

# A model for Mindful Communication

## How You Can Use the NVC Process



Clearly expressing  
how **I am**  
without blaming  
or criticizing

Empathically receiving  
how **you are**  
without hearing  
blame or criticism

### OBSERVATIONS

1. What I observe (*see, hear, remember, imagine, free from my evaluations*) that does or does not contribute to my well-being:  
“When I (see, hear) . . . ”

1. What you observe (*see, hear, remember, imagine, free from your evaluations*) that does or does not contribute to your well-being:  
“When you see/hear . . . ”  
*(Sometimes unspoken when offering empathy)*

### FEELINGS

2. How I feel (*emotion or sensation rather than thought*) in relation to what I observe:  
“I feel . . . ”

2. How you feel (*emotion or sensation rather than thought*) in relation to what you observe:  
“You feel . . . ”

### NEEDS

3. What I need or value (*rather than a preference, or a specific action*) that causes my feelings:  
“. . . because I need/value . . . ”

3. What you need or value (*rather than a preference, or a specific action*) that causes your feelings:  
“. . . because you need/value . . . ”

Clearly requesting that  
which would enrich **my**  
life without demanding

Empathically receiving that  
which would enrich **your** life  
without hearing any demand

### REQUESTS

4. The concrete actions I would like taken:  
“Would you be willing to . . . ?”

4. The concrete actions you would like taken:  
“Would you like . . . ?”  
*(Sometimes unspoken when offering empathy)*



## **A model for Mindful Communication**

Nonviolent Communication (NVC) was developed by Dr. Marshall Rosenberg. NVC gives us the tools and consciousness to understand what triggers us, to take responsibility for our reactions, and to deepen our connection with ourselves and others, thereby transforming our habitual responses to life and promoting a positive way of communicating.

### **NVC Step 1: Making Clear Observations**

Observations are what we see or hear that we identify as the stimulus to our reactions. The key to making an observation is to separate our own judgments, evaluations or interpretations from our description of what happened. When we are able to describe what we see or hear in *observation language* without mixing in evaluation, we raise the likelihood that the person listening to us will hear this first step without immediately reacting. Translating judgments and interpretations into observations moves us away from right/wrong thinking and helps us take responsibility for our reactions by directing our attention to our needs as the source of our feelings rather than to the other person.

### **NVC Step 2: Expressing our Feelings**

The key to identifying and expressing feelings is to focus on words that describe our experience rather than words that describe our interpretations of people's actions. "I feel lonely" describes an inner experience, while "I feel like you don't love me" describes an interpretation of how the other person may be feeling. When we express our feelings, we continue the process of taking responsibility for our experience, which helps others hear what's important to us with less likelihood of hearing criticism or blame of themselves. This increases the likelihood that they will respond in a way that meets both our needs.

### **NVC Step 3: Understanding our Needs**

Needs refer to what is most alive in us: our core values and deepest human longings. Understanding, naming, and connecting with our needs helps us

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improve our relationship with ourselves, as well as foster understanding with others, so we are all more likely to take actions that meet everyone's needs.

The key to identifying, expressing, and connecting with needs is to focus on words that describe shared human experience rather than words that describe the particular strategies to meet those needs. Whenever we include a person, a location, an action, a time, or an object in our expression of what we want, we are describing a strategy rather than a need.

For example: "I want you to come to my birthday party" may be a strategy to meet a need for love and connection. In this case, we have a person, an action, and an implied time and location in the original statement. The internal shift from focusing on a specific strategy to connecting with needs often results in a sense of power and liberation, as we can free ourselves from being attached to one particular strategy by identifying the underlying needs and exploring alternative strategies.

### NVC Step 4: Making Requests

Learning to make clear requests of others and shifting our consciousness to making requests instead of demands are very challenging skills for most people. People often find the request step to be the hardest, because of what we call a "crisis of imagination" - a difficulty in identifying how to ask others to meet our needs without being at the expense of their needs or threatening to them. Even before considering the needs of others, the very act of coming up with a positive, doable request is challenging. We are habituated to thinking in terms of what we want people to stop doing ("don't yell at me!"), and how we want them to be ("please treat me with respect") rather than what we want them to do ("Would you be willing to lower your voice or talk later?"). With time, and a deeper connection to our needs, our creativity expands to imagine and embrace more strategies.

This fourth step is critical to our ability to create the life we want. In particular, shifting from demands to requests entails a leap in focus and in faith: we shift from focusing on getting our needs met, to focusing on the

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quality of connection that will allow both of our needs to truly matter and ultimately also to be met.

### **Empathy & Self-Empathy**

Expressing our own observations, feelings, needs and requests to others is one part of NVC. The second part is empathy: the process of connecting with another's feelings and needs. Empathic connection can sometimes happen silently, but in times of conflict, communicating to another person that we understand their feelings and that their needs matter to us can be a powerful turning point in problem situations. This ability to be aware of other's feelings is nurtured by the practice of self-empathy. As we know ourselves more fully it becomes more possible to know others at the deepest level.