



Mindful Communication exercise

Mindful Communication is Rooted in Feelings and Needs

We tend to mistakenly think our communication is only about the content we're trying to explain. And then it's a surprise when things go south! Using the wise findings of Non-Violent Communication, we learn that for communication to be successful it must also include awareness of the feelings and needs of both sides of the communication.

This handout will help you lead your team in a powerful exercise exploring mindful communication.

Preparation:

Everyone needs access to a vocabulary list of feelings and needs created by the Center for Non-Violent Communication. It's available at the [Mindfulness Northwest website](#) or search for "NVC Feelings Inventory" and "NVC Needs Inventory." If you are meeting online paste the link(s) to these lists into the chat box. If in person bring paper copies.

Step 1. Reflection

- Explain to the group that you'll be leading them in a guided reflection to work with and deepen their emotional understanding of a challenging communication.
- Invite participants to take a breath and settle into a space of reflection. They may have eyes closed or lower their gaze. Go within.
- Invite them to bring to mind a challenging, but not traumatizing, difficult communication they've experienced. If you'll be using the longer version of this exercise, which includes sharing with a partner (see page 2), mention this as they'll want to pick an incident they're comfortable sharing about.
- Ask them to recall a situation which still feels unresolved. It may be a conversation with a co-worker or a customer or anyone else, bringing into the present moment as much detail about what occurred as possible. (the person and the setting, what was said, etc.)

Step 2. Feelings & Needs Exploration

- Screenshare or ask them to look at the feelings inventory to help them first to identify feelings they had at the time, or may still have about the situation, making notes or circling the feelings on their list.
- Explain that often there is an unmet need or needs which is underneath the deep feelings and emotions. Next they'll be looking at a list of possible needs.
- Look at the list of unmet needs, orienting them to the bolded headings and the lists under each heading. Invite them to either write down or circle their unmet need(s).



Briefer option: jump to Step 4 Closing Discussion.

Fuller option:

Step 3. Pairs Communication Exercise

- Explain that we can explore mindful communication more deeply with a structured communications exercise.
- Divide into dyads (pairs). If there is an odd number, the facilitator has a partner.
- This is a timed exercise. Online either use the Zoom "broadcast" feature to send signals or paste a summary into the chat box and ask them to time each other.
- Either using breakout rooms or spreading around the room so they don't hear the other pairs, continue with...

Part A (3 minutes): Person 1 speaks for 3 minutes. Person 2 just listens without speaking. Nodding is OK, but even body language is kept to a minimum. The topic is the challenging communication. What made it challenging? Are there familiar trigger or patterns?

Part B (2 minutes): Person 2 shares what they heard. Suggest a sentence starter such as "What I appreciated about what you said was..." Person 1 just listens to their own thoughts coming back.

Part C (3 minutes): Change roles and repeat. Person 2 speaks about the difficult communication for 3 minutes and Person 1 just listens

Part D (2 minutes): Person 1 reflects back what they heard for 2 minutes.

Debrief (whole group): Close the breakout rooms or come back together in the room to debrief the exercise. Was comfortable or uncomfortable? What habits or patterns did they notice in themselves? Suggest they "just listen" to someone for 5 minutes this week!

Step 4. Closing Discussion

Conclude with a discussion around what they've learned about the communication and the interpersonal situation they were exploring by reflecting on feelings and needs. You could divide up in small groups to explore this with more fluidity.

Finish with a whole group inquiry. Ask for participants to share their experience with the exercise. Include some prompt such as: How was it helpful? What was challenging?

