stay quiet.

Then we identify the thoughts that are making us angry, our *judgmental thoughts*.

Then we take the next step and *connect to the needs behind that those thoughts*. For example, if I judge someone to be racist, the need may be for inclusion, equality, respect or connection.

To fully express ourselves, we now open our mouth and speak the anger –but the anger has been *transformed into needs and need-connected feelings*.

“When you entered the room and started talking to the others and didn’t say anything to me and then made the comment about white people, I felt really sick to my stomach, and got scared; it triggered off all kind of needs on my part to be treated equally. I’d like you to tell me how you feel when I tell you this.”

Offering empathy first

In most cases, however, another step needs to take place before we can expect the other party to connect with what is going on in us. Because it will often be difficult for others to receive our feelings and needs in such situations, we would need first to empathize with them if we want them to hear us. The more we hear them, the more they’ll hear us. “Are you feeling...?”

When we hear the other person’s feelings and needs, we recognize our common humanity. I’ve learned to savor life much more by only hearing what’s going on in their hearts and not getting caught up with the stuff in their heads.

Taking our time

Probably the most important part of learning how to live the process we have been discussing is to take our time. As we have seen, our anger comes from judgments, labels, and thoughts of blame, of what people “should” do and what they “deserve.” Take your time. Collect all such negative judgments and then ask yourself, “When I make that judgment, what am I needing and not getting?”

To practice NVC we need to proceed slowly, think carefully before we speak, and often just take a deep breath and *not speak at all*. Learning the process and applying it both take time.

THE PROTECTIVE USE OF FORCE

When two disputing parties had an opportunity to fully express what they are observing, feeling, needing, and requesting –and each has empathize with the other- a resolution can usually be reached that meets the needs of both sides. At the very least, the two can agree, in goodwill, *to disagree*.

In some situations, however, the opportunity for such a dialogue may not exist, and the use of force may be necessary to protect life of individual rights. For instance, the other party may be unwilling to communicate, or imminent danger may not allow time for communication. In these situations, we may need to resort to force. If we do, NVC requires to differentiate between the *protective* and the *punitive* uses of force.

The thinking behind the use of force

The intention behind the protective use of force is to *prevent injury or injustice*. The intention behind the punitive use of force is to *cause individuals to suffer for their perceived misdeeds*.

The assumption behind the protective use of force is that people behave in ways injurious to themselves and others due to some form of *ignorance*. The corrective process is therefore one of education, not punishment. Ignorance include:

- a lack of awareness of the consequences of our actions.
- an inability to see how our needs may be met without injury to others.
- the believe that we have the "right" to punish or hurt others because they "deserve" it.
- delusional thinking that involves, for example, hearing a "voice" that instructs us to kill someone.

Punitive action, on the other hand, is based on the assumption that people commit offenses because they are bad or evil, and to correct the situation, they need to be made to repent. Their "correction" is undertaken through punitive action designed to make them:

- suffer enough to see the error of their ways.

- repent.
- change.

In practice, however, punitive actions, rather than evoking repentance and learning, is just as likely to generate resentment and hostility and to reinforce resistance to the very behavior we are seeking.

The punitive use force

Physical punishment, such as spanking, is one punitive use of force. My personal concern is that children's fear of corporal punishment may obscure their awareness of the compassion that underlines parental demands.

I wonder whether people who proclaim the success of such punishment are aware of the countless instances of children who turn against what might be good for them simply because they choose to fight, rather to succumb, to coercion.

Second, the apparent success of corporal punishment in influencing a child doesn't mean that other methods of influence wouldn't have worked equally well.

Finally, I share the concerns of many parents about the social consequences of using physical punishment. When parents opt to use force, we may win the battle of getting children to do what we want, but in the process, *are we not perpetuating a social norm that justifies violence as a means of resolving differences?*

Punishment also includes judgmental labeling: for example, a parent may label a child as "wrong," "selfish," or "immature" when the child doesn't behave in a certain way. Another form is the withholding of privileges.

The cost of punishment

I was visiting a friend, a school principal, at his office when he noticed through the window a big child hitting a smaller one. "Excuse me," he said as he leapt up and rushed to the playground. Grabbing the larger child, he gave him a swat and scolded, "I'll teach you not to hit smaller people!" When the principal returned inside, I remarked, "I don't think you taught that child what you

thought you were teaching him. I suspect what he learned instead was not to hit people smaller than he is when somebody bigger – like the principal- might be watching! If anything, it seems to me that have reinforced the notion that the way to get what you want from somebody else is to hit them.”

In such situations, I recommend first empathize with the child who is behaving violently. For example, if I saw a child hit someone after being called a name, I might empathize, “I’m sensing that you’re feeling angry because you’d like to be treated with more respect.” If I guessed correctly, and the child acknowledges this to be true, I would then continue by expressing my own feelings, needs, and requests in this situation without insinuating blame: “I’m feeling sad because I want us to find ways to get respect than don’t turn people into enemies. I’d like you to tell me if you’d be willing to explore with me some other ways to get the respect you’re wanting.”

Two questions that reveal the limitations of punishment

When our objective is to get somebody to stop doing something, punishment looks like an effective strategy. But if we ask ourselves two questions, we would never use punishment again. Punishment is a losing game.

Punishment is a losing game.

- What do we want the other person to do?

We are not asking what we don’t want them to do. And second question:

- What do we want the other’s person reasons to be for doing what we want them to do?

As I’ve mentioned, the purpose of Nonviolent Communication is to create connections so people give to one another out of compassion –not out of fear of punishment, not out of hope for rewards, but because of the natural joy we feel of contributing to one another’s well-being.

EXPRESSING GRATITUDE IN NVC

When we know how to express and receive gratitude in a certain way, it gives us enormous energy to sustain our efforts. It is a reminder of the beauty side of life.

As I've said, the spirituality we embrace is to make people conscious moment by moment that our purpose in life comes from compassionate giving, compassionate service. There's nothing more wonderful than exercising our power in the service of life.

Praising and compliments as damaging judgments

In Nonviolent Communication we suggest not giving compliments or praise. In my view, telling somebody they did a good job, that they are a kind or competent person... that's still using moralistic judgments.

We suggest that positive judgments are equally as dehumanizing to people as negative judgments. We also suggest how destructive it is to give positive feedback as a reward.

If you look at the research you will see that, yes, most children and employees work harder when they're praised and complimented... but only for a very short time. It last until they sense the manipulation, that this is not gratitude from the heart. And when people sense the manipulation, the production no longer stays high.

Expressing gratitude in NVC

How we express gratitude in Nonviolent Communication? First, the intent is all-important: to celebrate life, nothing else. We're not trying to reward the other person. We want the other person to know how our life has been enriched by what they did. That's our only intent.

To make clear how our life has been enriched, we need to say three things to people, and praise and compliments don't make these three things clear:

1. What the person did that we want to celebrate, what action of their part enriched our lives.
2. How we feel about that. What feelings are alive in us as a result of what they've done.

3. What needs of ours were met by their actions.

The sequence of these ingredients may vary; sometimes all three can be conveyed by a smile or a simple "Thank you." However, if we want to ensure that our appreciation has been fully received, it is valuable to develop the eloquence to express all three components verbally.

Example:

After a Nonviolent Communication meeting a woman came an express her gratitude to me.

Woman: "You are brilliant."

Marshall: "That doesn't help. Telling me what I am doesn't help. I can see you want to express gratitude, but telling me what I am doesn't give it to me."

Woman: "What do you want me to say?"

Marshall: "What did I do that made life more wonderful for you? What I did that that really in some way enriched your life."

Woman: She open her notebook and said, "You said these two things."

Marshall: "Yes that helps, just knowing that I in some way enriched your life. It would help me to know how you feel right now."

Woman: "Oh, Marshall, I feel so relieved and hopeful."

Marshall: "Ok. And now third, what needs of yours was met by those two things?"

Woman: "I have never being able to connect with my eighteen-year-son. All we do is fight. These two things you said met that need of mine for some concrete direction for connecting with him."

Marshall: "Thank you, it is so much more satisfying for me to know concretely what I did."

"Marshall, when you said these two things, [showing me her notes], I felt very hopeful and relieved, because I've been searching for a way to make a connection with my son, and these gave me the direction I was looking for."

By hearing the three pieces of information –what I did, how she felt, and what needs of her were fulfilled- I could then celebrate the appreciation with her.

Receiving appreciation

Accustomed to a culture where buying, earning, and deserving are the standard modes of interchange, we are often uncomfortable with simple giving and receiving.

NVC encourages us to receive appreciation with the same quality of empathy we express when listening to other messages. We hear what we have done that has contributed to others' well-being; we hear their feelings and the needs that were fulfilled. We take into our hearts the joyous reality that we can each enhance the quality of others' lives.

Receive appreciation without feelings of superiority or false humility.

Paradoxically, despite our unease in receiving appreciation, most of us yearn to be genuinely recognized and appreciated. Ask yourself this question:

"What appreciation might someone give you that would leave you jumping for joy?"

PART III – SPEAKING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Psychological foundation of the domination societies

Eight to ten thousand years ago for various reasons a myth developed that the good life was good people punishing and conquering bad people. And this myth seemed to support living under authoritarian regimens or *domination societies*, the leaders of which might call themselves kings or czars.

Women will believe that nice women have no needs; they sacrifice their needs for their family. Brave men have no needs; they're willing to lose their lives to protect the king's property. At the same time we developed this way of thinking, of judging one another in ways that imply that reward is justified and punishment is justified. We created judicial systems based on *retributive* justice that reinforce the idea that reward and punishment are deserved. I believe that this way of thinking and behaving is at the core of violence on our planet.

This mindset is not very difficult to cultivate, because all it requires is getting people disconnected from what's really alive in them and other people.

We still have a domination society ruled by *gangs*. Some gangs call themselves street gangs. They're not the ones that scares the most. Other gangs call themselves multinational corporations. Some gangs call themselves governments.

These gangs control the schools, and many of them want the teachers to teach students that there's right and wrong, a good and a bad. They want schools to make student work for rewards so they can be hired later on to work eight hours a day for forty years of their life doing meaningless tasks.

Having say that, I don't think the people caught up in domination systems from the very beginning are bad people overtly trying to manipulate the masses. Rather, they believe that they are blessed with being somehow closer to the higher authority.

Let's look at how Nonviolent Communication can help us transform "gangs." I encourage an awareness of how gang behavior affects how we are educated, what we carry within our self. I've been suggesting that certain language and certain form of communication have been very destructive.

Where did this language come from? Where did the predominance of moralistic judgments and the tactics of punishment and reward come from? Why do we use them? We learn these tactics because they support certain gang behaviors.

Creating change in our schools

For example look at our schools. Our schools are doing what they were set up to do, which is to support gang behavior. Which gang? In this case it's the economic-structure gang, the people who control our business. They control our schools, and they have three historical goals:

1. Teach people obedience to authority so that when they get hired they'll do what they're told.
2. Train people to work for extrinsic rewards. They want people to learn not how to enrich their lives, but to receive grades, to be rewarded with a better high-paying job in the future. They don't want people to ask themselves, *Is this product we're turning out really serving life?* No, they just want them to do what they're told and to work for a salary.
3. Maintain a caste system and making it look like a democracy.

It's the structure that's the problem, not individuals. Teachers and administrators within the schools are not enemies. They genuinely want to contribute to children's well-being. There are no enemies here. It's the gang structure we have set up to maintain our economy.

The good news is that it can be transformed. We're now working in several countries to make radical transformations in schools. We're supporting schools, teachers, and students to work in harmony with the principles of Nonviolent Communication.

Now in some kindergarten schools we have a mediation corner in the classroom. When a conflict occurred between two girls, the mediator, sometimes another kid, asked them the basic questions of Nonviolent Communication. They have all studied it so the girl didn't have any trouble answering the questions. Then the mediator asked the other girl to repeat back what the first one has said. Then when the first child was understood, the mediator helped the other girl express herself and helped this girl hear the other side. In a short time they had resolved the conflict and run off together. We teach students to mediate as well.

Changing other social institutions

What about other big gangs? Along with the schools, another major area of change for us is with the judicial system, with the government gangs that operate the legal system. I hope that by now everybody is aware of the failure of the punitive structures that are part of our judicial system. There need to be a transition from *retributive* justice to *restorative* justice.

Applying restorative justice to change people's behavior

We need to learn to apply *restorative* justice. We need to learn not to punish people when they behave in ways we don't like.

NVC is very much in harmony with the principles of restorative justice. The idea is that if we really want to have peace and harmony, we have to find out what will restore peace and not just punish the bad guys.

Example:

A person might have been raped. Instead of simply punishing this person for doing it, it is established by agreement on both sides that restorative justice in prison will be attempted.

I start by helping the person who has been victimized express the pain they've been experienced. And it's often deep. Very deep. This might be a woman who's been raped who screams pretty strong things at this person: "I'd like you to die. I want you to be tortured. You know, you're a pig."

Then I help the person who did this connect empathically with the suffering of the other person, really just to hear the depth of what that person has suffered.

The first thing they want to do is apologize. They say, "I'm sorry. You know..."

I interrupt and say, "No, hold it. Remember what I say before. I want empathy first. I want you to show her that you fully understand the depth of her suffering. Can you repeat back her feelings and needs?"

They can't. I say, "Let me repeat it." And I transform all what she said into her feelings and needs. Then I help the other person hear it. The person who has been raped is experiencing understanding from the person who did it.

Then I help him mourn for what he did. Not apologize; that's too easy. I help him go inside and look at what he feels when he sees the suffering of this other person. That requires going deeply into oneself. It's very painful, but it's a healing kind of pain.

Of course, the other person is witnessing this person now sincerely mourning, not just apologizing. And then I ask, "What was going on in you when you did this to her? I help him articulate it in terms of feelings and needs, and I help the victim empathize with that. At this point there are two different people in the room than the two who came in.

Transforming enemy images for social change

We want people not only to come out with awareness of how Nonviolent Communication can be used to transform our inner world, we want people to see how it can be used to create the world outside that we want to live in.

First, we need to liberate ourselves from *enemy* images, the thinking that says there is something wrong with the people who are part of these gangs. It's hard to see that those who are doing these things are human beings like the rest of us.

In a discussion, once both sides get over the enemy image and recognize each other's needs, it's amazing how the next part, which is looking for strategies to meet everyone's needs become pretty easy by comparison. It's getting past the enemy images that's the hard work.

Mediating between warring tribes

Example:

I once was asked to help mediate a conflict between two tribes in northern Nigeria.

Marshall: "I'm confident that if anybody's needs get expressed and understood we'll find a way to get everybody's needs met. So who would like to begin, please? I'd like to hear what needs of yours are not being met."

Tribe A: "You people are murderers!"

Marshall: "Notice I did not say, 'What do you think of the other side?', What needs of yours are not getting met?"

Tribe B: "You've been trying to dominate us."

Right away, There was two diagnosis with enemy images. Our training shows that all criticisms, judgments, and enemy images are tragic expressions of unmet needs.

Marshall: "Chief A, are you expressing a need for safety that isn't been met? You have a need for safety. You would hope that no matter what's going on, things could be resolved with nonviolence, correct?"

Chief A: "That's exactly what I am saying."

With Nonviolent Communication skills, I was able to hear the need behind the judgment. But that wasn't enough. I had to be sure his needs were heard by the other side.

Marshall: "Would somebody from this side of the table please tell me back what the chief said his needs were?"

Chief B: "Why did you kill my son?"

Marshall: "Chief, we'll deal with that issue soon. For the moment, would you be willing to tell me what the first chief's feelings and needs are?"

He was so involved in making judgments of the other side that he wasn't able to hear the feelings and needs that I had to helped articulate.

Marshall: "Chief, what I hear the other chief feeling is anger, strong anger, because he says he has a need for conflicts, whatever they are, to be resolved in some way -other than with violence- so everybody can be safe. Could you just say that back, Chief, so I'm sure we're communicating?"

After two attempts finally, he was able to tell me.

Marshall: "Now that you hear what the needs are of the other side, I'd like you to tell me your needs."

Chief B: "They have been trying to dominate us for a long time, and we're not going to put up with it anymore."

Marshall: "Are you upset because you have a strong need for equality in this community?"

Chef B: "Yes."

I turned to a member of the other tribe and said,

Marshall: "Could you repeat that so I'm sure that we're communicating?"

I had to repeat that at least another two times before they were able to see that the other side had anger related to a need for equality that wasn't being met.

At the end, they could see that you don't need weapons to resolve conflicts when you know how to connect clearly with each other's needs.

The fact remains that when people get connected to the needs behind the anger, frustration, and violence, they move into a different world. They're in the world that Rumi, the thirteenth-century Sufi mystic and poet talks about:

*"Out beyond ideas of right doing
and wrong doing there is a field,
...I'll meet you there."*

Making group meetings more productive

In a group much time is wasted when speakers aren't certain what response they're wanting back. When we address a group without being clear what we are wanting back, unproductive discussions will often follow.

- Ask the one who is talking "Can you tell me, when you brought up the discussion, what response you were wanting from the group?"
- Ask the group if their needs were being met by the current discussion.

Nonviolent Communication can help us to work better as a team in order to make our meetings more productive.

Example:

I helped a team that was going into unproductive discussions and ask me for help.

The meeting began with a man who had clipped an article out of the newspaper. And then for the next ten minutes everybody was talking about things that happened to them in the past, what a racist system it was, and so forth.

Marshall: "Could I break in here? I'd like to ask you all to raise your hand if you have found the meeting productive to this point."

Not one hand went up –not even by those individuals who had told stories. So I went back to the gentleman who had started the conversation and said,

Marshall: “Sir, can you tell me your request of the group? What did you want back from the group when you read that article from the newspaper?”

Man: “Well, I thought it was important –that it was interesting.”

Marshall: “I’m sure you thought it was interesting, but you’re telling me what you think. I’m asking what you wanted back from the group...”

Man: “I don’t know what I wanted.”

Whenever we take the attention of a group and present something, and we are not clear what we want, it’s very likely that we’re not going to have a very productive encounter. Nonviolent Communication shows us, whether we are talking with an individual or a group to be sure to end whatever you’re saying with clarity about *what you want back: What is your request?*

Presenting your pain or thoughts without a clear request is likely to be the stimulus for unproductive discussion.

How to request when we don’t have enough time

Sometimes we need not only to speak Nonviolent Communication from the heart, we need to be brief and clear and make the most of short periods of time –or, as they’re sometimes called, windows of opportunity.

My usual approach to soliciting funds would’ve been to go in with a proposal and slides and to try to document all the value of what we are trying to do and get the money.

Don’t feel the air with a lot of words. Rather, create a flow in which the other person can tell you what they need to know.

Sometimes, if we don’t have enough time, is effective to start just the opposite. *We’re here to get some money; what do you need to hear from us to decide whether you want to give it or not?*

We can start from the very beginning by essentially saying to the other person, *what do you need to hear from us to give us what we came for?* In other words, setting it up in the very beginning that the other person can find out what they need to hear to decide whether or not they want to support the change that you’re interested in.

I think I got more out of it by letting them tell me what they needed to hear rather than my using a lot of words that weren't going to help.

NOTES

You are *furious* and would appreciate ...?

Sounds like you are feeling *desperate* and you're wondering Am I hearing you right?

Are you reacting to my not having said... ?

Are you feeling... because you would have like ...?

Resolving conflicts

What is that you are each needing?

What would you like to request of the other in relation to these needs?

Can you help me understand what the problems are and what can be done about them?

"Could you help me understand what keeps it from getting done?"

"Help me to understand how you came to that."

"Whoever want to start, I'd like to know what needs of yours are not being met in this situation. If we can identify everybody's needs, and everybody can express their needs clearly, I'm certain we'll find strategies for getting everybody's needs met. So, who wants to start?"

"Compassion is not religious business, it is human business, it is not luxury, it is essential for our own peace and mental stability, it is essential for human survival."

- The Dalai Lama -

WORKSHOP DISCUSSION

Quality of connection

NVC is a combination of thinking and language, that allows us to create *the quality of connection with other people and oneself that enables compassionate giving to take place*. It's compassionate in that our giving comes willingly from the heart. We are giving service to others and ourselves –not out of duty or obligation, not out of fear of punishment or hope for a reward, not out of guilt or shame, but for what I consider part of our nature. It's in our nature to enjoy giving to one another.

A way to focus attention

NVC guides us in reframing how we express ourselves and hear others. Instead of being habitual, automatic reactions, *our words become conscious responses based firmly on an awareness of what we are perceiving, feeling and wanting*. We are led to express ourselves with honesty and clarity, while simultaneously paying others a respectful and emphatic attention. In any exchange we come to hear our own deeper needs and those of others.

Judgments

Instead of attributing the cause of conflict to wrongness in one's adversaries, we do our best to think of oneself or others in *terms of human needs and vulnerability* –what one might be feeling, fearing, yearning for, missing, etc.

It is important not to confuse *value judgments* and *moralistic judgments*. Value judgments reflect our beliefs of how life can be best served; for example we might value honesty, freedom, or peace.

Blame, insults, put-downs (critical remark), labels, criticism, comparisons, and diagnoses are all forms of judgment. When we judge, as a result, we *increase defensiveness and resistance from others*.

Responsibility for our feelings

We are each responsible for our own thoughts, feelings, and actions. What others say and do may be the *stimulus*, but never the *cause* of our feelings. We see that our feelings result from *how we choose to receive what others say or do, as well as our*

particular needs and expectations in that moment. It's not what other people do that can hurt you: it's how you take it.

By equating stimulus and cause, we trick ourselves in thinking that other's behavior is the cause of our anger. The basic mechanism of motivating by guilt is *to attribute the responsibility for one's own feelings to others.* Our language facilitates the use of this *guilt-inducing tactic.*

Anger indicates that we have moved up to our head to analyze and judge somebody, rather than focus on which of our needs are not getting met. Use anger as a wake-up call. Consciously replace the phrase "I am angry because they..." with "I am angry *because I am needing...*"

It's very important that when we do express our feelings we follow that expression with a statement that makes it clear that the cause of our feelings is our needs: "I feel ... because I ..."

Acknowledge responsibility in our language

We can replace language that implies lack of choice with language that *acknowledge choice.*

- Replace "I have to" with "I choose to... because I want...", and "I should" with "I might".
- Be careful with the words *always, never, ever, whenever, frequently.* Sometimes such words are used as exaggerations, in which case observations and evaluations are being mixed.
- Be aware of the denial of responsibility when using impersonal pronouns (it, that makes me feel), mention only the actions of others or even saying "I feel... because you..."

Deserving reward and punishment

Life-alienating communication is also associated with the concept that *certain actions merit reward while others merit punishment.*

It is in everyone's interest that people change, not in order to avoid punishment, but because they see the change as benefiting themselves.

Punishment is a losing game. We want people to change their behavior, not because they're going to be punished if they continue, but because they see other options that better meet their needs at less cost.

Observing without evaluating

When we make an observation about what other people do that we either like or don't like, say that *without mixing in any evaluation*. That means, when we try to tell people what they've done, we want to go directly to the behavior without mixing in a diagnosis, judgment or evaluation.

When we combine observation with evaluation we decrease the likelihood that others will hear our intended message. Instead, they are apt to hear criticism and thus resist what we are saying.

NVC does not mandate that we refrain from evaluating. It only requires that we maintain a separation between our observations and our evaluations. Evaluations are to be based on observations *specific to time and context*.

Expressing our feelings

To say clearly what's alive in us at any given moment we have to be clear about what we feel and what we need.

It is important to have a vocabulary of feelings and clearly distinguish the expressions of actual feelings that describe what's alive in us from words and statements that describe thoughts, opinion, assessments, and interpretations.

In expressing our feelings, it helps to use words that refer to specific emotions, rather than words that are vague or general.

Expressing our needs

People would not feel stimulated to help us if they do not clearly understand our needs, the needs of ours that are connected to our feelings. "I feel as I do because I need..."

It is when people see the needs of another person that it stimulates their enjoyment of giving –because we can identify with needs. All humans have the same basic needs. We see each other humanness at the need level.

The problem with people who are in touch with their needs is that they do not make good slaves. We are used to analyze and blame one another rather than clearly expressing what we need. When people begin talking about what they need rather than what's wrong with one another, the possibility of finding ways to meet everybody's needs is greatly increased.

Emotional liberation

We respond to the needs of others out of *compassion*, never out of fear, guilt, or shame. We accept full *responsibility for our own intentions and actions*, but not for the feelings of others.

At this stage, we are aware that we can never meet our own needs at the expense of others. Emotional liberation involves stating clearly what we need in a way that communicates *we are equally concerned that the needs of the others be fulfilled*.

Using specific positive action language

Nonviolent Communication suggests that we make our request using *positive action* language. Your language is positive in the sense that it request what you *do want* the other person to do, rather than what you *don't want* or what you want them to *stop doing*. You want to request an action that involves them *doing* something.

We also receive a more favorable answer if we ask for specific concrete actions that others can undertake rather than vague, abstract or ambiguous phrasing like "fair treatment". We can find ways to express our requests in *specific positive action* language. When request are worded in a negative or vague ways, *people are often confused as to what is actually being requested*, and furthermore, *negative requests are likely to provoke resistance*.

Asking for a reflection

To make sure the message we sent is the message that's received, *ask the listener to reflect it back* and express appreciation when your listener tries to meet your request for a reflection.

We want to make clear, assertive requests, that people trust as requests and not demands. In order for them to trust that it's a request, they need to know that they can disagree and be understood. We can help others trust that we are requesting, not demanding, by indicating that we would only want the person to comply if he or she can do so *willingly*.

Anytime somebody does what we ask out of guilt, shame, duty, obligation, or fear of punishment, we're going to pay for it. We want people to act on our request only when they're connected to a kind of divine energy that exists in all of us. We're not doing it to avoid negative consequences.

Learning from our limitations

“Learn to analyze any situation only once for the purposes of learning new lessons. If you are thinking about a mistake over and over again, then you need to stop! You should not even call it a mistake. Call it feedback.”¹

When we behave in a way we think was not appropriate, we can learn best from it if we do two things.

1. See the need that wasn't met by the behavior.
2. Be conscious of the need we were trying to meet by doing what we did.

When we have our awareness focused on those two needs, I believe it heightens our ability to learn from our limitations without losing self-respect –without feeling guilty or depressed.

If we can learn how to emphatically connect with the needs of ours that wasn't met, and then look at the part of our self that was trying to meet the need, we're better prepared to see what's alive in ourselves and others –and to take the steps necessary to make life more wonderful.

Talking about what happened in the past

We talk very little if at all about what happened in the past. You heal by *talking about what's going on in the moment, in the now*. Certainly it's stimulated by the past, and we don't deny how the past is affecting the present, but we don't “dwell” on it.

Sometimes I begin with empathy and say, “What's still alive in you as a result of what I have done?” See, we're not going into the past and talking about what I did, but about what's alive in you now that's still there from what happened in the past. We want to know what a person is feeling and needing at this moment.

The essence of our choices

Make choices motivated purely by our desire to contribute to life rather than out of fear, guilt, shame, duty, or obligation. When we are conscious of the life-enriching purpose behind an action we take, when the sole energy that motivates us is simply to make life wonderful for others and ourselves, then even hard work have an element of play in it.

¹ “The Secret Behind the Secret, *How to clear your path to greater manifestations*” - Dr. Eric Amidi

We would appreciate what we do if we are motivated purely by the *human desire to contribute to life*.

Empathically connecting with others

Empathic connection is an understanding of the heart that involves connecting with what is alive in the other person *at this moment*. It is a *respectful understanding of what others are experiencing*. It implies our *presence* in the moment. It is emptying the mind and listening with our whole being. We give to others the time and space they need to *express themselves fully and to feel understood*.

Instead of empathy, we tend instead to have a strong urge to give advice or reassurance and to explain our own position or feeling. Intellectual understanding of a problem blocks the kind of presence that empathy requires. When we are thinking about people's words, listening to how they connect to our theories, we are looking at people –we are not with them. *The key ingredient of empathy is presence*.

I recommend allowing others the opportunity to fully express themselves before turning our attention to solutions either to their request or to our own desire to express ourselves.

Listening behind the message

All criticism, attack, insults, and judgments vanish when we focus attention on *hearing the feelings and needs behind the message*. The more we practice in this way, the more we realize a simple truth: behind all those messages are just *individuals with unmet needs* appealing to us to contribute to their well-being. Empathizing with the others *protects us from taking it personally*.

No matter what words people use to express themselves, we listen for their feelings and needs behind the others' statements. Our tendency is to take others' messages personally. If we can connect with the divine energy behind every message coming at us, we will hear the beautiful needs that are alive in them.

Everything we do is in service of our needs. When this is applied to our view of others we'll see that we have no real enemies, that what others do to us is the best possible thing they know to do to get their needs met.

Paraphrasing

Reflect back what we have understood by paraphrasing back in the form of questions that reveal our understanding focusing on the feelings and needs the other person is expressing as well as their specific request. When we paraphrase, the tone of voice we use is highly important. When they heard themselves reflected back, people are likely to be sensitive to the slightest hint of criticism or sarcasm.

Sustaining empathy

No matter how people respond, we try to connect with what's alive in them and what would make life more wonderful for them. Notice this doesn't require that we agree with the other person. It doesn't mean we have to like what they're saying.

If you are feeling you are losing connection, take a deep, deep breath and bring your attention back to the other person, saying, "So you're feeling..." and "you're needing..." to try to connect again. If the other person says something else, and again you get triggered, slow down and take a deep breath to be able to keep coming back to what is alive in the other person.

Bringing a dead conversation to life

The best time to interrupt a conversation is when we have heard one more word than we want to hear. Our intention in interrupting is not to claim the floor for ourselves, but to help the speaker to connect to the life energy behind the words being spoken. Speakers prefer that listeners interrupt rather than pretend to listen.

When in a boring group conversation, ask the one who is talking "Can you tell me, when you brought up the discussion, what response you were wanting from the group?"

Opening people to listen to other options

When people feel that we are sincerely showing an empathic connection and that we understand what needs they're trying to meet, that we are not blaming them or judging them, they're more open to hearing other options. If they think we have single-mindedness of purpose to change them, or if they feel they're being blamed for what they're doing, it makes change difficult.

Try to begin with empathic connection with the needs they're trying to meet by doing what they're doing and, once we've understood that and reflect it back, I suggest looking for other ways of meeting their needs that are more effective and less costly.

The protective use of force

The intention behind the protective use of force is to *prevent injury or injustice*. The intention behind the punitive use of force is to *cause individuals to suffer for their perceived misdeeds*, repent and change.

In practice, however, punitive actions, rather than evoking repentance and learning, is just as likely to generate resentment and hostility and to reinforce resistance to the very behavior we are seeking.

in the punitive process, are we not perpetuating a social norm that justifies violence as a means of resolving differences?

- What do we want the other person to do?
- What do we want the other's person reasons to be for doing what we want them to do?

Expressing gratitude

The intention by expressing gratitude is all-important: to celebrate life, nothing else. We're not trying to reward the other person. We want the other person to know how our life has been enriched by what they did. That's our only intent.

10 STEPS TO PEACE

- (1)** Spend some time each day quietly reflecting on how we would like to relate to ourselves and others.
- (2)** Remember that all human beings have the same needs.
- (3)** Check our intention to see if we are as interested in others getting their needs met as our own.
- (4)** When asking someone to do something, check first to see if we are making a request or a demand.
- (5)** Instead of saying what we DON'T want someone to do, say what we DO want the person to do.
- (6)** Instead of saying what we want someone to BE, say what action we'd like the person to take that we hope will help the person be that way.
- (7)** Before agreeing or disagreeing with anyone's opinions, try to tune in to what the person is feeling and needing.
- (8)** Instead of saying "No," say what need of ours prevents us from saying "Yes."
- (9)** If we are feeling upset, think about what need of ours is not being met, and what we could do to meet it, instead of thinking about what's wrong with others or ourselves.
- (10)** Instead of praising someone who did something we like, express our gratitude by telling the person what need of ours that action met.