

Introduction to Nonviolent Communication

A Language of Consideration Rather than Domination

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Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is a process of connecting with people in a way that allows everyone's needs to be met through empathizing with the universal needs we all share. It is a way of relating to ourselves and others out of an awareness of feelings and needs rather than judgments, labels, punishment, guilt or shame.

At the heart of NVC is the ability to connect to our own 'humanness' and to the "humanness" of others. It is to see ourselves and each other not as objects or as 'good' or "bad," but as whole, dynamic persons with varying combinations of feelings and needs. When we can express that which is alive in us in a nonjudgmental, non-blaming way we have a much greater chance of inspiring an empathic connection with others because as humans we all share these same qualities; e.g. the needs for trust, safety, appreciation, caring, freedom... the list goes on. When empathy is experienced in connection to another person (or to ourselves) we, as humans, have a natural desire to improve the life of that person. Within this connection an exchange can take place that greatly enhances the chances of getting everyone's needs met.

THE JACKAL AND THE GIRAFFE



THE JACKAL:

In NVC we use the Jackal to symbolize the life alienating, domination language most of us were raised with. The jackal, as an animal, is low to the ground, a scavenger, competitive and vicious. A jackal as a person is one who approaches people (including themselves), places and things through the lens of a Right/Wrong, Good/Bad judgments. They speak a language that instills fear, anger, guilt and shame. It often inspires painful obsessions and behaviors. The jackal sees everything as deserving either reward or punishment for themselves or others. Their language is demanding; "Do this." "Don't do that." The jackal lives in their head judging, analyzing and blaming themselves and others.



THE GIRAFFE:

In NVC we use the Giraffe to symbolize the life serving, partnership language that inspires connection and community. The giraffe is a very powerful yet peaceful, gentle animal. It has the largest heart of any land animal on earth and the longest neck which allows for a far, overall view of the world around it. To speak 'giraffe' is to speak from the heart. A giraffe person is non-judgmental, non-blaming, non-demanding and non-threatening. A giraffe is objective in their view and understanding of their feelings and needs as well as the feelings and needs of others. They practice empathy and desire to make life more wonderful for themselves and those around them.

Purpose of NVC

- To evoke an empathic, natural connection so that all needs may be met

- To consider and to connect to the life in ourselves and others
- To be inspired and to inspire others to give out of the natural joy of giving

Background of NVC

- Founded by Marshall Rosenberg during the Civil Rights era; influenced by Carl Rogers
- The Center for Nonviolent Communication, founded in 1984, has international presence in such places as the Middle East, Bosnia, Rwanda, Columbia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, India, Western Europe, and more.
- Most frequent applications include school systems, health care, prisons, workplaces, law enforcement & military, drug treatment & social services, families.

NVC - Based on 2 Principles

1. Principle #1 –

Nurturing Our Nature

We hold an acknowledgement that domination thinking and violence have been trained and habituated into us in a poor attempt to control others and be controlled by others. The basic premise of NVC is that this unskillful training, though thousands of years old, is not our true nature. Gandhi once said, “Don’t mistake habit for what is natural.” NVC is taught on the underlying supposition that our true nature is one of desire to make life more wonderful for ourselves and others. Unfortunately most of us have lost the skill and know-how to fulfill this desire. NVC is as much a process of unlearning old, unskillful reactions as it is gaining new tools and developing new responses.

2. Principle #2 -

No One *Makes* You Feel

We understand that we are responsible for our own reactions to any given situation. Example: If identical triplets are on a beach and a wave comes and crashes down on them and recedes, one of the triplets may be exhilarated, thrilled and laughing, one may be furious, resentful and yelling while the third is despondent, frightened and crying. What made the difference? The difference comes not from what happened but rather from the fact that each of them has different needs, expectations, values and perceptions. The same can be said for any situation or interaction. It’s not that something or someone *makes* you feel anything but rather your needs are being met or not met.

NVC Model

The Four Components of NVC

The first 3 components - observations, feelings and needs - make up the first part of the

empathy process. This is a process of objectively identifying what's really alive in you or another person. It's an exploration of what 'is' without blame, judgment or analysis. It involves:

1. **Observation** (free of judgment, labels, diagnosis, opinions, etc.)
"When I see/hear/notice..."
2. **Feeling** (free of thoughts, not "I feel like.." or "I feel that..." We are also careful not to use 'jackal' words that imply blame such as bullied, ignored, cheated, betrayed, abandoned, victimized...)
"...I feel..."
(happy, sad, delighted, frightened, surprised, angry, content, confused, thankful, anxious, affectionate, resentful, intrigued, overwhelmed, thrilled, etc...)
3. **Need** (universal; without reference to any specific person, time, activity)
"...because I am needing..."
(*trust, appreciation, freedom, understanding, connection, safety, hope, consideration, equality, integrity, respect, acceptance, autonomy, etc...*)

The fourth component - the request - is the 'dance' that allows life to move forward. It presents the opportunity to make life more wonderful by moving toward a joyful resolution. The request is the ebb and flow of giving and receiving, back and forth, that provides the opportunity for everyone's needs to be met.

NOTE: It's important to remember that if you are the one expressing what's alive in you then your request will always immediately follow your observations, feelings and needs. However, if you are the one providing empathy to someone else then you will not make a request until you've been given a 'sign' or have been asked to make a request.

4. **Request** (clear, positive, present, detailed, active request that would enrich life)
"Would you be willing to...?"

Jackal Example: 

Person #1: *You never listen to me when I'm talking to you. You're ignoring me constantly. You just don't care!*

Person #2: *Yeah right! I listen to you all the time!*

Person #1: *You can't listen to me and read the paper at the same time! You're so unreal!*

Person #2: *I'm unreal?! You don't even.... (discussion goes nowhere and ends in frustration)*

Giraffe Example: 

Person #1: *When I see you read the newspaper while I'm talking, I feel frustrated because I'm needing to be heard. Would you be willing to close the newspaper for 5 minutes and hear my idea?*

Person #2: *When you ask me to close the paper when I'm reading an article that is very important to me I feel anxious because of my need to understand what's going on in the world. I also feel concerned because of my need for your well-being. Would you be willing to wait 5 minutes while I finish this article so I can give you my full attention?*

Person #1: *Yes.*

Two Parts of NVC

1. RECEIVING EMPATHY

Honestly **EXPRESS** your clear, nonjudgmental observations, your own feelings and needs; being aware of what's alive in you

- Ongoing awareness of observations, feelings and needs: "When I hear (see)... I feel...because I need.... Would you be willing to...?"
- Willingness and courage to express those feelings and needs (vulnerability)
- Willingness to make clear, detailed requests

2. PROVIDING EMPATHY

Empathically **LISTEN** to other's observations, feelings and needs

- Presence, Focus, Space, Verbal reflection of feelings & needs: "Are you feeling...?", "Are you needing...?"
- NOT advising, fixing, consoling, story-telling, sympathizing, analyzing, explaining, defending.
- No matter what is said, hear only feelings, needs, observation & requests.
- Make a request ONLY after being given a 'sign' or asked to do so.

SELF EMPATHY

Transforming the Pain of Unmet Needs

Transforming our relationships often involves transforming ourselves at the same time. When 2 (or more) people are in pain because their needs aren't being met it may seem like a stale mate; no one has enough empathy to get the ball rolling. In this situation self empathy is a tool to begin with. This practice can be done as many times as needed to soften the hard defenses and open the heart. It may take a minute, a day or two, sometimes more. You may choose to make it a daily practice which would be optimal.

1. **Take Time & Space:** When you are in pain take some time, create a space alone and undisturbed where you can write (or type) freely.
2. **The Jackal Show:** Just start writing. Don't watch your words or try to "be nice". Just let it flow. This is called the Jackal Show. You can write all about what 'they' have done to you, what they have created, what they've destroyed. You can express all your pain and anguish, your fears and outrage, your judgments, thoughts, analysis of the situation and whatever else comes to mind. Do this until you have nothing left to say.
3. **List the Jackal Words:** Go back over what you've written. What are the jackal words that come to mind? Make a list of the jackal words that imply blame such as; bullied,

ignored, cheated, betrayed, abandoned, victimized...

4. **Translate Jackals into Baby Giraffes:** Go back over your jackal list. What are the real feelings behind all this? Make another list using your list of jackal translations. Remember that no one *makes* you feel anything. Your feelings are your own and are the results of your perceptions, beliefs and attitudes. Go behind the jackal words and get a real sense of the feeling words that describe what is going on in your body now such as; sad, frightened, angry, worried, confused, anxious, overwhelmed, bitter, jealous, etc... Use the Feelings List and pick out the words that describe the way you really feel. Each feeling is a baby giraffe crying with an unmet need. Feel them, listen to them. What are they trying to say? What needs are not being met?
5. **List the Needs (not the strategies) Behind the Feelings:** In this next list write down the unmet needs (not strategies) behind all these feelings such as; respect, appreciation, intimacy, recognition, cooperation, support... Use the Needs List to pick out the needs you have that are not being met. Remember these needs are not specific to any one person. An example of a need would be, "I need understanding." An example of a strategy is, "I need *you* to understand me." List only the needs not the strategies.
6. **Mourning:** Allow yourself to mourn the fact that these needs are not presently being met. Be with yourself. Give yourself permission to feel the pain of not having these needs met. It is painful. Hold your pain like you would hold a baby. If anger and resentment persist for a long time go back to writing more of the Jackal Show. Often once we have completed the first step a shift will take place and suddenly anger feels more like sadness. List the new feelings. List the needs behind those feelings. And allow yourself to mourn your loss again.

Empathy: When you feel complete with the above exercises allow yourself to sit back. The word "Empathy" implies an empty presence – an awareness of what is alive in you. Bring your awareness into your body. Every thought and emotion we have is manifesting in the body somewhere. Scan your body with all your senses gently and locate the places where you're holding your pain. Don't try to change anything. Just be empathic. Is your brow furrowed? Your shoulders tight? Your throat constricted? Your abdomen tight? Is your breathing shallow? When you find a place that is holding your pain just be present with it. If your shoulders suddenly relax, let them go. If your face muscles soften let it be. If your abdomen softens, breathe.

NVC Resources ... If you want to learn more about NVC

- Center for Nonviolent Communication: www.cnvc.org
(Information, books, videos, audio tapes, training event listings, etc)
- Book: [Nonviolent Communication](#) by Marshall Rosenberg
<http://www.puddledancer.com/>