

Summary of Some Aspects of Nonviolent (Compassionate) Communication (NVC)

Definition: a process and language of compassionate, empathic communication.

Intention: connection, the quality of which leads to everyone's needs being met peacefully; to encourage compassionate giving.

Attention: to the present; to what is alive (Observations, Feelings, Needs, Requests) in us and others now.

Modes: self-empathy (O, F, N, R); honest self-expression (O, F, N, R); empathy for others (O, F, N, R).

Key assumptions behind NVC. All human beings have the same basic needs. All human actions are attempts to meet needs. People naturally enjoy contributing to others when they can do so willingly ("helper's high").

Components:

Observations (O)-what would be recorded by a video camera, separate from evaluations.

Feelings (F)-emotions or body sensations which result from needs met (pleasant, comfortable) or needs not met (unpleasant, uncomfortable).

Needs (N)-lack of something required, desirable, or useful; a condition requiring supply or relief; necessity.

Requests (R)-strategies to enrich our lives and meet our needs.

Feelings: distinguished from evaluations and thoughts.

Examples of feelings when needs are met include: affectionate, comfortable, confident, engaged, excited, exhilarated, grateful, hopeful, inspired, joyful, moved, peaceful, proud, refreshed, satisfied, and others.

Examples of feelings when needs are not met include: afraid, annoyed, angry, anxious, confused, disconnected, embarrassed, envious, fatigue, pain, repulsed, sad, tense, uncomfortable, vulnerable, and others.

Asking/expressing feelings: (are you/I am) feeling _____ because (you are/I am) needing _____ (?.)

Needs: some other words that may have a similar meaning to need in certain situations include: value, care about, is important to, want, wish, hope, prefer, like, yearn for, long for, desire, cherish, expect, have an interest in, have a priority for, think, and other words.

Examples of some basic needs include: autonomy/freedom; connection/empathy; honesty/integrity; meaning/purpose; peace/ease; physical nurturance/safety; play/fun, and others.

Requests: helpful to make after O, F, N; helpful to express O, F, and especially N prior to request.

-**Connecting** requests (What did you hear, feel, think?)

-**Action** requests (positively stated, doable, oriented to present time)

Life alienating (disconnecting) communication: 4 Ds (diagnosis, demands, deserves, denial of responsibility). Analyses and judgments are expressions of needs and values which have been met or unmet.

4 ways people may respond to difficult to hear message (jackal/giraffe): blame other (jackal out); blame self (jackal in); empathy for self (giraffe in); empathy for other (giraffe out).

Empathy: respectful understanding of O, F, N, R in ourselves and others. Needs are the most important component. Understanding does not mean agreement or disagreement. Empathy increases connection and the chance of getting everyone's needs met.

Verbal (O, F, N, R) and **nonverbal** (facial expression, body language, tone of voice) **empathy**.

Give empathy (verbal and/or nonverbal) **before non-empathic response**. Also, consider asking permission before giving a non-empathic response such as: advising/fixing; one-upping; educating; consoling; story-telling; encouragement; sympathizing; interrogating; explaining; correcting.

Self-empathy: translate self-judgment and inner demands (should) into recognizing feelings and unmet needs. NVC mourning allows for self-forgiveness with change from feelings of shame, guilt, depression (self-punishment) and anger to feelings of sadness, frustration, disappointment, fear, grief, regret etc., which allows for creative possibilities of how to get the needs met.

When unable to empathize: Breathe; give self-empathy or get empathy from someone else; do honest self-expression (O, F, N, R); take time out.

A helpful reframe can be to translate “I have to ___” into “I choose to ___ because I want ___.”

Anger: value as a wake up call.

Cause: needs not being met; thoughts of blame and judgment.

Steps to expressing anger or responding to anger in NVC model: Stop, breathe, be aware of body sensations; observe internally silently any thoughts of blame and judgment (jackal) of others and/or self; as soon as possible do self-empathy to fully connect with one’s own unmet needs and the associated feelings; then do honest self-expression and empathy to other (in either order).

How to respond when someone reflects back something different from what we intended to say: express appreciation for the response. (Example) “Thank you for telling me what you heard me say. I was not as clear as I would have liked. I would like to try expressing myself again, and for you to try hearing me differently.”

Saying and hearing “no” in NVC: receive request as a gift; say or guess/ask what feelings and needs prevent compliance with the request (what are saying “yes” to); empathy to self or other if needed; recognize goal to get all needs met. Behind every no is a need.

Some distinctions in and comments about NVC and insights

The process is simple but not easy.

Value judgment vs. moralistic (condemnatory) judgment.

Feelings (and needs) vs. thoughts/evaluations/judgments/blame.

Stimulus (what triggers a response) vs. cause (needs met or unmet and the associated feelings).

Request (empathizes with no, wants compliance only if willing) vs. demand (blame or punishment if not comply).

Need vs. strategy (request to meet the need).

“Classical NVC (Classical Giraffe)” and “Conversational or Idiomatic NVC (Street Giraffe)”.

Natural vs. habitual.

Unexpressed anxiety may be interpreted as hostility or aggression.

Power with (serves life, loving) vs. power over (detracts from life, oppressive).

Process language vs. static language.

Intrinsic motivation (meet needs of self and others)/self discipline vs. extrinsic motivation (guilt, shame, fear of punishment, hope for reward)/obedience.

NVC consciousness (intent) vs. NVC formula words.

Empathy (understand O, F, N, R) vs. sympathy (how one feels about the other).

Goal connection to get everyone’s needs met (win/win) vs. get only what we or others want (win/lose).

Goal to inspire compassionate response vs. produce aggressive or resentful or indifferent response.

Interdependence and autonomy vs. dependence/independence.

Protective vs. punitive use of force.

Gratitude/Appreciation in NVC (celebration expressing O, F, N) vs. praise/compliments (which may involve judgments and manipulation). Much value/benefit to giver and receiver of appreciation.

This handout: reflects my understanding of and interpretation from NVC materials, workshops, and practice groups; is a work in progress; and may be shared. Feedback and suggestions are welcomed.