

***Nonviolent Communication* Study Guide**
for Individuals or Practice Groups

Introduction

For eleven years, the Maine *NVC* Network published an educational newsletter to support readers in deepening *Nonviolent Communication* skills and consciousness. This booklet is a compilation of many of the articles, brought together for the purpose of supporting individuals and practice groups in their *NVC* studies. There are many more, which can be accessed at (<http://mainenvcnetwork.org/newsletter-archives.htm>).

This document is intended to be a supplement to your *NVC* journey, not a substitute for taking trainings with certified *NVC* trainers. The Center For Nonviolent Communication (www.cnvc.org) certifies trainers as a way to support the quality of *NVC* teaching and learning. Whether you take in-person trainings or the many options for online trainings, I urge you to connect with a certified trainer from time to time.

I have updated a few things to bring the work into alignment with my current thinking. One of the things that has “super-charged” my current practice is studying the interface of *NVC* and neuroscience through the work of Sarah Peyton (www.sarahpeyton.com). You will find this influence present in this document.

I hope this collection supports you on your journey of understanding and love. Please be in touch with any curiosities and/or feedback.

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Note: All articles in this booklet, unless otherwise attributed, were authored by Peggy Smith.

The Maine NVC Network website & newsletter would not have been possible without the loving dedication of Betsy Terrell. Thanks to Betsy's inspiration and hard work these offerings are now together in one place for free download. Please join me in sending Betsy oceans of gratitude for her dedication to nonviolence and human harmony.

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GETTING STARTED

Starting and Maintaining an *NVC* Practice Group

"How do I start a practice group?"

"Do I know enough to run a practice group?"

"How do I keep *NVC* alive in me?"

So many people leave *NVC* trainings with enthusiasm and strong desire to keep deepening *NVC* within them. When we think of building new neural pathways that will react as easily as the ones we have, well-grooved from a lifetime of practicing blame and judgment, we can see that having regularly supported practice could be a big help.

When my friend, Olive Pierce, and I came back from our first weekend with Marshall Rosenberg, we decided to start a practice group. She invited thirteen people to her cozy living room and we met twice a month. By the end of four months there were seven of us left, and we continued to work together for several years.

Olive and I were both very much beginners. At that point we saw *NVC* as a set of rules to follow. We turned some people off to *NVC*. Sigh!!! and I remember Marshall used to say, "Anything worth doing is worth doing badly." And I smile. We did our best and practiced diligently. I encourage everyone to start and work with what you have.

At the beginning many of us want *NVC* to help us change other people so that they are acting in ways we enjoy. This desire doesn't go away easily. This points us to the spiritual underpinnings of *NVC*, the challenge and opportunity to create a world in which everyone (and everything) matters. With gentle practice, we discover that perhaps it is ourselves who change the most by making *NVC* a living, ongoing practice.

Over the years, I have come to distinguish two types of groups:

A **study group** meets to read a basic *NVC* text and do some practice to support that learning. My first group read Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life, and worked through Lucy Leu's Nonviolent Communication Companion Workbook. We thought we would do one chapter and exercises each meeting. What we found was that it took us three meetings to cover a chapter and its accompanying exercises in a way that felt complete to us.

A **practice group** is a group of people who have either gone to enough workshops or read the text enough times that they have the basics and want to keep practicing together for support. Often this involves some combination of empathy time and working through core practices to harvest the learnings of past interactions or prepare for future ones from an *NVC* perspective.

Whether your intention is to set up a study group or a practice group, let's explore some ways of starting and maintaining the group. Each group is unique. Here are some questions to consider.

- How often will the group meet? Some options include weekly, biweekly, once a month
- How long will each session be? I find one hour too short. Many people will not commit to more than 2 hours. So somewhere between 1.5 and 2 hours seems to work well.
- Where will we meet? What would suit our community – someone's home or office, or a more public space? How many people can the space accommodate comfortably?
- How much *NVC* experience do the interested people have? This will determine if the focus is primarily studying to learn more or practicing.

- How will we organize leadership and facilitation? Some groups have a core leader/facilitator and some groups rotate. There is no "right way." Lucy Leu's Nonviolent Communication Companion Workbook offers ideas for rotating facilitators.
- Will we be an open or closed group? Are people welcome to drop in whenever they want or do you want people to make a certain time commitment when joining? I have worked with both sorts of groups. What feels good to you? Try it one way and then re-evaluate after several months to see if it's working the way you enjoy.
- Who can join? Some groups are open to anyone who is interested in *NVC*. Some groups have a pre-requisite that a member has taken at least a Level 1 workshop. The first strategy can nurture inclusion and learning. The second can nurture ease and learning. Which works for you?

Once you have your structure set up, it's time to move forward. I recommend any of the four books listed below as helpful guides with a modest cost, with the one caution: that they write about needs as "met" or "unmet," which is not how I teach about needs. (Read the article "Beyond Met and Unmet" in the Needs section of this guide.)

- Marshall Rosenberg's basic book: Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life and the companion practice book, Nonviolent Communication Companion Workbook, by Lucy Leu.
- Connection: A Self-care Approach to Conflict Management, by Bonnie R. Fraser, is an interactive workbook set up for college students, filled with practical exercises that are appropriate for older teens through adults.
- Another book written for college students that includes exercises appropriate for older teens through adults is Connecting Across Differences, by Dian Killan and Jane Connor.

I recommend you begin each session with a check-in, giving each person a certain amount of time (e.g. five minutes) to let the group know what is up in their lives. An addition is to have the next person begin by reflecting what they heard. This helps everyone experience the need "to be heard" at the beginning of every session.

Then the facilitator for that session will present the focus of that day. It may be an exercise from one of the listed resources or it may be an empathy session.

If you choose an empathy session it is important to review the blocks to empathy. (See list in the last section of this guide.) I suggest you divide the available time equally among the people present. Each person in turn receives everyone else's presence for their entire allotted time, whether they choose to speak or not. In the last few minutes of a person's time one or two other participants can reflect back a feeling and need that they heard. This is not a time for dialogue back and forth. It is a time for an empathic offering for the speaker to consider. For more support with Empathy Circles please refer to the first article in the Empathy section of this guide.

I find it helpful to end a practice or study group session with a round in which people express one thing they are taking from that session. This helps solidify learning.

Daily Practices for Integrating *NVC* Naturally

NVC, as developed by Marshall Rosenberg, is an effective and powerful assist to move toward nonviolent consciousness. This way of thinking is a major shift from the right/wrong, good/bad thinking that we have been raised with. It takes time and conscious effort to build new neural pathways in the brain to move *NVC* from an inspiring theory to a way of life.

The four step elements of *NVC* - Observation, Feelings, Needs, Requests (OFNR) - are a strong foundation. In addition, there are many other ways that I can purposefully shift my thinking and speaking to strengthen *NVC* thought patterns. Remember, *NVC* is more than a four step formula; it is an attitude of compassionate self-responsibility. For concrete actions that anyone can incorporate into their thoughts and speech without sounding *NVC*-ish, consider the following chart:

Daily Practices for Translating Judgmental Thinking into Compassionate Thinking	
Judgmental Thinking	Compassionate Thinking
I can't	I don't want to, I won't I choose not to I haven't learned how to
I feel that I feel like	I think, I believe I have an opinion It seems to me
Why? What? And other probing questions	Are you feeling . . . ? Are you wishing . . . ?
It's right, wrong, good, bad, smart, stupid	I judge it to be . . . I believe it is . . .
It / you / he / she makes me sick. It makes me happy.	I feel sick. I feel happy.
All, always, never, etc.	Give specific situations: When . . .
<i>Slightly revised from <u>The Compassionate Classroom: Relationship Based Teaching and Learning</u>, by Sura Hart and Victoria Hodson thenofaultzone.com</i>	

It has been my experience that by consciously incorporating each of these six strategies for compassionate thinking, my mindset builds the internal attitude that supports the integration of OFNR. In this way, *NVC* becomes my primary way of thinking, sounding natural and connecting when I choose to speak it out loud.

PRACTICE SUGGESTIONS:

1. For the next six weeks, work with this chart. Each week pick one of the translation suggestions from the chart and make an intentional effort to practice it. When you find yourself stating something using judgmental thinking, take a moment to restate the sentence using one of the translation choices.

It is important to remember that by becoming aware of the judgments we use in our everyday speech, we build our internal freedom to make other choices. I find it helpful to acknowledge when I just worded something in a way I don't enjoy and would like to take a moment to restate it in a way that resonates with my values.

Some examples might be:

"I can't go with you."

Restate: "I am choosing not to go with you because. . ."

"I feel that it is wrong to label people."

Restate: "When I hear you call him passive aggressive I feel (sad, anxious, upset) because I believe that labels make it harder to connect to others."

"That's a selfish way to behave."

Restate: "I think that is selfish behavior."

"When you don't follow through with your commitments it makes me feel (frustrated, mad, annoyed)"

Restate: "When you don't follow through with your commitments I feel. . ."

2. At the end of each day take two or three minutes to review that day and notice when you made a change based on the Daily Practices Chart. Offer yourself an appreciation for the effort and focus it takes to change. If you think of times you didn't implement that week's focus, take a moment to mentally rehearse a change now so you are better prepared for the future.

3. Have an empathy session to explore the joys, celebrations and challenges of implementing the strategies presented in the Daily Practices Chart.

When I chose to work with the Daily Practices chart in these ways, I found *NVC* becoming far more than a formula.

I have deep appreciation for CNVC-certified trainers Sura Hart and Victoria Kindle Hodson for all they do to develop curriculum for NVC, and the practicality of their needs-based writing. I invite you to read one of their books: Respectful Parents, Respectful Kids, The Compassionate Classroom; or The No-Fault Classroom. The chart that is the core of this article is slightly modified from their work.



Where Am I?

Whether my *NVC* experience is based on having attended a one hour presentation, a twelve hour introductory workshop, or years of intensives, in each moment the starting point of nonviolent consciousness is the same:

Am I aware in THIS moment how I am receiving the messages around me?

NVC brings me awareness that I have choice about how I receive the messages life delivers. Often my reactions happen so quickly that I am not aware that I am making choices. Slowing down - pausing - accepting with loving kindness how I'm viewing each moment is the way to increase my range of choices. Whenever anything happens, I have four ways I can react (exemplified by each of the four chairs).

The first two ways are cultivated in our culture based in right/wrong thinking: there is a problem and the most important thing is to find out who is at fault.

Chair #1:

Whatever is happening is definitely **YOUR fault**. When I sit in this chair my mind is busy telling myself YOU are the problem. Thinking from this chair may sound something like:

"It's because you did _____ that I feel _____."

Or

"If only you weren't so _____ (passive-aggressive/mean/bullying/overbearing/wimpy), things would be better around here."

Chair #2:

Whatever is happening is definitely **MY fault**. When I sit in this chair my mind is busy telling myself that **I** am the problem. Thinking from this chair may sound something like:

"Oh, if only I could be _____ (more organized – efficient – smarter – kinder – tougher – compassionate – assertive – creative, etc.). I'll never get this right! If only I could change - things would be better."

The third and fourth ways to respond are based in the options *NVC* offers: connecting feelings to needs. The most important thing in each moment is self-awareness and loving self-connection.

Chair #3:

Moment to moment I sense what emotional reaction I experience, either as sensations in the body or with descriptive terms, (happy, sad, annoyed, joyful, etc.) AND I connect those feelings to the needs within me that are stimulating them. The focus when I am sitting in Chair #3 is **self-empathy**, connecting my feelings to the needs that generated them. Thinking from this chair may sound something like:

"When I see the backyard with old furniture scattered around, I feel annoyed, arising from needs of ease and beauty."

Chair #4:

Moment to moment I am curious about what emotional reaction **you** are experiencing, and what needs are stimulating those emotions. The focus here is **empathic guessing about YOU**, wondering what feelings YOU may be experiencing and what needs may have generated them. Thinking from this chair may sound something like:

"Oh, their check didn't come when they hoped. I wonder if they are feeling anxious, arising from the needs of honoring agreements, ease, and support?"

It is important to remember that it's not the words we speak on the outside, but the thoughts we have on the inside, that determine which chair we are operating from. I might be saying the perfect *NVC* dialogue phrases but inwardly thinking judgments of myself or the other person.

To develop this compassionate consciousness, the first step is to pause long enough to check inside and see which chair is supporting my thinking. If I find myself operating out of Chairs #1 or #2 and I grasp that this way of thinking is unlikely to get the connection I am yearning for - connection with myself and the other person - I can use the *NVC* process to shift to either Chair #3 or #4.

The key to the shift is EMPATHY. Taking the time to accompany the parts of me that use judging and interpretation to call out for my attention. Empathy is a fundamental need that is often not well nourished in modern culture. Working with skilled trainers who can help us develop our empathy skills is of great value to developing peace within ourselves and the world and we can also work with each other in practice groups to develop this important skill.

PRACTICE SUGGESTIONS

1. For 21 days, use a deck of Feelings and Needs cards to connect feelings to needs. Here is one way to do that:
 - a. Try taking 10 minutes to remember something that happened in the past 24 hours.
 - b. Make an observation.
 - c. Ask yourself, "Thinking about this observation NOW, what feelings are stimulated in me?" Lay out those cards.
 - d. Slowly go through the needs deck and lay down the cards that connect to each feeling.
 - e. Take time to connect to each Need card you lay down with the thought, "I have the beautiful need of _____ flowing within me."
2. For one week, 6 – 8 times during the day, pause and ask yourself with loving curiosity: "Which chair am I thinking from in this moment?"
3. Consider scheduling an *NVC* coaching session with a certified trainer.

The Zero Step: What we do before we open our mouths influences what happens next!

by Jim Manske

"Know what you want before you open your mouth." -Marshall Rosenberg

Shortly after meeting Marshall Rosenberg in November of 2000, Jori and I started attending the Community *NVC* Practice Group in Albuquerque. One member of the group, Mel Schneider, offered the group a lesson he called "The Zero Step." Mel started the presentation by writing the numbers 1 through 4 on the whiteboard:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

He then filled in the blank next to each number, enumerating the four components of *NVC*.

1. Observation
2. Feeling
3. Need
4. Request

He briefly reviewed what each component meant. He said something like, "Observation refers to what we see and hear. Feeling means the physical sensations and emotions we notice in our body. Needs are the universal values that cause our feelings. Requests are the action step that moves us forward into making life more wonderful." This was already familiar. As I once heard Marshall say, "You can learn the basic components of *NVC* in 5 minutes or less." Then he went back to the board and wrote a 0 at the top of his list:

- 0.
1. Observation
2. Feeling
3. Need
4. Request

And after the 0 he wrote two words:

0. ZERO STEP
1. Observation
2. Feeling
3. Need
4. Request

Intrigued, we all leaned forward. I thought, "What is this? I don't remember seeing this in Marshall's book! He didn't mention this at the workshop we just went to. I wonder what this is about."

Mel explained that his understanding and practice of *NVC* centered around the idea that "all the rest" of *NVC* follows from one underlying premise: the intention that we each bring to every communication matters to the outcome! He also reminded us of the ever-present environment in which we practice *NVC*: the present moment.

In other words, when we take the time and energy to get clear about our intention, before communicating with one another, we increase the likelihood of living compassionately. In the moments before we engage in a conversation, the choices we make profoundly influence everyone involved. When we begin with an intention to connect, we naturally enter into the present moment, the only "time and place" that the connection we so fervently want actually exists.

The "Rest of *NVC*"

I have come to understand that "all the rest" of *NVC* also supports our clarity of intention because each component of *NVC* awakens us to another important quality of consciousness- Openness to Outcome. Rather than pre-judging the moment based on beliefs and images rooted in the dead past or the imagined future, we open to the possibility of something new arising that can make life more wonderful from now on.

In each moment, our consciousness focuses on what is arising with four lenses:

- What's actually happening, right now?
- What feelings are arising, right now?
- Who needs what, right now?
- What might contribute to those Needs, right now?

So the intention of *NVC*, in a dynamic feedback loop with *NVC*'s components, creates and sustains a natural quality of connection, a quality that makes compassionate giving and receiving both possible and inevitable. We creatively move through each moment of presence, awake and open to the almost infinite potential of what could be.

What happens if we forget the Zero Step?

With another intention, the same four components can be used at a great cost, one that adversely affects one's own well-being and integrity, and likely leads to something other than compassionate giving and receiving, a world based on who deserves what punishment or reward. In other words, violence rooted in separateness.

When we view the world through a screen of life-alienated "jackal" consciousness, we live our lives alternating between the dead past and the imaginary future. We fall into habits of:

- Evaluation and analysis
- Separative thinking and moral judgment
- Resistance and addictive attachment
- Demands and expectations

Even after we learn the basics of *NVC*, we may fall into these mostly unconscious habits. We may begin to use *NVC* as a mechanical process devoid of warmth and care. We can use the lens of *NVC* to become analytical and diagnostic. We can try to use *NVC* to manipulate others to get what we want without regard to our interdependence. We might start judging others for not using *NVC* "the right way," or correcting others for not

being vulnerable enough, honest enough, empathic enough. We might become the "NVC Police," correcting others for using words that are faux feelings or when they seem to mix up needs and strategies.

"We might ask ourselves whether we are more intent on applying the process 'correctly' than on connecting with the human being in front of us. Or perhaps, even though we are using the form of *NVC*, our only interest is in changing the other person's behavior." - Marshall Rosenberg

Becoming aware of any of these deeply embedded habits awakens us to the possibility of shifting our intention. Instead of an intention to correct, we can shift, right now, to an intention to connect!

What does living this intention look like?

When we shift our orientation to connection in the present, it affects our body, mind and world.

For the body, the intention to connect results in heightened awareness of sensations and emotions which can be read to support us in cultivating our own vitality, ensuring that our body's needs are nurtured with ever-increasing reliability. We learn to listen to the body and respond compassionately to its requests.

For the mind, we experience clarity, insight and openness to outcome. The safety and security we experience in our body influences our minds to become both vulnerable and empathic. We enjoy each moment as an opportunity to sense fully the whole range of human experience with a respectful quality of allowance. The luminosity of our awareness invites self-connection in the service of life.

With body and mind in resonance, our interactions with the world shift. The separateness we have habitually felt dissolves into connection and compassion. Our willingness to both give and receive blossoms.

Now, we can connect! More and more often we can catch ourselves connecting naturally. Every time we notice a pleasant sensation in the body becomes an opportunity to taste and express gratitude. Each moment of sadness or despair invites us to inquire into the source of our pain: what need is crying, "Please!" right now? Each connection to a need invites us to open to the possibility that there exists a strategy (or a myriad of strategies) to care for the needs arising.

Here are some practices to experiment with to connect with The Zero Step:

- Acknowledge, "I am Giraffe." or "I'm putting on my giraffe ears."
- Cultivate Warmth toward self and other
- Care for your vitality as well as the vitality of other(s)
- Cultivate Gratitude
- Cultivate interest in what is alive: What's actually happening? What feelings are arising? Who needs what right now? What might help?
- Mental practice: This refers to a strategy of using the brain's power of simulation to practice the Zero Step in challenging situations before they happen. I sometimes do this kind of practice just before going to sleep and/or just upon awakening. If I end up in a sleepless period in the middle of the night, one can also utilize the time for this kind of practice. Write down one new thing that you will do to cultivate your zero step.

Please join me in a commitment to live from the consciousness that we are one.

Please, let every word that you speak or type be empathically cleansed of any thought or feeling of separateness before you open your mouth or press "send." (This in no way implies there is a correct form!)

Please, let every word you hear be filtered by empathy so all you hear is "Please" and "Thank you."

Please, let every communication express our common aim of living nonviolence and compassion.

May we remember our vision and mission each and every moment, and measure our own actions (and inactions) in relation to those commitments.

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"Contributing to a world where everyone's needs can be satisfied reliably and abundantly!"*

EMPATHY - WARM ACCOMPANIMENT



Oak Tree Beauty, copyright 2008, Marilyn Barbone, from bigstockphoto.com

To me, this photo symbolizes the empathy process.

The clouds represent our thoughts and emotions, that come and go like clouds in the sky.

The oak represents the strong, slowly growing self. Given healthful nourishment (including empathy), it grows in beauty and expansiveness, providing shade and food for others over a wide expanse.

The still water represents the person holding empathy, becoming so internally still that their heart knows just what to say or not say. The person holding empathy is a mirror reflecting the beautiful wholeness of the person sharing, even when the speaker can't see it.

The slight ripple in the water represents that few of us hold pure empathy 100% of the time. Each ripple reminds us that our own emotions may surface, giving us an opportunity to mindfully return to stillness.

My Journey into Empathy and Self-Connection

In *NVC* we use the term empathy to describe the energy of presence, creating inner calm and focus so that we can hold nonjudgmental awareness. I have come to think of myself as having an internal empathy battery. Here is an example of discovering my empathy battery in “negative charge” and my journey of recharging it.

At my second *NVC* workshop, I experienced empathy, *NVC* style. Marshall Rosenberg, the creator of the Nonviolent Communication process, taught a session on empathy. Then we were arranged in groups to practice empathy in the form of listening, then guessing feelings and needs. (At this time in *NVC* we called this reformulation.)

After I spoke, the people in my group made several guesses at my feelings and needs and I felt growing frustration. Then *NVC* trainer Gina Cenciose joined our group, and within a few moments offered a feelings and needs guess that brought me deep relief. I knew in that moment that *NVC* was for me.

However, for several years empathy remained a mystery to me. I couldn’t seem to connect the dots of my various experiences. Working with the **Empathy Blocks**,* and with growing patience, I could see that my habit of wanting to help by advising kept interfering. When I tried to listen I found that my mind wanted to offer suggestions, strategies intended to help reduce pain. It often involved suggesting a book to read or sharing an insight from some workshop I had attended. I thought these ideas would help reduce the person’s suffering. Then I began to realize that thinking of solutions kept me from being *with* the person.

My next step was to look with gentleness at my habit of offering suggestions as a way of helping. Since I had been a teacher for over thirty years, educating was a very strong habit. I decided that when my mind wanted to educate, I would simply notice. Just notice. Not try to change my habit, but instead become more aware of its many flavors and its deep roots in my behavior. What I discovered was a bit shocking to me: strong resistance to giving it up.

Ahhhh! I noticed a part of me was telling myself I ought to give up educating. After all, educating is on the Empathy Blocker list. When we tell ourselves that we “ought to do something,” we can call that should energy. I noticed that I was holding a lot of should energy in those moments.

I remembered a Carl Rogers quote:

"The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change."

This led me to a two-pronged approach to working with this habit.

- When I noticed that my mind wanted to offer suggestions, I would silently thank it for its ideas and ask myself if I was willing to bracket the ideas and come back to the person I was holding empathy for. Sometimes I accepted that request, which led to my being able to be in stronger presence with the other. Sometimes I didn’t accept the request, and I offered education.
- That led to the second aspect of my practice. When I did offer education, I watched the result. It was often not the connection I really wanted. So I began to ask myself with openness and loving kindness, why was the urge to educate so strong?

I told myself internally that I was not trying to get rid of educating. I wanted to understand its motivation. I noticed that often, just before my thoughts of education arose, I felt fear. I began to look at my relationship to fear. I didn’t like it at all. In addition to the usual aversion to fear, I have a spiritual practice that promotes fearlessness. So when I experienced fear, I told myself that my spiritual practice was weak. Not an enjoyable thought.

When I realized that my suggestions were an attempt to relieve or cover up my fear, my attention shifted to my relationship to fear. I decided to try the practice of accepting my fear, by turning toward it and hold it in the arms of my loving attention, as I would a very frightened young child. I would say, "Fear, I see you. I accept that you are here. I welcome you as an old friend. Please sit here with me in my loving awareness."

I held it in my awareness. Not trying to soothe it. Not trying to shift it. Not trying to even understand it. I practiced being with it. I noticed how long I could sit with it without being swallowed up in its power. I noticed that the more I followed this practice, the longer I could usually be with it.

After several weeks I came to a realization that is currently working for me. Fearlessness is not being without fear; it is being willing to be with my fear, with curiosity and acceptance.

As I use this self-empathy practice to turn toward the emotions I fear, I have become better able to be present with another person without falling into my habit of educating. I experience richer connections with myself and those around me.

*** Empathy Blocks**

- Advising: "I think you should . . ."
- Educating: "This could turn into a positive experience if you just . . ."
- One-Upping: "That's nothing, wait till you hear what happened to me."
- Consoling: "It wasn't your fault; you did the best you could."
- Sympathizing: "Oh you poor thing."
- Story-telling: "That reminds me of something I heard on the news . . ."
- Shutting down: "Cheer up. Don't feel so bad." "Come on, let's go (for an ice-cream) (to the gym)."
- Questioning: "When did this begin?"
- Correcting: "That's not how it happened."
- Reassuring: "It will all be OK."
- Denial of Feelings: "Don't worry. It's silly to worry."
- Minimizing: "This isn't so important."
- Diagnosing: "Your problem is you're a compulsive worrier."
- Analyzing: "I think you are reacting like this because of your personality type."
- Spiritualizing: "When one door closes, another always opens." Or "It's probably karma."

PRACTICE SUGGESTIONS

- Set an intention to bring more empathy into your life.
- Journal or discuss what comes up for you reading this article.
- For the next few weeks notice which of the Empathy Blocks is a common reaction within you. Be in a place of gentle inquiry. Notice your reaction as a source of information, without attaching "good/bad, right/wrong" thinking to your noticing. Try inviting the self-inquiry by asking gently: "I wonder why I tend to respond with (empathy block of your choice) when I am listening to someone's pain?"
- For a group practice: Divide the group into pairs.
Each person picks:
 - 1) a mild annoyance in your life
 - 2) one of the Blocks to Empathy that you want to use (see list above)
 - 3) for the *Empathy* response use your Feelings and Needs Cards or lists to fill in one of these frames:
Are you feeling __ (feeling word) __ because of the need of __ (need word) __?
or
Are you feeling __ (feeling word) __ and yearning for __ (need word) __?

The practice:

1. Person A shares their mild annoyance.
2. Person B responds with a Block to Empathy.
3. Take a brief pause as Person A notices what it feels like in their body to receive this message.
4. Then Person B responds with an Empathy response as outlined above.
5. Take a brief pause as Person B notices what it feels like in their body.
6. Then switch roles and repeat the steps.

With gratitude to Jane Conner and Dian Killan who inspired this exercise in their book
Connecting Across Differences

Empathy Buddy Guidelines

Having an Empathy Buddy or Empathy Group is a powerful way to strengthen our Empathy Battery. While it can be very helpful to choose someone who has attended an *NVC* Level 1, this is not essential. Making a time every week or every other week to exchange empathy listening and responding is the key. Usually the time is split between the people involved (I suggest two to four people). If someone has something really big to process the group might decide to give that person the whole time for that session, holding group awareness that each member's time will even out over subsequent sessions.

It is essential to remember that Empathy is holding PRESENCE with as close to 100% attention as possible. We can sometimes guide a friend to be our Empathy Buddy without *NVC* experience asking them to agree to the following:

- read over the Empathy Block list;
- during our Empathy time each of us will hold the intention to not respond using any of these blocks. (see Empathy Blocks list, next page)

An empathy session using the Feelings and Needs lists

This works well with two to four people. Each person will have a turn to be the speaker. Each person has a copy of the lists.

The speaker talks freely about any topic (or can remain silent and think a story). The listener(s) tune into the speaker in silence. The listener(s) will be aware that no matter what the speaker is saying, the listener does not believe or disbelieve the story. The listener is being present for the whole unbroken person who is inside the speaker. The listeners do not comment or ask questions. It can be helpful if the listeners write down any feelings named by the speaker.

When the speaker is finished or their allotted time is up, they name the feelings that are alive for them related to the story they just told (or thought about).

The listeners use the Needs list to find Needs that might be underneath the feelings named.

Using the following sentence they ask the speaker:

“Are you feeling _____, because of the Need of _____?”

Or

“Are you __ (feeling word) __, because you value/want __ (need word(s)) __?”

The listeners do not add any additional words - no explanations, no questions, just simply this basic sentence.

The speaker receives these questions without saying yes or no, just receiving the guesses with interest and curiosity. It can be helpful for the speaker to write down the Needs being guessed. This step is complete when the speaker doesn't want any more guesses, or the listeners have run out of Needs to guess, or the allotted time is up.

Next the speaker thanks their feelings for being there to point to Needs. Then the speaker chooses the Needs that most resonate for them and goes through each of them one by one, putting them in this sentence:

“I have the beautiful need of _____.”

Something that is powerful to experience is that this process works even when the speaker has thought the story or spoken in a language the listener doesn't understand. This makes the process doable even when the speaker is reluctant to share their story out loud.

This completes one round. Repeat the process with the next speaker.

For an empathy session using Feelings and Needs cards, after the first person finishes their speaking time, they lay down feelings cards that match their current inner experience. The listener(s) lay down needs cards that they are guessing might be the stimulus for the feelings. Use the same format as above for responding and completing each round.

Empathy Blockers

Advising: "I think you should . . . "

Educating: "This could turn into a positive experience if you just . . . "

One-Upping: "That's nothing, wait till you hear what happened to me."

Consoling: "It wasn't your fault; you did the best you could."

Sympathizing: "Oh you poor thing."

Story-telling: "That reminds me of something I heard on the news . . . "

Shutting down: "Cheer up. Don't feel so bad." "Come on, let's go (for an ice-cream) (to the gym)."

Questioning: "When did this begin?"

Correcting: "That's not how it happened."

Reassuring: "It will all be OK."

Denial of Feelings: "Don't worry. It's silly to worry."

Minimizing: "This isn't so important."

Diagnosing: "Your problem is you're a compulsive worrier."

Analyzing: "I think you are reacting like this because of your personality type."

Spiritualizing: "When one door closes, another always opens." Or "It's probably karma."

Emergency Self-Empathy

Over the last ten years my understanding and practice of empathy has expanded exponentially by studying with certified *NVC* trainer Sarah Peyton. [<https://sarahpeyton.com/>] When Sarah was becoming certified she wanted to understand how *NVC* could be so impactful. She began to study neurobiology. Now Sarah is a neuroscience educator for those of us who don't find great joy in reading original research.

Sarah has expanded from the core *NVC* empathy strategy of Feelings and Needs guesses. Under the name Resonant Language, Sarah has added an additional eight empathy strategies. To learn more about these strategies consider taking a Resonant Language 101 online course with Sarah. Or a course I call Accompanying Strong Emotions, given online periodically through the University of Maine Division of Life-long Learning.

In this article we will explore one of these empathy strategies, Acknowledgment Guesses, with a focus on emergency self-empathy.

Remember the Empathy Blockers?

- Advising/educating: "I think you should" "This could turn into a very positive experience for you if you just...."
- One-upping: "That's nothing - wait till you hear what's happened to me."
- Consoling/Reassuring: "It wasn't your fault; you did the best you could." or "It'll be OK."
- Story-telling to distract: "That reminds me of the time...."
- Sympathizing: "That's so terrible" or "Oh you poor thing!"
- Shutting down: "Cheer up. Don't feel so bad." "Come on let's go ... (meditate, walking, to the movies, have a drink)"
- Questioning: "When did this begin?"
- Correcting: "That's not how it happened."
- Denial of Feelings: "Don't worry. It's silly to worry."
- Minimizing: "This isn't so important."
- Diagnosing: "Your problem is you're a compulsive worrier."
- Spiritualizing: "When one door closes, another always opens." "It's probably karma."

Practice #1, to experience acknowledgement in your body

With a partner try this exercise:

Step 1

1. Decide who is Person A and who is Person B.
2. Person A completes the sentence: "I am irritated about"
3. Person B offers some version of reassurance (empathy blocker).
4. Person A checks to see how it feels in their body to receive this. Check your torso and/or your face. Share in one sentence with your partner what is happening in your body.

Step 2

1. Person A completes the sentence: "I am irritated about"
2. Person B responds: "___A's name___, of course you feel irritated."
3. Person A checks to see how it feels in their body to receive this. Check your torso and/or your face. Share in one sentence with your partner what is happening in your body.

SWITCH roles and go through both steps of the exercise.

Using a person's name and then the phrase, "of course you feel _____," is often very powerful empathy medicine.

Now let's explore this as a self-empathy experience. This next practice you will do individually.

Practice #2, using your own name in self-empathy

1. Think of a minor difficult experience.
2. What happens in your body?
3. If that sensation had a name, what emotion might it be?
4. Say: "__ (your own name) __ , of course you would feel __ (feeling word) __ . Are you wanting __ (need word) __?"
5. Notice your body. Has it changed?

To increase the benefit you can add a body awareness practice. Place your left hand over your heart. Then place your right hand over the left. Notice your heart beating. Stay with this awareness of your beating heart for 4 or 5 or 8 or 10 breaths, however long it seems appropriate. Do you notice any changes in your body?

Now take a few minutes to share with someone what you experienced.

NEEDS - THE HEART OF THE MATTER

The Intrinsic Energy Called Needs

In a Level 1 workshop, we explore the Nonviolent Communication concept of needs. The nature of needs is the gem of the *NVC* process developed by Marshall Rosenberg. *NVC* presents the concept that needs are universal and intrinsic, common to all of us regardless of age, gender, culture, religion, education, socioeconomic status or where we live. This awareness gives me a way to conceptualize the interconnectedness of humanity, and all of life.

Intrinsic means "belonging to the essential nature or constitution of a thing; situated in the body." (Webster's Collegiate Dictionary) When I focus on the intrinsic nature of needs I realize they cannot be counted, seen, touched, taken away or given. I have come to conceptualize them as a river of energy that flows through me and everyone else.

Since these rivers of life serving energy are universal, they flow through everyone. As a result, I have come to find the traditional *NVC* form of identifying needs as mine or yours does not fully express the unifying potential that *NVC* offers us.

When I follow a traditional *NVC* dialogue form, (Observation, Feeling, Need, Request: OFNR) there can still be a sense of separateness when I identify the needs as belonging to an individual. For instance: "When you didn't call at the time you said you would, I felt frustrated and sad because of **my** needs of connection and consideration. Are you willing to tell me what you are hearing me say?"

To me there is an implication that the needs of connection and consideration belong to me, and if that's true, they may not belong to you. So, wanting to follow the invitation of non-dualistic thinking inherent to *NVC*, it works better for me to rephrase the example by substituting the word "the" in place of "my" or "your."

For instance: "When you didn't call at the time you said you would, I felt frustrated and sad because of **the** needs of connection and consideration. Are you willing to tell me what you are hearing me say?"

On the surface this may seem like a very small change; but to my mind and body it creates an expansiveness that rehumanizes everyone.

I have also observed that when I find myself thinking about "my" or "your" need, I am not yet resting in the full beauty of the need, with a full experience of that need's intrinsic nature. I have come to understand that what benefits me in this case is empathy. Once I have done some self-empathy or had a session with an empathy buddy, I often find that substituting "the" in place of "my" or "your" flows easily within my thinking. Then I feel an expansiveness that brings more compassion and peace within me and more likelihood of connection with the other person.

PRACTICE SUGGESTIONS

For the next week, when you notice yourself thinking about needs as "my needs," try imagining that need also flowing in the other person. If you can't connect to that need within the other person, please consider arranging for empathy. When you can perceive this energy flowing in the other, try rephrasing, substituting "the" for "my." Notice if this change stimulates any difference within your body.

For the next week, when you notice yourself thinking about needs as belonging to another, i.e. "your needs," try connecting to where that need lives within yourself as well. If you can find that need within you, substitute "the" for the word "your." Notice if this change stimulates any difference within your body.

Marshall Rosenberg thought deeply about how to hold *NVC* both as a process for personal transformation and connection, AND as a process to enhance social change at the systemic level. He was a fan of Manfred Max-Neef, a Chilean economist who developed a taxonomy of human needs and a process by which communities can identify their "wealths" and "poverties" according to how these needs are cared for. Read more: <https://www.positivityguides.net/max-neef-model/> Discuss with your practice group how this approach would support a clearer understanding of your local community. Consider ways to bring this understanding to your circles of influence.

Moving Beyond Needs as Met or Unmet

In a Level 1 workshop, we explore the Nonviolent Communication concept of needs. The universal nature of needs is the gem of the *NVC* process developed by Marshall Rosenberg. *NVC* presents the model that needs are common to all of us regardless of age, gender, culture, religion, education, socio-economic status or where we live. This awareness gives me a way to conceptualize the inter-connectedness of humanity, and all of life.

I like to picture my needs as a symphony orchestra. There is an array of instruments, each representing one of my needs. All the instruments are on stage whether they are playing or not, just as my needs are always present inside me whether they are actively engaged in this moment, or not.

My needs are never in conflict with your needs, though our strategies for expressing our needs may conflict; just as the instruments in my internal orchestra are not in conflict with the instruments in your internal orchestra. Sometimes, though, it may take some translation to enjoy the harmony our needs produce.

In many cultures, the word "need" often has a connotation of weakness, unpleasant vulnerability, and desperation; acknowledging needs may even imply something is lacking within me.

In *NVC*, needs are understood as the vital energy that makes up our humanness, each human having the same set of universal needs. We come to see that our reactions to any event arise out of those needs, not the event itself. For example, sometimes when I call a friend and get their voice mail I feel sad and frustrated because I am wanting connection and empathy and prefer to get it from that person. Sometimes when I call that same friend and get their voice mail I feel relieved because I am wanting ease in conveying a message and don't want to take much time. The event is the same, calling a friend and getting their voice mail, but my reaction is different depending on what needs of mine stimulated my calling them.

Most books based in *NVC* further explain that feelings we enjoy arise from needs that are "met," and feelings we find unpleasant arise when our needs are "unmet."

As I traveled along my *NVC* journey, I found that thinking of needs as met or unmet did not assist me in creating the quality of connections I was longing for in my relationships. Many times when I followed a classical *NVC* dialogue form, (Observation, Feeling, Need, Request: OFNR) there was still an implication of wrong-doing. For instance:

"When you didn't call at the time you said you would, I felt frustrated and sad because my needs of connection and consideration were not met. Are you willing to tell me what comes up for you when you hear me say this?"

Though my intention was to use *NVC* to build connection with others, often they heard that I was blaming them and felt disconnected from me. Admittedly, I had the belief that my needs "should" be met.

From this place I was not fully appreciating needs as the living energy inside me that created my humanness. I was holding needs as something that could be met or unmet by another person or situation, which left me unempowered and frustrated. By adding a new step to my process - taking the time to connect to the living energy (the beauty) of a need before making a request - I have experienced a shift to an expansive fullness that others are more likely to be drawn to and that supports the connection I want.

Here is an example of a strategy that works for me to reach this expansive fullness.

1. Pick a need that seems to be calling for my attention.
2. Close my eyes and think of a time that need was fully present in my life
3. Think of where I was, what I could see, hear, smell and touch. Remember who was with me: people, animals, plants and all aspects of the setting.

4. Make a “movie” of those things within my mind. If I cannot think of a time when that need was fully present, I make one up.
5. I shift my attention to how my body is doing. I anchor the feelings in my body by paying attention to all the sensations. When I have a clear and tangible experience of the need, I stop thinking of the movie and just feel my body with the need alive in my sensations, in my emotions, and in my mind.
6. When I am in this space I have a sense of openness and expansiveness. I treasure having that need and naturally find myself wanting everyone else to be connected to that need inside of themselves as well.

From this place of fullness I can make my OFNR statement and be truly open to however the other person reacts. Because the need is already fully present within me, I am not desperately trying to get anyone else to meet it for me.

Now I can say: "Remembering that you didn't call at the time you said you would, I feel afraid, sad, and curious because I value connection, consideration and understanding for us both. Are you willing to tell me what comes up for you when you hear me say this?"

I have noticed a major change in my internal energy as a result. I am open to both my authenticity and the other person's. Instead of trying to find a nicer way to change someone's behavior I have found a way to deeply connect to myself. This builds an energy that opens my heart to the other, generating the quality of interconnection I've yearned for. I experience a calm centeredness inside of me, from which I can live life with more joy.

The term "Beauty of Needs" and this exercise first came to me from the NVC Training Institute in their seven day training "Living Energy Of Needs"; much appreciation to the trainers: Wes Taylor, Towe Widstrand, Susan Skye, and Robert Gonzales.

PRACTICE SUGGESTIONS to help grow your experience of the living energy of needs

- Keep regular appointments with your Empathy Buddy. Shifting the concept of needs met/unmet to needs as a living energy inside you is much easier when our empathy batteries are charged
- Use Feelings and Needs cards to clarify your inner journey. Pick a need from the deck and practice the exercise described above.
- Repeatedly practice the somatic exercise described above.
- Before you speak, check inside to see if you truly feel curious about the other person's situation. If not, invite yourself to practice the somatic exercise before engaging.

The Journey To Living Through Needs Compassionately and Assertively

Mary: You said you were going to leave your computer at home when we took our trip.

Fred: I changed my mind.

Mary: If you are playing games on your computer, my needs for intimacy won't be met. Don't bring your computer.

A reader requested an article on the "obnoxious stage" in learning how to express needs. I believe she was asking about a stage in many people's *NVC* development when we are so excited about coming into relationship with the needs within us that we project our strategies for nurturing those needs out into the world with a lot of demanding.

Before discovering *NVC*, I thought of needs in one of two ways: either from a consumer perspective, differentiating between needs and wants; or a "spiritual" perspective, something to be transcended to achieve happiness.

In our *NVC* Level 1 workshops we learn a different definition of the word need. *NVC* uses needs to describe living energies that are universal and intrinsic. Every human has the same set of needs, which live in us as energy that cannot be touched, counted, given, or taken away.

The essence of *NVC* - that all humans share the same needs - is the basis of our interconnectedness with other humans and all of life. Most of us have been acculturated away from awareness of this use of the word needs. When we learn *NVC*, we reunite with this awareness of needs as elements of our humanity, something to be honored and celebrated. Coming to realize we are "need-full" can stimulate self-connection and delight.

As Bonnie Fraser writes in her *NVC* study book, Connection: A Self-Care Approach to Conflict Management:

It seems to me that your choice is to adopt a social image and then try to make your behavior line up with it or to try to find your unique, individual self by knowing your needs and expressing that self with your behavior. Decide for yourself. Look again at the list of needs. Would it be a world you wanted to live in if everyone were trying to meet these needs and support others in meeting these needs? In learning to value our needs, we as individuals often go through three stages. Some have suggested societies go through the same stages. If so, what stage do you think we are in?

PASSIVE: "I have no needs and if I had some, they are not important."

AGGRESSIVE/Obnoxious: "It is very important that my needs are met, regardless of how that affects you."

ASSERTIVE/Mutual: "We both have needs and all of our needs are important."

The PASSIVE stage is the result of cultural conditioning. In it, I believe I am responsible for other people's feelings and often I focus on what I should do to keep everyone around me happy. In order to do this, my authentic feelings are suppressed. I often believe myself to be less worthy than others; so if I do have needs, they don't matter as much as others'. In this stage my statements might sound something like this: "I have so much energy and wanting to play. I'm going to turn on the radio to dance. What? You are tired and want to sleep? Oh, okay, never mind. I'll go in the other room and read quietly."

The AGGRESSIVE/Obnoxious stage can be an attempt at bringing *NVC* into my life. I realize I am not responsible for other's feelings, I have needs, and that these needs are important. It becomes clear that my communication habits from the passive stage keep me from living life fully. As I embrace this awareness, that I have needs essential to my full blooming as a human being, I often develop an urgency to get those needs met. Sometimes I use the *NVC* form to try and get other people to do things for me without consideration of them.

This stage may sound something like this: "I feel cold in this room, I have a need for ease and comfort. I need the furnace on, now."

Notice, there is no checking in with the other people to see if they have needs to be considered before choosing this strategy. And, if others don't go along with our idea, thoughts such as these may arise: "Those people are so inconsiderate! Can't they see I have a need and it's not getting met?"

The ASSERTIVE/Mutual stage is one in which I have come to accept responsibility for my own feelings, needs, intentions, and actions. I have both an awareness of needs and I have developed the skills to connect to the beauty of those needs before expressing them to others. I move away from thinking of needs as "mine" or "yours" and can fully embrace the intrinsic nature of needs. I appreciate that every choice I make impacts others and seek to develop relationships in which everyone's needs are considered with care.

This stage may sound something like this: "When I think about our trip together I feel happiness arising from the needs of connection, fun and intimacy. When I hear you might bring your computer I feel anxious and concerned because I believe it will interfere with our connection. I wonder what comes up for you when you hear me say that? I wonder if we can take a few minutes to talk about what needs you are trying to meet by bringing the computer. And we can talk about strategies to nourish all the needs."

Awareness of how I am holding needs is important to my development. As I learn and grow, I may relate to my needs differently in different relationships.

PRACTICE SUGGESTION

Try this exercise from Connection: A Self-Care Approach to Conflict Management (page 40) to bring awareness to your interactions.

How Well Do You Assert Your Needs?

Consider your primary relationships. How do you usually interact with this person – passively, aggressively, or assertively? (It is typical to have varied behavior with different people, even with the same person.) The first two rows have been filled in as examples.

List your most active relationships:	Stage ?	Give an example
my friend	passive	When she asks my opinion I always say what she wants
my son	aggressive	I ordered him to get off the phone because I wanted it.

It is important to hold a lot of compassion for ourselves wherever we are in our needs journey. Awareness will give me more choice in how I interact with others. To take more healthy responsibility in my relationships, I want to make use of my own internal "pause" button. Before I interact, I want to pause and consider which needs stage I am about to respond from. It is important to hold myself in kindness while considering. If I find that

Stage 1 or 2 is what is alive in me, my intention is to wait, take some extra breaths, take a walk, do some journaling, call a friend for empathy, or use other forms of self-connection before responding.

Author's gratitude: I want to express my appreciation to NVC certified trainers Lynd Morris, Gregg Kendrick and Bonnie Fraser, whose talents have contributed greatly to this article.

Judgments to Needs

Many of us have judgments about our judgments. Something like, “If I was a “good” person I wouldn’t have judgments.” Actually, when I notice my judging thoughts I can use an *NVC* exercise to uncover the Universal Human Needs underneath them. Finding the Needs helps me engage my *NVC* consciousness and is more likely to help me find a life-serving way forward. Here's the process as I use it.

Step One: Write the judgment without the back story. This is often a simple sentence.

“My neighbors are so selfish and inconsiderate.”

Step Two: Take time to remember the actual behaviors that led to creating that judgment. Record a clean observation about the behavior.

“My neighbors have not cut back the invasive plant species that are growing along our property line. I have spoken with them about it at least three times in the past year.”

Step Three: Contemplate the observation. Tune into your body and notice what sensations come up as you connect to the observation. If the sensations had names, what would they call themselves (using feelings words).

“I notice I feel frustrated, sad, angry, exhausted.”

Step Four: What Universal Human Needs are under these feelings? If you have a Needs list or Needs cards you can use them as a support to identifying the Needs.

“Support, consideration, shared reality”

If there are a whole gang of Needs, you might want to pick out the two to four that are the most important to you in this situation.

When I do this process, I notice my body relaxing. When I’m clear about the Needs under the judgment it gives me ways to engage in the situation that were blocked by the judgmental thought. I call this process Finding the Pearls In the Oyster. Here is a form for your ongoing practice.

Finding Pearls In Oysters: translating judgments into beautiful needs

Judgement	
Observation	
Feelings	
Needs	

FEELINGS - THE GUIDE INTO NEEDS

Connecting Feelings to Needs

"I never knew there was something good in me."

"Wow, it's a new idea to see that behind everything I do there are human needs!"

These are a few of the comments shared in the closing round of an *NVC* class at the Maine Coastal Regional Reentry Center. *NVC* has been a part of the class offerings since the Reentry Center started.

I have endeavored to design an introductory class that is relevant and engaging for the men who are moving through the Center. These are people who are nearing the end of a jail or prison sentence. They spend from six weeks to ten months at the Center engaged in a variety of learning and work opportunities. The idea is that they will return to their communities with more skills to contribute than when they left.

It is interesting to be teaching a process that is all about *choice*: choosing to focus on Feelings and Needs and choosing to hold authentic connection as a high priority; because they are *required* by the Center to participate. I think it is important to acknowledge this and to remind the participants that everything I ask of them is an opportunity for choice, and that I'm open to hearing "no."

One of the many things I have enjoyed about my weekly two hours at the Center is the invitation to bring *NVC* alive in new ways. One activity that came out of this work, and now is a basis for sharing *NVC* with any newcomer, is an activity I call "Sometime I Did Something Kind or Caring for Another."

I wanted to have a simple exercise through which we can all discover the relationship between feelings and needs, while at the same time not stimulate the pain of remembering unpleasant experiences. I think one of the challenges of learning *NVC* is that we often reserve it for working with unpleasant experiences. I imagined that it might be easier to touch the relationship of feelings to needs if we explored a pleasant memory. After all, if the feelings that I experience are needs speaking to me, then that is just as true for pleasant feelings as unpleasant ones.

I have so enjoyed the effectiveness of this activity that I now use it in most of my *NVC* introductions – perhaps you would want to try it yourself, whether you are new to *NVC* or have been practicing a long time. (You may want to use Feelings and Needs Cards to help you with this exercise.)

Connecting Feelings to Universal Human NEEDS: A time I did something nice for another person

Observation:

(What I did: the facts) _____

Thinking about that now,

I feel . . . (Make a list of feelings)	because of the needs of . . . (Put the corresponding need across from each feeling)

This is an example of chair (1,2,3 or 4) thinking. (Go to p. for an explanation of the 4 Four Chairs, representing four possible ways in which we can receive the messages life delivers.)

From the other person's point of view:

Observation: same as above

How do I guess the other person might have felt, coming from what needs?

Their possible feelings . . . (Make a list of feelings)	because of the needs of . . . (Put the corresponding need across from each feeling)

This is an example of chair (1,2,3 or 4) thinking.
What learning did I get from doing this exercise?

PRACTICE SUGGESTIONS

Twice a week for the next four weeks express a gratitude to yourself by tracking something nice you do for someone else and connect your feelings and needs to that event.

Twice a week for the next four weeks express your appreciation to someone who has done something nice for you – let them know how you feel and what needs were nourished in you. Be aware of the array of people who do nice things for you, perhaps without your noticing: the person who delivers your mail; the cashier at the store; or clerk at the post office; a neighbor who smiles and waves as you drive by. Start to notice . . . what do you discover?

Feelings: The Golden Road

In our first Nonviolent Communication workshop we are encouraged to embrace our feelings as valuable information. Whether the feelings I am experiencing are pleasant or unpleasant, they are the "road" pointing me to the universal needs that are alive within me.

To use my feelings as the roadway to my treasured needs, I want to be careful of two detours that take me down the blame and judgment journey instead of the self-connecting journey of needs-based consciousness.



One detour is confusing thoughts and feelings. Feelings are an energy that exists in my body. Sometimes I have names for my feelings – anger, fatigue, hopelessness, frustration, joy, happiness, delight, playfulness; other times I experience the energy that is present as a sensation. I might feel the energy of constriction somewhere, a tightening of muscles, a sensation of bubbles in my chest, or a vague sensation in my leg reminiscent of smoke.

Learning to quiet the mind and open awareness to this moment-to-moment energy flow can be challenging for many of us, who may have experienced in childhood that expressing feelings could generate unpleasant reactions. We were affected not only by our family but by a culture with gender and social norms about feelings as well.

We don't want to be judged as right/wrong or good/bad. One way we try to protect ourselves from judgment is by labeling our thoughts as feelings. This habit may have arisen to protect us from judgments. Now this pattern inhibits our ability to use feelings as sign posts directing us to find what needs are expressing themselves.

I have found that one useful practice for distinguishing thoughts from feelings is to self-monitor my sentence patterns with an awareness question:

Am I using any of the following sentence frames?

- I feel that . . .
- I feel as if . . .
- I feel you (I, she, he, they) . . .
- I feel like . . .
-

If any of these phrases is used to precede what we hope is a feeling word, it is unlikely that an actual feeling word will follow. Instead, using these sentence patterns disguises thoughts as feelings.

If I can use the word "think" instead of the word "feel" in any sentence and it still makes sense, then I am confident I'm expressing a thought. I make it a habit to restate my sentence to contribute to clarity for myself and others.

- I think that . . .
- I believe that . . .
- I think you (I, she, he, they) . . .

Please remember that this practice is for you only. Please refrain from correcting anyone else's speech.



The second detour that keeps me from authentically experiencing my feelings is taken when I use words that assign judgments of myself or someone else and then call the judgment a feeling. This group of judging words is sometimes called "faux feelings."

Examples of Faux Feelings

- accepted/rejected
- appreciated/unappreciated
- attacked
- betrayed
- bullied
- criticized
- disliked
- distrusted/trusted
- harassed
- ignored
- intimidated
- left out
- manipulated
- misunderstood
- neglected
- overpowered
- pressured
- put down
- stupid
- tricked
- unwanted

These are important labels because they signal that I am having a strong and unpleasant reaction. Recognizing this is one step toward my connection to an experiential feeling. To promote needs-based consciousness, I want to uncover the vulnerable experience underneath these judgments. I do this most effectively by inviting myself to explore this question:

"Peggy, when you tell yourself that you are (insert faux feeling word), how do you feel?"

I ask this question of myself with a gentle, kind inquiring mind. If I ask myself with a stern "teacher" attitude, my inner experience will usually hide even deeper and become less available to me.

For example, let's imagine I find myself thinking, "In this friendship I feel taken for granted."

My internal monitor alerts me I am using a judgment and calling it a feeling. So I invite myself to sit quietly. I take a few quiet breaths to calm myself. I make an intention to be open to whatever awareness comes out of my inquiry.

Then I ask myself with a kind loving tone, "Peggy, when you tell yourself you are taken for granted, how do you feel?"

My attention is focused on my body. I scan for sensations. When I become aware of whatever is happening (one sensation or several) I continue to sit quietly for a few moments, letting the sensations happen. I am not trying to soothe the sensation; I want to experience it fully. Then I ask the sensation, "If you had words, what would you call yourself?" I might answer myself, "sad and frightened."

Sometimes I find I substitute a different faux feeling word for the original one. In this example, I might tell myself, "I am feeling ignored." When that happens, I keep accompanying myself by asking the same question with the new word in it. I keep asking until I find the experiential feeling underneath.

Being present to our authentic feelings is what Marshall Rosenberg calls sweet pain. While it is painful to touch sadness and fear within me, I also experience a release because I am experiencing myself authentically without judgment. Finding the authentic feeling is the key to reading the roadmap to my needs.

PRACTICE SUGGESTIONS

1. Take several weeks to monitor yourself for these sentence frames. When you find yourself thinking or saying any of these, rephrase the sentence with the word "think" in place of the word "feel."

- "I feel that . ."
- "I feel like . ."
- "I feel you/I/she/he/they . ."

If you find yourself using one of the faux feeling words in your thoughts or speech, commit to spending a few minutes of self-exploration time. Use the exercise outlined above to connect to the experiential feeling(s) alive in you at the moment. Use the list of faux feelings to practice translating faux feeling words into experiential feeling words.

2. Use the feelings and needs cards several times a week to help connect feelings to needs from a variety of daily experiences.

"That Makes Me Feel ____"

When we think of human interaction on a continuum, we find peace/co-operation on one end and violence/destruction on the other. We are all on this continuum, moment by moment, making choices that move us toward one end or the other.

NVC is a process that can act as a compass, helping us turn toward the direction of peace and co-operation.

When I feel upset by something, the first step I take toward peace is to recognize that I feel upset – often because my mind is thinking there is a problem and someone is to blame. Our culture has encouraged us to find fault – giving us the choice of blaming others or ourselves for our unpleasant feelings and thoughts.

Today I invite you to consider this phrase: "That makes me feel ____" (Substitute: "You make me feel ____", he, she, or they make me feel ____.) Take time to notice over the next week how many times you hear this phrase – in conversation, on the radio, on the TV, in movies and in your own mind.

Our culture is constantly reinforcing a belief that the cause of emotions lies outside of us, in what others do or say. This leaves us in the victim position, and who wants that?

To reclaim our inner sovereignty, we can use *NVC*. When I notice my mind focused on the phrase, "That makes me feel ____," I can remember the *NVC* principle that my feelings arise from needs living in me, the energy that makes me human.

Remember, the first step I take toward peace is awareness. I ask myself if I am thinking "That makes me feel ____" and, as soon as I notice this, I get to choose what happens next. Do I want to continue assigning blame, thereby moving along the continuum toward violence or do I want to reorient myself toward peace and co-operation?

Using an *NVC* lens, "That makes me feel ____" means not only am I assigning responsibility for my inner state to something outside myself, parts of me are calling out for empathy. As soon as I recognize this, I can use the *NVC* process of clearly identifying an observation and then simply claiming my feelings so I can connect them to the needs flowing in me. By following this process, I reclaim my inner sovereignty.

So here's a practice strategy: When I find myself thinking "That makes me feel ____" Simply restate: "I feel ____ arising from the needs of ____."

One BIG note of caution. Please remember, *NVC* is about our internal work. Our judging minds will often want to evaluate others' speech using an *NVC* lens. Notice when you hear someone else say "That makes me feel ____" and you judge and try to correct them. Please remember this person is calling out for empathy. The most effective way to hold empathy is in presence, listening for the feelings and needs the other person is trying to express.

Once, when I was on a call-in radio show, discussing *NVC*, a caller remarked that she hated *NVC*. She went on to explain there was a very painful situation in her family, with one person labeling and blaming other family members in ways that stimulated a lot of pain. At one point the family tried an "intervention", pointing out to the person all the ways he "made the other family members feel badly." They were trying to move the family toward peace and co-operation. He responded that he had learned through *NVC* that he couldn't make them feel anything. It appears he was using this piece of *NVC* wisdom as reasoning to not hear the feelings and needs that his family members were trying to express.

I am guessing that he was yearning for a lot of empathy during this family gathering. I wonder if he was hearing and believing a lot of blame and part of him reacted defensively. When this happens we can use the *NVC* model to respond authentically and vulnerably.

It might sound something like this:

"When I hear you say my words have created a lot of pain in you (Observation), I feel shocked and scared (Feelings) because I value family, love, and support (Needs). I realize there is a story running in my head that I am a mean person and that you don't love me. A part of me is scared that you believe that too (deepening the vulnerable honest expression). I wonder what comes up for you when you hear this? (Connecting Request)

In such a heated situation, it is likely that more than one *NVC* expression will be helpful in creating connecting dialogue. Every attempt will help to reorient us (and possibly the situation) toward the peace and co-operation end of the continuum.

So please, hear the phrase "That makes me feel ____" as a calling out for connection to needs. If we each start with ourselves we will be more likely to be able to offer this gift to others.

PRACTICE SUGGESTIONS

1. Journal about a time you said to someone, "When you _____, you made me feel _____."

How might you have responded without the phrasing, "you made me"?

See if you can come up with three to five examples from your life.

2. Remember a time someone said to you, "You made me feel _____."

How does it feel in your body to remember this?

Notice if you want to defend yourself by educating them or attacking back.

Now think of how you might have responded from Chair 4 (empathy for them, i.e. "Are you __ (feeling word) __ and wanting __ (need_word) __)?

3. If you are in a practice group consider sharing with each other and let people know if you are open to hearing other suggestions to expand your future possibilities.

OBSERVATIONS - CLARITY

Creating Common Ground

"Don't confuse me with the facts!" This was a favorite saying of someone I worked with many years ago. His somewhat joking approach to details runs counter to what we practice in Nonviolent Communication (*NVC*). What we experience when following the model is that the facts can be the beginning of the road to connection.

Actually, we find that carefully discerning facts and separating them from opinions or evaluations is a valuable first step in developing compassionate consciousness. This discernment has two invaluable consequences: (1) freeing us from the suffering caused by our own interpretations about what happened and (2) opening a conversation with clarity and mutual trust.

The first life-affirming consequence of making observations is getting clear about what actually happened and letting go of our interpretations or stories arising from what happened. This practice can sometimes end the suffering arising from an event.

Here is an example from one of my workshops. One participant, let's call him Bob, chose as the focus of his weekend's work framing a conversation with a friend "who doesn't like me anymore." Several times Bob talked with a deep sense of sadness and bewilderment about this change in his friend's attitude.

Bob shared that at a reception following an art opening (at which Bob had been a featured artist), his friend didn't speak to him. From this event Bob had created in his mind a story about losing this very treasured friendship. Bob told himself that his friend had not enjoyed his artwork; he told himself that his friend was angry at him about something; he told himself that his friend didn't want to be his friend any longer. At the workshop Bob learned how to discern an observation. When we make an observation, we consider ONLY what a camcorder with sound capability could capture – recordable facts.

We avoid words that have a variety of shades of meaning (bully, weird, passive-aggressive, yelling, whispering, angry, shy, etc). Instead, we describe the behavior that is leading us to use "shortcut" words that different people might interpret differently. It is also important to avoid words that denote continuous, unchanging behavior (always, never, repeatedly, etc.)

After a variety of exercises to practice the four components of an *NVC* conversation, Bob began to compose a dialogue he wanted to have with his friend. He began with the observation. After several minutes Bob became quite excited. When I asked him what was up, he replied with a huge smile on his face. "It's simple. The observation has changed everything."

Bob went on to explain that he found the observation amidst all his mind stories about his friend, and could clearly state to himself: "At the reception my friend didn't speak to me."

Once the observation was clear to Bob, he could see his suffering had arisen from all the stories he created around his friend not speaking. "It's possible," Bob continued, "that he was just having a bad time at the moment. It might have had nothing to do with me."

With that inner freedom, Bob was ready to check in with his friend with a sense of ease. Getting to the observation was key to Bob's relief from inner suffering and opened up the inner space to make outer connection with this friend.

The second life-affirming consequence of making observations is that, because they are free of opinions and evaluations, observations can help begin conversations in a way that allows others to keep their protective shields down, thereby making it more likely that connecting conversations will follow.

When I want to talk with someone about something that could be "sticky," I want to be clear and at the same time focus the conversation in a way that encourages the hearer to stay open to communicating with me. When the observation is clear, it is likely that the listener will agree that it is accurate. This gets the conversation started with some level of agreement.

Remember, our opinions and evaluations are important information for *ourselves*. They give us valuable information about what we value and where we are in our nonviolent consciousness journey. However, they are not likely to contribute to mutual connection when expressed to the other person. In the Practice activity below you will find a process to shift evaluations into observations.

When we first encounter the Observation step in learning *NVC*, the power of observations is often underestimated. Taking time to hone our observation skills is an important part of our development.

PRACTICE SUGGESTION: Getting Juice from My Opinions and Evaluations

Taken from: "Delving Deeper: Evaluations and Observations," in Connection: A Self-Care Approach To Conflict Management, by Bonnie Fraser, used with permission

Stretch toward accepting all parts of your thinking.

Sit and listen to yourself, without judging or trying to change your thinking. This will sometimes include thoughts that you might be embarrassed to speak in public, such as sexist or racist comments, prejudiced insults, self-doubts, and other ranting and raving. Thank yourself on hearing this hard-to-hear stuff. Judging ourselves for having any of these thoughts will shut down and freeze the process. The more accepting you are of your many inner voices, the more accurately you will hear your thoughts. Learning to see yourself with honesty and with compassionate eyes is a solid start on your journey toward more accuracy in your observations, and more compassion for both yourself and others. This is a paradox. We are trained to *push* ourselves and others to change, but this is a fairly ineffective way of getting lasting change to occur.

Insert the words "I am telling myself" before every evaluation.

This will loosen your assumptions that the content of your evaluations is true.

"I always mess up." - - > "I am telling myself that I always mess up."

"That person is a total dip." - - > "I am telling myself that that person is a total dip."

"That supervisor is unfair." - - > "I am telling myself that supervisor is unfair."

"She's a rock star!" - - > "I'm telling myself she's a rock star."

After you have gotten a clear hold on any evaluations you are thinking, change them to observations.

Don't forget to do this step, but don't rush into it as your first step if you want to improve your ability to spontaneously make observations more often.

Evaluation: "I always mess up." Observation: "I ordered chocolate cake instead of lemon cake last night."

Evaluation: "That person is a total dip." Observation: "He forgot to tell Sandy the time change for the committee meeting."

Evaluation: "That supervisor is unfair." Observation: "That supervisor changed my days for next week without talking to me about it first."

Evaluation: "She's a rock star!" Observation: "She handled three customer complaints before going to lunch."
Or "She cooked a meal for ten unexpected guests and seemed relaxed and happy while we were eating."

Using the above process:

Record four of your own evaluative thoughts.

Rewrite the original evaluations with the words "I am telling myself" in front of each.

Describe the triggering event as an observation, without any evaluations.

REQUESTS - CONNECTION AND ACTION

Exploring the Depth of Requests

One summer I came to see a parallel between an *NVC* dialogue and my gardening. The Observation is when I map out where the various plants will grow; noticing Feelings is like preparing the garden's soil. Exploring Needs is doing the work of planting. Making Connecting Requests is the caring for each plant (weeding/ debugging/ watering/ nourishing). Action Requests are how I harvest my garden of communication.

Connecting Requests - what are they? Why are they important?

The purpose of the Connecting Request is to make sure the person listening to me heard my words as an expression of myself and not as a judgment of them; and that we feel connected to each other before I ask for a specific, doable Action Request. A Connecting Request is a strategy to find out if I have been understood in a way that I want.

They may sound something like:

- Would you tell me what you heard me say?
- Would you tell me how you're feeling hearing this?
- What emotions are coming up in you?
- I want to be sure I am expressing myself clearly, would you tell me what you heard me say?
- I'm really curious to know what's happening in you. Are you willing to share?
- or simply, What's up for you hearing this?

I use Connecting Requests after stating my Observation, Feeling, and Need, though not necessarily in this order; sometimes I put a Connecting Request early in the flow of dialogue if I am concerned the other person may be feeling disconnected from me in any way or if I realize I feel disconnected from them. I find that the most direct and simply worded Connecting Requests work best for me.

This practice can work just as well within emails:

- Are you willing to tell me what you are understanding after reading this?
- Are you willing to tell me what comes up for you when you read this?

Personally, I enjoy beginning most requests with "Are you willing to ___?"

This wording helps communicate that I want the other person to grant my request only from an internal place of choice and autonomy. My experience is that when my listeners understand that I care about their internal experience within a conversation, they are more open to me and I enjoy our connection.

So, even if what they answer does not resonate with my understanding of what I have said, my next statement will always be an expression of gratitude that they were willing to share. "Thank you for telling me," doesn't express agreement with their words; it does express my appreciation for their willingness to engage.

Making a Connecting Request in context might sound something like this:

Me: Three days ago, I remember you saying you would call back in an hour and I am just now hearing from you. Thinking about that now, I feel curious because of the needs of understanding and connection. Are you willing to tell me what you are hearing me say?

Friend: You think I'm a jerk!

Me: Thank you for telling me what you think I'm trying to say. I was hoping to communicate a different message. Would you be willing to let me try again?

Then I wait to see what my friend says.

If my friend says, "No, I don't want to talk more about this." I want to honor that authenticity. If hearing "No" stimulates some pain for me, I will take time to draw on my empathy skills to be with myself in a caring and accepting way. If my friend says, "Yes, I am willing," I get to try to express myself again. I might decide that an empathetic guess could serve our connection more at this point than another honest expression.

For example, "Three days ago, I remember you saying you would call back in an hour and I am just now hearing from you. I wonder if you are feeling overwhelmed and exhausted because of your efforts to contribute to the project? (Connecting Request) Am I understanding what's going on for you? Is there anything else you would like me to hear?"

Breathing into any tension I am experiencing during this conversation and holding firmly to my *intention to connect* will help guide me to whatever words will keep the flow of authentic communication moving toward connection.

The Connecting Request is a tool to help me gauge whether we are communicating from heart to heart. It is a key piece that separates an *NVC* conversation from other types of dialogue. If I ask for an action without first ensuring our connection, there is a possibility my request either will be turned down or will be filled from a place of resentment, and sooner or later I will pay in a way I won't enjoy.

Remembering to make Connecting Requests takes a willingness to slow down. For me, any conversation worth having is worth taking time with. When we make the effort to slow down and ensure we are heart connected in the midst of a conversation, it is more likely the other person will say "yes" to the action request that usually follows, or at least be willing to explain why they are choosing to say "no." And the explanation can create a lot of heartfelt connection.

PRACTICE SUGGESTION

For one week, invite yourself to S L O W down during one conversation a day. During that conversation add one Connecting Request. With a lot of gentleness, observe your inner reactions to making a Connecting Request.

As you think about making the request, are you calm or are you tense, nervous or agitated in any way? Just notice. It is not that one way is better or worse than the other.

Also notice any body sensations while you are making the request and after making the request. By gently noticing my body sensations while working with requests in my own *NVC* journey, I discovered a long held core belief about making requests; this awareness was vital to my growth.

Write down what you observe during that week. At the end of the week, reflect on what you wrote. What did you notice? Are you willing to renew this practice for another week? Do you have questions, celebrations, concerns, wonderings or comments about which you would enjoy support? If so, please share them with your practice group.

Is This A Request or A Demand?

The Adventure is to value your own needs enough to let others know what would enrich your life and to value the integrity, free will, and equality of others enough to make a request and not a demand.

- Bonnie Fraser, Connection: A Self-Care Approach to Conflict Management, p.52, used with permission

I used to think that if I asked for something with "please" or "I would really appreciate" or even "Are you willing" attached to it, then it was a request. Through working with *NVC* I came to realize that it's not how "nicely" I ask, but how I react if I hear a "No" that distinguishes a request from a demand.

We have been acculturated to think that asking with a soft and inviting voice is an important element of a request. Many of us can make demands with the sweetest voice and softest of facial expressions.

How I monitor if I am making a request or a demand is to inquire inside myself – "How will I handle hearing a 'No' to my request?" Will I hold curiosity to what is motivating you to say "No"? Or will I have a reaction that will promote disconnection or other forms of punishment?

Marshall Rosenberg (creator of *NVC*) points out that if someone complies with our request out of shame, fear, guilt, obligation or duty, then sooner or later we will pay. And the joy of *NVC* is asking for what we want with an energy of freedom. This freedom is based on knowing that I only want the other person to say yes from a place of freedom to say no. That I hold within me the response-ability to handle their choice no matter what it is.

I find it very helpful to take time to ask myself (before voicing my request), "If I receive a 'no' to my request, how will I react?" I find that if I take time to connect to the fullness/beauty of the needs involved before making my request I am more likely to be open to hearing a "no" with curiosity. If I find that my authentic reaction will probably be blame and disconnection, then I like to get more empathy before speaking, or at least say clearly that I am making a demand.

In my journey toward incorporating requests, there was about a year during which I found myself saying the word "request," but checking in with myself found that I would likely be triggered by hearing a "no." I made it my practice to restate what I was saying with something like, "I know I just said this is a request, but if you respond with a no I am likely to be upset, so let me just clarify that I am aware that this is actually a demand. And I'll do my best to handle a 'no' in a way that honors my true intentions"; remembering that the true intention of an *NVC* dialogue is connection.

Doing this re-wording often brought humor to myself. It helped me shake up thoughts that were blocking my openness to honoring myself and the other person. It helped me remember that I was practicing freedom. Freedom from my old belief systems and freedom for the other to say "yes" or "no" in service to the needs that were resonating within them at that moment.

When we make a request, and receive a "no" in response, have we created the inner balance to remember that every "no" is a "yes" to something else, within the other person? When my attention is on connection, then I want to know what the other person is saying "yes" to.

At one workshop, a man with a teenage son expressed puzzlement about this concept. The man wanted to understand how his son could be saying "yes" when his responses were so often "no."

Three days later I received an email – "*NVC* is a miracle!" He explained that he had wanted help moving a heavy piece of furniture. He asked his 14 year old son to help. His son replied, "No." Usually an argument would arise between them. This time the man remembered the *NVC* workshop, and he took a moment to entertain that his

son was saying "yes" to something. The father decided to be curious. Instead of what he would usually say, he responded, "I wonder why you said no; will you tell me?"

His son answered that he was late for a get-together with his friends, but that he would help move the furniture on Friday. The father was so excited. Instead of the same old disconnecting dialogue that he often experienced with his son, he asked for what would contribute to his life, and he received a response that he didn't care for, he was able to experience curiosity and express that to his son, and he received information that contributed to his experiencing connection with his son.

As in all aspects of *NVC* it is our intention or attitude that holds the key. A request is based on the attitude of freedom for everyone involved. Blocks to that sense of freedom mean one important thing: more empathy is being called for.

PRACTICE SUGGESTION

Make the intention that when you say "no" to someone in the next week, you will express what needs within you are leading you to say no. You will be practicing connecting a "No" (your own) with the underlying "Yes." When you are able to connect to your own yes beneath the no, you will have more skill in holding curiosity for the yes beneath other people's no.

When you hear a "no" to your request, try asking for more information with the energy of open curiosity. "Are you willing to tell me why you are saying no to what I asked?" Watch your inner reaction with loving compassion to what the other person says. If it is upsetting, make a request of yourself for an empathy session with someone else to nourish the needs that are stimulated within you.

Making Requests: Harvesting the Fruit of Nonviolent Communication

I wonder if you grew up with the same myth that I did: If he/she only loved me enough they would know what I want. If I have to ask that means they don't love me.

When I think back on this belief now, I experience a tender pain, and the thought, "How silly to think others 'knew' what I wanted when I did not consciously know myself." I think this was a reflection of my cultural conditioning to seek approval, acceptance and love from outside myself.

Layer that with my family belief that putting someone in the position to say "no" was not appropriate. So, somewhere during my childhood I learned an unspoken family rule, "Do not ask for something unless you know the other person will say 'yes'."

No wonder I had such resistance (and sometimes still do) to making requests. And yet in my years of working with *NVC*, I have found requests to be amazingly powerful, and that liberating myself enough from core beliefs to make requests has been life transforming.

Remember to set the stage for an effective Action Request by preceding it with the other steps of an *NVC* dialogue. Having made an Observation, expressed Feelings, connected those feelings to the Needs generating them, AND made Connecting Requests along the way so that I feel connected to the listener and they seem connected to me; now is the time for an Action Request.

There are several criteria that will increase the likelihood that the other person will say yes to a request:

Word it in the positive

Be specific and make it doable

Make it measureable

Word it in the positive means instead of asking people to stop doing something, state what you want them to do.

Be specific and make it doable takes some time for self-reflection and careful consideration. Be sure that what you are requesting is within the capability of the person. You can ask a two year old to wash the dishes, but you may not have many unbroken dishes when they are done. You can ask your sweetie for a new car, but is that doable with their financial resources?

Being specific can take a lot of practice. Instead of asking for general wishes such as

Please offer me more consideration.

Please support me more.

Show me you love me.

Take time to ask for specific things that would demonstrate these wishes:

Are you willing to listen to me talk for ten minutes and then tell me one feeling and need you heard?

Are you willing to do the food shopping tomorrow?

Are you willing to kiss me good night this evening?

Are you willing to massage my feet for ten minutes today? If yes, when?

Making it measureable helps create clarity for everyone. I find it very helpful to put a time marker on requests so that everyone involved has clarity about the expectation. If I make a request, "Are you willing to call me?" and I don't say by when, a lot of confusion can arise. I might have a reaction if within three days I receive no call. And yet, when I speak with the person they say they had intended to call once their current research project was completed.

Consider these three examples of Action Requests. Check to see which one meets the three criteria: positive, specific and do-able, measureable.

"Are you willing to stop procrastinating?"

"Are you willing to be more effective?"

"Are you willing to have that report completed and to me by noon on Thursday?"

These three criteria help us craft an Action Request that is more likely to be received and fulfilled from the energy of connection. However, the real test of whether it is a request or a demand lies more in how we react internally if the other person says no.

It is vital to remember to make Action Requests of ourselves. It is just as important to use the three criteria for internal Action Requests. I have found that as I get more skilled at making Action Requests of myself, making them of others becomes much easier.

PRACTICE SUGGESTIONS

- For a week, at least once a day, take time to consider the three criteria discussed here when composing a request.
-
- Work with an *NVC* buddy or practice group on requests. Each person shares a request they are considering making and gets feedback about how the request expresses the three criteria.
-
- For one week, invite yourself each day to practice making a self directed Action Request following the three criteria.

DEEPENING - PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Go for the Gold in Conflict: Occupy The No-Fault Zone®

by Sura Hart, used with permission

Most people are afraid of conflict, dissatisfied with the way they handle conflict, and anxious even thinking about it.

The fact is that most of us don't know what to do with conflict. Past experiences have led us to believe that conflict is dangerous, and that engaging with it will make things worse. With this belief, it makes sense to try to avoid conflict, sweep it under the rug, change the subject. However, trying to avoid conflict does not make it go away. Most often, feelings intensify, resentments build and the same or bigger conflict resurfaces.

The good news is that we can change the way we think about and work with conflict so that it informs instead of inflames. We can use the principles of *NVC* and "go for the gold" by discovering the life-serving needs at the core of every conflict. In the process, we can forge stronger bonds of trust and understanding in our families and in all our relations.

If you don't like how you have handled conflict in the past, becoming aware of your habitual responses is a place to begin the change.

Change your game: from the Blame Game to The No-Fault Game

One habitual response to conflict that predictably inflames and perpetuates conflict is finding fault and blaming.

When someone says to you, "It's your fault," how do you feel? Do you want to move towards that person? Or do you tend to defend, attack or run away?

How do you feel when you're the one blaming others? Do your jaws clench, stomach tighten? Next time you hear yourself blaming someone, notice how your body reacts. Your body will tell you what game you're playing.

You can shift from blaming by noticing that it is happening and taking a break from what's going on in your head. Take some deep breaths, letting your jaw, stomach, shoulders relax.

Then, you can try switching your focus from fault-finding and blaming, to looking through a no-fault lens, to see the life energy within the conflict.

A no-fault lens is supported by the Nonviolent Communication® premise that all behavior is motivated by vital human needs. Needs that are frequently present in conflict are: understanding, respect, safety, trust, consideration, support, autonomy, and play. Looking through the no-fault lens, you can see more clearly what is most important to you and to others.

What does this look like?

When I'm frustrated finding myself doing the housework alone, I can make a choice to play the blame game: Blame the others, as "lazy" or "inconsiderate" when they are doing something other than helping around the house. See how that feels, and where it leads.

Or can I choose to play the No-Fault Game? Notice any judgments, breathe, and connect with the Needs stirring in me: help, support, companionship. Then, I can guess the needs they might be meeting: maybe it's play, autonomy, or understanding my needs?

When I look through the no-fault lens, I feel care and compassion for myself and for others. I also often have new interest in finding solutions that work for everyone.

These five practices will help you create an internal No-Fault Zone®:

1. Notice your habitual reactions when a conflict shows up. Notice blame and notice judgments, without judging yourself for having these habits.
2. Take a breath, and refrain from the old habit. Get curious: I want to see what's important to each of us.
3. Remind yourself that you and the other person have important needs right now.
4. Look through the no-fault lens to see the Needs. Ask yourself, "What is important to me about this?" And ask yourself, "What could their needs be?" Then make a guess.
5. Ask yourself the problem-solving question: "How can we work together to meet needs for everyone?" Even if you don't yet see a great solution, this question will keep your heart open to everyone's concerns and will guide you toward win-win outcomes.

Here is how these practices can apply to the example of finding yourself cleaning the house while other family members are relaxing.

1. Notice any judgments, such as: "They're so inconsiderate. They don't help with anything around the house."
2. Take a breath and affirm: I want to see what's important to each of us.
3. Look through the no-fault lens: Focus on needs rather than fault.
4. Get curious: What are the needs in this situation? My needs: support, clarity, time to relax. Their needs: Maybe they want understanding about why this is so important to me. Maybe they want to be seen "without fault." Check the needs out with the other person to see what's important to them?
5. Ask the problem-solving question: How can we work together to meet needs for everyone?

If you take up these practices, I predict they will be game-changing for you, and will lead you to the gold at the core of conflict. They will also strengthen your capacity to listen, understand and find creative win-win solutions.

For added fun and support in playing the No-Fault Game, check out The No-Fault Zone® Game, a colorful board game designed to guide players through conversations and conflicts to the goal of connection and understanding.

Sura Hart is a certified trainer with the international Center for Nonviolent Communication, co-author of 3 NVC based books: Respectful Parents – Respectful Kids; The Compassionate Classroom; and The No-Fault Classroom. Sura is also co-director of The No-Fault Zone®. This article is used with permission.

PRACTICE SUGGESTIONS

1. Bring the No-Fault Zone® Game Board into your couple-ship, family, school or community group.
2. During the next month take a few minutes near the end of your day to reflect on any conflicts that happened. Record in a sentence or two what the conflict was. More important, reflect and record your inner attitude about conflict. Invite yourself to be curious about your inner beliefs about conflict. Do you have inner fears, opinions, or judgments about conflict itself?
3. Coming to know our internal belief structure can help us shift and grow, coming to experience that conflict can truly be an experience that can help me know myself and the other person more deeply.

Honesty

Honesty is good, right? I want others to be honest with me and I want to express honestly with others. I think.

As we learn *NVC*, we find "honesty" on the list of universal human needs. But we may have experiences from our past when being honest brought pain and disconnection. It can be confusing: how can "honesty" be a need and yet troublesome?

There is a key distinction in *NVC* between honesty that expresses our thoughts and judgments (judgmental/jackal honesty) and honesty that expresses our inner vulnerability (*NVC*/giraffe honesty).

In our day-to-day lives, when we refer to honesty we are usually talking about our judgments. Our honesty is usually about trying to change someone or a situation, thinking things are right or wrong, and wanting to mold things to our liking. This may sound like:

"What a kind person you are."

or

"Good girl/boy." (expressing a praising judgment so the person will keep behaving in a way we want)

or

"Once again you didn't do the dishes like you said you would, it goes to show you don't respect or care about me." (critical expression of opinions)

This type of expression rarely leads to connection.

As we learn to express ourselves through *Nonviolent Communication*, we learn to share what is authentically going on within us – that is, a form of honest expression that can lead to connection.

The first step is to slow down and discover what emotional reactions we are having in the moment; we are honest with ourselves about our momentary inner state. I like to call this the inner weather report. By referring to the emotional state within me as a "weather front" it reminds me that my inner states are constantly changing just as the weather outside is constantly changing. As we say here in Maine, "If you don't like the weather, just wait a few minutes."

If you are like me, you learned long ago that some feelings were not OK. Taking on the practice of *NVC* is an inner invitation to reconnect with long suppressed emotions. Having compassion with yourself, inviting yourself to open up awareness of your inner weather front, can take time. Practice inner gratitude for emotions that come up, even ones that in the past you didn't want to feel.

Why is it helpful to be aware of our emotions? Because through *NVC* we learn how to ride the wave of an emotion to the universal need that is the cause of the emotion. [For more on this process, go to the Feelings section and the article entitled *Feelings: The Golden Road*, p. 38.]

Connecting honestly occurs when I express my vulnerability. The classical *NVC* form can help me do that. It may sound something like this:

"When you hold the door open for me, (observation) I feel delighted and touched (feelings) arising from the need of ease and gratitude (needs). I wonder how you feel hearing me say that?"
(connecting request)

or

"When you brush your teeth when I ask you to, (observation) I feel glad (feelings) because I value harmony and good health (needs). Will you tell me what you just heard me say?"
(connecting request)

or

"When I am ready to start cooking supper and I find dishes and pots in the sink, (observation) I feel frustrated, concerned and curious (feelings) arising from the needs of ease, co-operation and harmony (needs). Would you be willing to tell me what you are hearing me say? (connecting request)

In each of these examples the focus is on honestly expressing my weather front and the need(s) stirring that weather.

At first, this type of honesty can sound weird and even feel scary because we have so little experience expressing in this way.

The magic of *NVC* is that as we become more honest with ourselves, we are able to have more choice about what and how we express. In this way we honor and nourish the beautiful need of honesty that flows within each of us. This kind of honesty brings deeper and deeper connection within myself and with others.

PRACTICE SUGGESTIONS:

1. When you find yourself wanting to express praise - stop and breathe. Ask yourself, "Does that person want to hear a judgment, or would they prefer to hear what in me appreciates their behavior?"
2. When you find yourself wanting to criticize someone (even yourself) - slow down, pause, and become aware of your breath. Ask yourself, "Is it likely to improve our connection if I give someone a piece of my mind?" Remember the *NVC* saying, connection before correction! Remember that you are more likely to build connection if you express honestly about *your* inner weather - connecting the feelings alive in you with the needs that flow in you.
3. Try writing down a classical *NVC* expression - Observation, Feelings, Needs, Connecting Request - and see how your weather front is doing. Taking time to connect to the beauty of the needs is an important step to increase the likelihood of connection.

Honoring Agreements

"Once I commit to a customer I always complete the job – no matter how overbooked I am – no matter how many hours a day I have to work to get it done. I can get so exhausted and angry with myself. Then I usually start drinking too much." – NVC Level 1 participant

Why do we commit to so many things that we lose connection with the needs of ease, fun/play and rest? Are we reacting to a core belief that our value lies in what we do? Are we simply conforming to the norms of our culture? Or are we clear that we are contributing to our visions and dreams for the world?

Once we do commit to something, how can we change our minds without negating the need of honoring agreements? I have worked with this question for several years. I started to look at what I did when I had made a commitment and then changed my mind. I began to notice that I would sometimes lie about my reasons for changing the agreement, so that the reasoning seemed "beyond my control." I would say things like, "My car won't start," or, "My family member is sick," when the truth was that I was tired or I wanted to spend time in my garden instead.

Using an *NVC* lens to consider my behavior, I found that underneath this habit of telling lies lay a desire to be liked, for acceptance and belonging. A problem arose. When I made one of these untruthful statements my energy was not clear and connecting. Often the other person picked up on this lack of clarity, creating confusion and muddiness between us. Ironically, this decreased my sense of belonging. Marshall Rosenberg might call this a tragic attempt to meet a beautiful need.

Then I started thinking about decisions from a needs-based perspective. Now, if I begin to feel uncomfortable with a commitment for any reason, I use an *NVC*-based inquiry.

What needs might I have been contributing to by saying "yes" to a commitment?

What needs might the other person (persons or group) have been addressing when they asked me for the commitment?

What needs might I be neglecting if I stick with the commitment?

Then I take time to consider which strategy would serve life in the best way at that time: to stick with the original agreement or to change it.

If I decide to change it, then I remember how important integrity is to me. The strategy I have come to enjoy the most is transparency.

This involves being transparent with myself – getting clear what needs are most calling for my attention, then contacting the other person as soon as possible and telling them clearly about the change, clearly stating the needs involved. Then I ask how they are affected by my change. Then, it is important to me to listen from calm presence, not hearing the other person's statements as blame, no matter how they are said. Hearing their reaction may lead me to reconsider and stick with the original commitment. Or I can know that I did the best I could to take care of each of us in the situation. Or a third idea may arise from our honest expression to each other. The more I practice this, the more creativity seems to emerge in decisions.

Here are some elements that I appreciate from others, and therefore try to use as much as possible myself.

Before saying "yes" to someone's request, I look carefully within myself to assess what percent of me wants to say "yes" and what percent wants to say "no."

If I have made a commitment and decide to change it, I tell the other person as soon as possible.

I tell my reasons, honestly. As an *NVC* practitioner I know that behind every "no" there is a "yes" to some need(s). When I say "no," I make every effort to express the needs that I'm saying "yes" to. And when I hear a "no" from someone else, I make every effort to hear the "yes" that is being expressed.

I ask how the other person is affected, and I listen.

I seek complete communication, until both parties have a clear sense of being heard and understood.

The relationship is what is most important to me. I have come to realize that when other people change their minds about their commitments, and then don't choose to have this level of communication about their decision, that is most painful for me. Of course we won't always get what we want. We CAN get connection through honest dialogue. To me, this is a valuable way to nurture the beautiful needs of honoring agreements, integrity and belonging.

PRACTICE SUGGESTION

You may want to use Feelings and Needs Cards to help you with this exercise.

Redo #1: Clear some time (20 minutes perhaps) for self-reflection. Remember a time that you made a commitment to do something, and later regretted the commitment.

Record:

Observation: What was the commitment?

Judgments:

- What thoughts arose from this commitment? thoughts about yourself; thoughts about other people involved; thoughts about the task/commitment.
- Repeat each judgment, this time starting with the phrase, "I'm telling myself . . ."
- Bring the commitment back to mind. When you think about doing the commitment, what feelings come up? What needs are underneath these feelings? What needs were supported by doing it? What needs seem neglected by doing it?
- Brainstorm how you might have changed the commitment with care and consideration.
- Make a request of yourself to use your preferred strategies the next time you are changing an agreement.

Redo #2: Think of a time that someone "broke" an agreement with you.

Observation: What was the commitment? How did it get changed?

Judgments:

- What thoughts arose from this change? thoughts about yourself; thoughts about other people involved; thoughts about the task/commitment.
- Repeat each judgment, this time starting with the phrase, "I'm telling myself . . ."
- Bring the situation back to mind. When you think about what happened, what feelings come up? What needs are underneath these feelings?
- Brainstorm how you would have preferred the person to act.

How to be Heard— Listen !

I had been contacted by a college radio station to do an interview on dialoguing with people you disagree with. Not family or friends – just people on the street, people in your community you are not in agreement with. I've been mulling it over.

Then a few days ago I received a phone call from a campaigner for a political candidate - not the person I'm supporting. The campaigner seemed to assume that I was supporting the person on whose behalf she was calling. She asked if I would like an application to apply for an absentee ballot. I assured her I was all set, that in fact I had already sent in my ballot. "Oh, who are you supporting?"

I stated that I was supporting the other candidate. Her response, "Is there anything I can say that would change your mind?" I noticed my body contracting. I had no interest in hearing anything from this person.

"No."

"Well have a nice day, good-bye."

The conversation was civil and polite, but neither of us learned anything from the other. Neither of us really felt heard.

After we hung up I found myself thinking, I wish she had asked me a different question. I wish she had asked me, "Please tell me why you are supporting _____. I'd like to understand." I had a sense that if I had had a chance to express why I am so passionate about "my" candidate, I would have been more receptive to hearing from her. Then I found my inner voice wanting to coach her on how to approach people who do not support her position.

Now I have clarity about what I want to say in the upcoming radio interview. If you want people to listen to your perspective, the first thing to do is listen, REALLY listen, to their perspective. Perhaps this seems counterintuitive. When you model listening to people, this helps them get ready to hear you.

As *NVC* practitioners we know that deep listening does not mean agreement. It means we have practiced the skill of listening for the universal human needs underneath people's opinions, statements and behaviors. If we want to generate more civility in our communities, even during an election cycle, we are called upon to put into practice the skills we have honed.

This is not to put a "should" on ourselves. That will quickly drain our energy. We may want to use time in an *NVC* practice group or empathy session to rehearse such an encounter.

Notice when your body starts to become tight and defended by the words of another.

We can pause and ask, "Do I want to put my *NVC* skills into practice at this moment? Do I want to contribute to more tolerance and authentic harmony? Do I want to be more tolerant and connecting?" If the answer is YES, then get ready to listen.

We all know how to be "right." As *NVC* practitioners we have skills to instead move toward connection. Recently, on the *NVC* Certified Trainers list, Miki Kashtan sent in a suggestion on how to guide a volatile meeting whose purpose was to let people in a part of Europe express their fears regarding the huge influx of refugees. I think her idea would be useful in interactions around political discord anywhere.

As a person expresses their fear, listen for what you think they want. Consider that

what a person wants is most likely the opposite of the fear that is being expressed.

Keep guessing what they might be wanting until they say, "Yes, that is what I want."

At this moment it can be connecting to say, "Thank you for letting me know." If you have time and interest, ask, "Is there anything more?" How many times can you get to "Yes"?

After several yeses, you can ask, "Would you be willing to hear from me?" If you have helped the person feel heard, it is more likely that they will now be ready to hear one thing you are wanting. It would most productive if you began by expressing the places you see commonality between what they want and what you want. Let's give it a try and see what happens.

I find it important to stay connected to thinking that inspires and motivates me. I am inspired by the writings of peace activist, environmentalist and Buddhist teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh. On this subject he counsels:

"The most important thing is that we need to be understood. We need someone to be able to listen to us and to understand us. Then we will suffer less. But everyone is suffering and no one wants to listen. We don't know how to express ourselves so that people can understand. Because we suffer so much, the way we express our pain hurts other people and they don't want to listen. "Listening is a very deep practice. . . You have to empty yourself. You have to leave space in order to listen . . . especially to people we think are our enemies – the ones we believe are making our situation worse. When you have shown your capacity for listening and understanding, the other person will begin to listen to you, and you have a chance to tell him or her of your pain . . . This is the practice of peace."

PRACTICE SUGGESTION

Take time in the *NVC* practice group to rehearse an encounter with someone who has a different political view than yourself. Try the technique of guessing what the person is wanting at the core of their emotional statements.

Let's Transform the "Shoulds"

by Betsy Terrell

Years ago, I had a flash of insight that said the word (thought, concept) "should" is the seed of all violence. It was a watershed moment for me, a turning point, and for many months afterward, I simply observed the very many ways the word/idea "should" formed my thoughts, opinions, even feelings, about myself, other people, and the world around me. I began working to shift "should" to "could" and to be generally more internally accepting than resisting. Don't get me wrong: I still firmly held onto and exercised my inherent choices to participate, redirect or leave any scenario, internal or external. But I sought to be less judgmental and more open to seeing a bigger picture, maybe understanding how this person or situation got the way it was.

Then I came across *NVC* and dove into it full-force. The understanding of needs-based motivation, and feelings being the result of deeply held or strongly triggered needs/values, resonated enormously for me and expanded where I could go with my previous insight about "should."

I came up with a simple (though not necessarily easy) exercise, using the feelings and needs cards, which I like to call, "Let's transform the shoulds." It will probably take about 20-30 minutes to do, but I'm guessing it will be time that surprises you.

Here's how it works.

Take 5 minutes and write down every "should" and "have-to" that comes into your mind, ones you tell yourself, ones you hear others tell you or imagine that others are thinking about you, as well as ones you say about others (to yourself or out loud).

Next, read through them and pick the one that has the most emotional charge for you. (You can go back later and do this process on each of them one by one, if you care to.)

Read the one you picked to yourself and couple of times, and then just write all your stream of consciousness thoughts that come up around this issue for about 5 minutes (or more) until you feel the "steam" subside.

Now take the feelings cards, go through the deck, and pick out all the feelings cards that fit this situation for you, and lay them out in front of you.

Then go through the needs cards and pick out all the needs cards that fit this situation. You can group them next to or near the feelings they relate to, or just lay them out by themselves.

Spend a few minutes reading these cards, out loud if that feels comfortable, and giving presence to whatever comes up for you.

Now look at the original statement you started with, the "should" statement. Invite yourself to make a statement of intent that starts with "I choose to. . .", related to this situation. You might be surprised what statement comes up at this point.

I am hoping that you may find, as I have, that periodically doing this transformation game, a shift will begin to seep into your everyday thinking and relating and result in more inner peacefulness, and more understanding of yourself and others.

Practice Suggestions

To deepen your self-presence with the feelings and needs you've identified using the cards, try taking a large sheet of paper and doing some drawing, using whatever media appeal to you, without thinking, just letting color and form appear on the page.

For the next 24 hours, try replacing "should" with "could" in your thinking and in your speech and watch how it shifts your feelings. If it feels good, renew your self-request.

Schedule a session with an empathy buddy to receive empathic presence from another person, around one of your "shoulds."

Betsy Terrell lives in midcoast Maine, and created this practice of transforming "shoulds" while helping raise two small grandchildren.

Remembering Gratitude

When we learn Nonviolent Communication our focus is usually on our "ouchie" situations that we wish were different than they are. We come to experience that the four-step framework of *NVC* (Observation, Feeling, Need, Request) becomes an effective model for thinking about and expressing our thoughts about these "ouchies."

I noticed if I only used *NVC* to think about "problems," my own nervous system began associating *NVC* with problems and distress. As a result, when I would choose to look at a situation from an *NVC* lens, my body would sometimes start feeling some low level of anxiety.

When I used *NVC* in conversations with others only when there was an "ouchie" situation to address, others in my life began to associate *NVC* with conflict or differences of opinions. This did not endear *NVC* to them. In fact, it sometimes seemed to create an aversion to *NVC*.

It is just as useful and important to use the OFNR framework to think and express celebrations and gratitude. By exploring all situations, whether I consider them challenging or positive or neutral, with the OFNR framework, my internal emotional state (as well as the state of others) is directly affected.

It is inspiring for me to periodically re-read Marshall Rosenberg's (*NVC* founder) own words. The following excerpt from Speak Peace In A World Of Conflict addresses the theme of using *NVC* to express gratitude. *used with permission of the publisher, pp. 166-168*

"In our daily lives, we must see that it is not happiness that makes us grateful, but the gratefulness that makes us happy." - Albert Clarke

How do we express gratitude in *NVC*? 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:

First, we want to make clear what the person did that we want to celebrate, what action on their part enriched our lives.

Second, we want to tell them how we feel about that, what feelings are alive in us as a result of what they've done.

Third, we want to tell them what needs of ours were met by their actions.

I hadn't made this clear to a group of teachers I was dealing with. We ran out of time After the meeting one of the teachers ran up to me, and here's how she expressed her gratitude to me.

Her eyes were shining, and she said, "You're brilliant."

I said to her, "That doesn't help."

She said, "What!"

I said, "Telling me what I am doesn't help. I have been called a lot of names in my life. Some positive and some far from positive, and I can't ever recall learning anything of value by somebody telling me what I am. I don't think anybody does. I think there's zero information value in being told what you are. But from the look in your eyes, I can see you want to express gratitude."

Looking a bit bewildered, she said, "Yes."

"And I want to receive it. But telling me what I am doesn't give it to me."

"Well," she said, "what do you want me to say?"

I said, "Remember what I said in the workshop ...? I need to hear three things. First of all, what did I do that made life more wonderful for you?"

She thought for a moment and said, "You're so intelligent."

"No," I said, "that's still a diagnosis of me. It doesn't really tell me what I did. I'd get more out of your feedback if I knew concretely what I did that really in some way enriched your life."
 "Oh," she said, "I got you. I think I understand." She opened up her notebook and she pointed to two things she wrote there that had big stars by them. She said, "You said these two things." I looked in her notebook. "Yes, that helps, just knowing that I in some way enriched your life. Second," I continued, "it would help me to know how you feel right now."
 "Oh Marshall, I feel so relieved and hopeful."
 "Ok. And now third, what need of yours was met by those two things?"
 "Marshall, I've never been able to connect with my eighteen-year-old son. All we do is fight. I needed some concrete direction for connecting with him. These two things you said met that need of mine for some concrete direction."
 I said, "Thank you for sticking with me and helping me see how I have contributed to you. It is so much more satisfying for me to know concretely what I did."
 You can see, I'm sure, how different it was to hear those three things than to hear somebody tell me what I was. That's how we express gratitude in Nonviolent Communication.

At first others may seem surprised by an expression that includes Observations, Feelings and Needs rather an evaluative praise. My experience is that after the initial surprise, a delight often arises. People enjoy hearing appreciations that are not linked to evaluations of who they are.

PRACTICE SUGGESTIONS

Keep a personal gratitude journal for two weeks. In it write a daily appreciation of yourself using the following form:

(Observation) When I _____,
 (Needs) it nourished _____, which I value.
 (Feelings) And when I think about that, I feel _____.

After taking two weeks to write appreciations to yourself, take two additional weeks to write appreciations about what others do. (And keep writing one for yourself; it's great for nourishing self-connection and self-appreciation.)

Remember to include things that others do routinely that contribute to your well-being, things we begin to take for granted. (e.g. cook dinner for us, take the dog for a walk, clean the bathroom, give us a hug, etc.)

(Observation) When you _____,
 (Needs) it nourished _____, which I value.
 (Feelings) When I think about that I feel _____.

After these second two weeks, try expressing gratitude to others in this form. Add in the
 (Connecting Request) Are you willing to tell me how you feel hearing this?
 and observe how it is received.

Read (or re-read) Speaking Peace In A World Of Conflict, Marshall Rosenberg, Puddle Dancer Press, 2005, ISBN 1-892005-17-4

Sharing *NVC* with our Elders (and others too)

Over the past several months, a number of people have approached me asking about teaching their elders *NVC*. The elders often are parents in their 80's or 90's that the next generation want to support in having more ease in their life.

I reflected on how, for several years, I tried to share *NVC* with my mother when she was in her late 70's and early 80's. My efforts, no matter how subtle, were not welcomed. Once when I was sharing the Feelings and Needs cards with her and her older sister, my mom commented, "Well this is just too complicated."

In hindsight I see how all my efforts were an example of the Key Differentiation of "doing *NVC*" vs. "being *NVC*." Wanting my mom to do it. After a few years I shifted to "being *NVC*" when I was with her. This means I stopped trying to get her interested in learning *NVC* and instead offered feelings and needs guesses whenever she said something that stirred a reaction in me. In *NVC* we call making a feelings and needs guess a Verbal Reformulation.

For example, my mom has the habit of making declarative statements instead of asking questions, and I used to find this triggering. It used to be that when she would do this I would point out to her that I would prefer it if she asked a question instead of telling me her opinions.

So in the past, my mom might say, "You visit me too often. You have your own life. This has got to change." And I would find myself feeling annoyed arising from the needs of choice and appreciation. I would point out to her that she was making statements and not checking things out with me. After a while I began to make honest expressions of my reactions – When you say _____ I feel _____ because of the needs of _____," usually followed by something like: "and I want you to ask me questions instead of making statements about me." Then my mother would go into her habit of taking information as criticism and go into a cycle of self-judgment. This didn't get me the connection I was hoping for or any change in how she talked to me.

I hate to tell you how long it took for me to "wake up" to the reality that my mother's thinking patterns were so strongly ingrained that my waiting for her to change was not an effective strategy. Then I remembered I had another option: Chair #4, making an empathic guess.

Now, when my mom makes a declarative statement instead of a question I make a guess at the feelings and needs she might be trying to express. When she says, "You visit me too often. You have your own life. This has got to change." I try, "Mom, when you say that - are you feeling anxious because you want assurance that I enjoy spending time with you?" She often looks amazed and replies, "Yes."

When she says, "You are cold." I ask, "Mom, are you wanting me to know you care about my well-being?" She often looks relieved and replies, "Yes."

It has been almost a year now that I have taken my triggered moments with her to express an empathic guess. Two things have happened as a result.

I suffer a lot less because the triggering doesn't embed in me (with thoughts such as "She is so difficult" or "My life would be better if she would learn *NVC*/change.")

My mom has started occasionally asking questions instead of making declarative statements. She has also become more open to receiving physical affection (hand holding or short back rubs) from me. And she has requested using the feelings and needs cards when processing some issues.

My experience has shown me how important it is to "Be *NVC*" with those we wish would learn *NVC*. Remembering to guess what someone else is feeling and needing, giving them the gift of empathy in the form of

a Verbal Reformulation. I'm guessing this is an effective strategy no matter what the age of the person we wish would learn *NVC*.

PRACTICE SUGGESTIONS

Once a day, for 7 days, take 10 minutes to use the Feelings and Needs cards about something that happened to you during the day.

After a week of using Feelings and Needs cards for yourself, spend another week taking 10 minutes to guess the feelings and needs of someone who triggered you during the day.

Practice with an *NVC* friend. Each write out ten triggering statements. Hand your list to your buddy. Take turns reading one triggering message to your buddy and have them take time to make a Verbal Reformulation. Take turns "triggering" each other and seeing how quickly you can make a meaningful Verbal Reformulation.

Sharing *NVC* with Young people

When we yearn to share *NVC* with people we care about, younger people are often right up there on our list. Sometimes we wonder if younger people can relate to the concepts and vocabulary of *NVC*.

It has been my experience that the younger you are, the easier it is to bring *NVC* principles to life. Remember, *NVC* is NOT the exact words we use; primarily it is about our internal, natural desire to be relational. When we put **connection before correction**, *NVC* empowers us with choice.

There are a variety of resources available for bringing *NVC* to family and educational settings. Here I will highlight just a few.

* Heart to Heart: Three Systems for Staying Connected, a Manual for Parents and Teachers, by Gina Simm, is a very practical curriculum, created and field tested by Gina when she was a first grade teacher. The curriculum shares the principles of *NVC* by using really children's books that can be found in libraries or bookstores. It includes activities for follow up on each book and templates for feelings and needs cards that are just right for five to eight year olds. Additionally, it helps adults set up systems within their family or classroom that strengthen autonomy and interdependence by giving young people strategies for supporting themselves and others. Gina's website is TeachingFromYourHeart.org

* Another resource for parents and teachers are the books and games of Sura Hart and Victoria Kindle Hodson. They include templates for feelings and needs cards that I have found very helpful. They are now available in twenty languages as a free download from their website. Their books include The No-Fault Classroom, Respectful Parents, Respectful Kids, and The Compassionate Classroom. Their website: NoFaultZone.com/global-network.html

* The *NVC* trainer Inbal Kashtan had a dedication to making *NVC* accessible to younger people. Here are some of her ideas for talking about needs in ways that may be more accessible. Have some fun trying these on for yourself and within yourself.

Needs

Family Friendly Language

Accessible to many children and useful for adults

First created by NVC-certified trainers Inbal Kashtan, Author of Parenting From the Heart, and Miki Kashtan

The following are examples of ways to frame needs in ways that might be more accessible to some children. Note that some children understand and enjoy the "need" words, and some adults prefer the language used below. Choose by the quality of connection the language contributes to, rather than an idea about someone's age; and by the language that works for you.

Translations of commonly expressed needs that tend to reinforce right/wrong thinking rather than supporting connection:	
EQUALITY/ FAIRNESS:	Do you want everyone to matter?
	Do you want to know that you matter?
RESPECT:	Do you want to be cared about?
	Do you want to know that your choice is taken seriously?
	Do you want to know that you matter?
	Would you like what you want to be included?

"Need" words:	
AFFECTION:	Do you want to be close? (A cuddle? Closeness?)
APPRECIATION:	You want to know how we feel about what you did? Would you like to know if what you did was a gift?
AUTHENTICITY:	You want to say or do what's really in your heart? You want to share what's true for you?
AUTONOMY:	You'd like to choose what to do? (How you feel? What you think? What happens with your body?)
CARE/COMPASSION:	Is this really hard for you? You want to know that we care?
CELEBRATION:	Would you like to show how happy you feel? Do you want us to join you in celebrating?
COMPETENCE / EFFECTIVENESS:	Do you want to be able to do what you want? Do you wish things would turn out more like you plan them? Do you want to be able to make your plans work out?
CONSISTENCY/Honoring Agreements:	You want to be able to count on things going a certain way every time? Do you want people to do what they say they'll do?
CONTRIBUTION:	Would you like to be able to help? (Contribute?)
COOPERATION:	Do you want everyone to work together as a team?
COMPANIONSHIP:	Would you like some company?
CREATIVITY:	Do you want to feel your power (maybe strength?)? Do you want to explore what you are able to create (make?) Do you want to express yourself this way (with music, art, etc.)? Is it so much fun to create something from your own imagination?
FREEDOM:	Do you want to decide by yourself what works for you?
HONESTY:	You want to trust that people say what is true for them?
INCLUSION:	Would you like to be a part of what's happening?
MATTERING:	Do you want to know that you matter? Would you like to know that we care about what you need?
MEANING:	Would you like to do things that are important to you?
MOURNING:	Do you want to show how sad you feel? Are you so, so sad?

MUTUALITY:	You want everyone to help one another?
ORDER:	You want to find things easily? You want to know what's going on around you?
PARTICIPATION:	You want to have a say in what we do? You want to be part of what's going on? You want to participate?
PEACE:	Do you want quiet? (Calm? An easy time?)
PLAY:	You want to have fun? Do you want to have time without a schedule? Do you want to do just what you feel like doing?
PREDICTABILITY:	Would you like to know what to expect?
PURPOSE:	You want to know what this is for?
SAFETY/SECURITY:	Do you want to know that you're going to be ok? Would you like to be safe?
STIMULATION:	Are you looking for fun or something new to do?

Empathy is an innate capacity that needs to be developed through human interaction. Thank you for all you do to bring empathy alive within yourself and in younger people so they will have a lifetime of benefit from the strategies that Marshall Rosenberg pioneered for us.

You are SO Wrong

During the summer of 2012 I had the privilege of starting work at Seeds of Peace International Camp in Otisfield, ME, a privilege that lasted many years. Their website states their mission as: "Set on a quiet lake in the woods of Maine, the Seeds of Peace International Camp provides a neutral, supportive setting for hundreds of young leaders from regions in conflict to meet their 'enemy' face-to-face."

My job was to co-facilitate dialogue between nineteen adult educators, who chaperoned the youth on their journeys from eight countries: Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, U.S., Jordan, Egypt, Palestine and Israel. We met for two and a half hours a day for direct dialogue. My co-facilitator was Tarek Maassarani, a non-certified *NVC* trainer from the Washington, D.C., area. His job back home is building structure and capacity for Restorative Practices for youth in the Washington D.C. area. He also provides direct services to youth and Peace Keepers in a variety of conflict zones around the world.

We decided to integrate aspects of peace-making circles, *NVC* and art into the dialogue format. We spent a week teaching the *NVC* skills of listening with empathy. Then we spent a few days sharing each country's national narrative; and then we made a place for people to share what upset them about listening to the national narrative of the people from "the other side." This was real life pain. People were dying. Communities were being physically destroyed. Tensions were high.

Tarek Maassarani created a model for us to use when listening to a person who was very upset. It combines elements of reflective listening (to nurture the need to be heard) with elements of personal truth (to nurture the needs of authenticity, honesty, and to be seen) and elements of *NVC*-based empathic guessing (to nurture the needs of connection, compassion and empathy).

Each participant was invited to express their reaction to the national narratives in any way they wanted – no *NVC* speak requested – full emotional authenticity welcome. Then several listeners were asked to respond with this guiding outline:

In one or two sentences mirror what the speaker said. Then add, " This is/is not what I have learned. AND hearing this is true for you, I am guessing it speaks to the need(s) of _____."

It was not easy. Each listener had a deck of Needs Cards so that they could use them for support. *NVC* trainers were there as coaches and for support.

The results were amazing. People experienced expressing to and being heard by people who, to them, represented "the other side." The listener/responders experienced how to respond empathically, even to statements that they totally disagreed with.

This was empowering for everyone. We all realized a totally new option was open to us. Imagine how that might be in our own communities and families when there are strong differences of perspective and opinions.

Many people hold that they have "the truth." Yet too often our strategy within families or communities that hold different views is to just not talk to them. How different our world would be if we could first connect with those we disagree with before trying to be heard and understood ourselves. *NVC*, practiced at this deep level, has the power to offer hope and connection even in the places of despair. Do you yearn for that level of self-connection? Do you want support in responding compassionately and powerfully to someone expressing your deepest fears? This is the opportunity and challenge of deep *NVC* commitment.

CONNECTING WITHOUT AGREEING

Listening in empathy does not mean we agree!

It's challenging to listen with genuine empathy and curiosity to someone expressing a viewpoint we do not agree with. First, it's helpful to check with ourselves to find out if that's actually what we want to do. Questions to ask yourself:

Am I willing to listen to this person? If so, what is my intention in listening? Is it

- to be right?
- to be heard?
- to change their mind?
- to understand?
- to connect?
- to find a solution?

What concerns me most about listening with empathy to someone I disagree with?

- How to remain true to my integrity?
- How to make sure the other person understands I'm not agreeing just because I'm listening?

Empathy doesn't offer clever ways to win an argument or to coerce others to change their minds or embrace our point of view. Empathy offers the possibility of remaining connected with our own authenticity while at the same time connecting with the humanity in the other person. It increases the opportunity for us to gain understanding of the other person's perspective and what matters to them on the deeper level of human needs.

Here's a practice that allows us to remain true to ourselves and connected to the other, even when we disagree. These instructions are for practicing with a friend or practice partner in preparation for actual conversations with others with whom we don't agree. Your partner will play the role of a person you disagree with.

Step 1: Give your partner a sense of the other person's viewpoint and one specific sentence they can say to start things off, statement you strongly disagree with.

Step 2: Your partner says the sentence to you.

Step 3: Ground yourself in your intention to connect. Perhaps take a few deep breaths. Tap your toes. Make an INTERNAL feelings and Needs guess for yourself.

Step 3: You say: "I hear you saying (fill in the sentence here).

I don't see it that way, (or I do see it that way too). AND hearing this is how you see it I wonder if you feel (fill in a feeling) because you value (fill in a need)? Am I understanding you correctly?"

When we practice in this way, we are building our capacity to stay calm and connected even when the views being expressed by another are not in alignment with our own. With enough practice, we become more likely to remember these tools in a real life conversation.

ADDITIONAL PRACTICE

For the next week, keep a daily record of comments that people make that you disagree with. (This could be on TV or radio as well as in person.) For each observation you write, mentally rehearse the response frame shared above, and add needs guesses. By practicing, you are more likely to build the capacity to respond in the present moment. Write the response frame on an index card and carry it with you for at least a week. When you are waiting in lines or at a red light, read it over. This helps build the neural pathways in your brain.

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

NVC and Social Change

"Tell me how much a snowflake weighs?" a sparrow asked a wild dove.

"Not more than nothing," was the answer.

"Then," the sparrow said, "I want to tell you a wonderful story. I was sitting on a branch of a pine tree, close to the trunk, when it started to snow. Not much - not like in a storm. No, it was like in a dream, without any touch of intensity. Because I did not have anything else to do I started to count those snowflakes that fell on my branch and the needles. Their number was 3,741,952. When the next snowflake fell on the branch – not more than a nothing as you said - the branch broke."

Then the sparrow flew away.

The dove, who some consider an authority on the topic of peace, considered this story and then said to itself: "Maybe there is only one voice missing to bring peace to our world."

(Author unknown - story translated from German by NVC trainer Gitta Zimmerman)

Many people have the habit at the New Year's beginning to wish Peace on Earth to our family, friends, and neighbors. Yet we know here in Maine and around the planet we live in turbulent times. There are multiple wars, the climate is changing even faster than scientist predicted, homelessness and hunger are increasing, there is much political turmoil. How do we make our yearning for Peace on Earth more than a wish? How do we create concrete action? How do we become another "snowflake" for life?

Nonviolent consciousness is an active practice of bringing harmony and peace to our inner and outer world.

Inner work is a vital step toward social change. Without the inner work we often make enemy images of others who act or express themselves differently than we would prefer. *NVC* is a strong practice for orienting myself toward embodying peace no matter what is happening around me.

Modern-day philosophers and activists David Korten and Joanna Macy call our time "The Great Turning." They use this term to describe the current change in humanity they believe is on the magnitude of the agricultural and industrial revolutions.¹ From an *NVC* lens we come to see these revolutions as strategies to nourish needs.

Nonviolent Communication and The Great Turning

Joanna Macy describes The Great Turning manifesting on multiple levels. The first level includes efforts to slow down the destruction caused by current human activity. This can include lawsuits, demonstrations, and direct actions. The second level is to create life-sustaining forms and structures – this can include local food movements, cohousing, land trusts, permaculture, restorative justice, infrastructure for wide-spread mediation practices, and locally based currencies. The third level is a shift in consciousness - to profoundly change our perception of reality.

NVC, developed by Marshall Rosenberg, is a process we can use to shift our consciousness so we are liberated from "us" and "them" thinking. *NVC* helps us lay down new neural pathways in our brains to bring expansive loving-kindness from a vague wish into practical reality.

When we become ready to turn our *NVC* focus from our immediate world to the larger arena of humanity, we can consider the following Four Keys to Social Change:²

Transform enemy images of others. This equates to the "4th Chair" as described the article, "Which Chair" (p/) in the Getting Started section. By transforming enemy images, we let the feelings and needs of the other become the focus of our attention.

Focus on a Positive Vision. Make it a conscious practice to see the positive outcomes you wish for as concrete and do-able.³

Gratitude – make a continuous habit of embodying gratitude:

Gratitude for the people around us

Gratitude for the bounty of life – air, water, food, learning, community, challenges and celebrations

Gratitude for the people who think differently than we do

Connect with the people we hope to influence. Remember, with nonviolent consciousness we only want people to change if they can do it joyfully from a full realization of Universal Needs. To "force" change is to perpetuate the domination paradigm we hope to transform.

Joanna believes that in The Great Turning everyone's efforts toward sustainability and compassion are contributing to the whole. Whether efforts are small or large in focus, they are all "snowflakes" for life expressing itself. Each one's efforts are vital to the flow of the life-force.

¹ The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community, David Korten, Kumarian Press, 2006

Coming Back To Life: Practices To Reconnect Our Lives, Our World, Joanna Macy, New Society Publishers, 1998

The Great Turning As Compass And Lens, Joanna Macy, *YES!* Magazine, summer 2006, p. 44

² Material presented by Jeff Brown, certified *NVC* trainer, in his *NVC* Academy course: Creating a Kick-ass *NVC* Organization.

³ *YES!* Magazine, no longer published in print but available at yesmagazine.org, is a source for learning about positive visions for the future and how they are being created now.

PRACTICE SUGGESTIONS

Take time to consider the Four Keys to Social Change. With a partner, take fifteen minutes each to explore your reactions to each of these Four Keys. From this exploration make one concrete, positive, doable request of yourself.

Use the exercise in the end section of this booklet to practice transforming enemy images. p.

Schedule an *NVC* coaching session with a certified trainer.

Read *YES!* Magazine articles (at yesmagazine.org) to expand your vision of a positive future. (Social Change Key #2)

Read The Heart of Social Change: How You Can Make a Difference in Your World, by Marshall Rosenberg, Puddle Dancer Press, 2005

To broaden understanding of the effects of both the agricultural and industrial revolutions, consider reading Talking To My Daughter About The Economy, by Yanis Varoufakis

Mourn, Celebrate, Learn

Several years ago my *NVC* teaching partner, Leah Boyd, participated in the Mediate Your Life program. It appeared to be a powerful learning experience and a support for her budding *NVC*-based mediation business. She brought one of the processes, "Mourn, Celebrate, Learn," to our Maine *NVC* Integration Program.

Over the years I have begun to use this process of Mourn, Celebrate, Learn when I have had an encounter in which I didn't respond as open-heartedly as I yearn to. Last September I was at the *NVC* booth at the Common Ground Fair and surprised myself. It was my third day at the booth. In the afternoon a woman stopped by and became quite interested in *NVC*. It turns out she runs a pre-school that focuses on care of the earth and each other. She expressed an eagerness to share information about *NVC* with the parents of her students. Then the dialogue went something like this:

"Here is my rack card, the website is on there. It would be terrific if you would share it with them. I have a workshop coming up soon in your area."

"Oh. A website is so one sided. It's not interactive. Facebook is much better. Then they can respond to you directly."

"I don't do Facebook. I just don't get how to use it."

"Well I have such success with Facebook. It's really fantastic. It's easy for the parents to respond to what I write. They love it."

"Yes, I get that it works well for you. That you like how easy it is for you to interact with your parents. Actually I don't understand it. I don't understand how to work with it. So I choose not to use it."

"You should do Facebook. Its really easy."

If I'd only caught myself right here. If I'd only really acknowledged to myself what was actually happening within me at this moment and held acceptance for myself and open-heartedness for her, I would not have responded as I did next. Something like:

"It's not easy for me, I just don't understand it. And I've read that Facebook does psychological testing on its members without their knowledge, let alone permission, and I don't want any part of that!"

"Well! I was only trying to be helpful!" She muttered as she walked quickly away shaking her head. I'm telling myself she lost her interest in *NVC* then and there.

It was her reaction to my statement that got my attention. I was a bit shocked and embarrassed that I was able to be so disconnecting while sitting at the *NVC* booth. My mind immediately went into self-defense: "Its been three days at the fair, I'm tired. I haven't had a good night sleep in weeks – maybe months – with my mom being so close to death. If she only knew what I'm managing she could have been more accepting . . . blah blah blah." My mind was trying to justify my behavior. I could have spent hours, even days, in this mind loop.

Then I remembered Mourn, Celebrate, Learn. I took a few breaths and went through the steps (listed below).

I **mourned** that I chose a form of education instead of empathic connection. I mourned that I chose to let my frustration and discomfort with social media influence my tone and energy while speaking. I mourned that I didn't focus on her efforts to actually support *NVC*. I identified these needs as unnourished in what I said: connection, consideration, interdependence, learning and growth, community, empathy, integrity, choice, shared reality, companionship, acceptance, to be seen for one's true intentions, trust, tenderness, support, competence, visions and dreams, appreciation, and love. Wow, no wonder I was churned up inside. It's painful when my choices leave so many needs in distress.

I **celebrated** that I was able to be at the fair and able to host the *NVC* booth. I celebrated how I had set the table up differently this year, in a more interactive way with NEEDS cards for people to explore and discuss. I celebrated a number of connecting conversations I had had over the three days. I celebrated how connecting my conversation with this woman was, up to the point of discussing social media. The needs that were nourished in this experience: community, shared reality, support, visions and dreams, expression, honesty, understanding, meaning and purpose.

I ended up relishing the remembering that empathy is the connector! I made a request of myself. "Next time someone offers you advice and you notice you are tired or frustrated in receiving it, instead of countering with education (my usual habit), instead say (and mean), "Thank you. I'll give that some thought."

I noticed a deep sense of relief within myself. I took a few moments to repeat my new go-to phrase: "Thank you. I'll give that some thought." I could feel my body relax even more and a sense of calm fill the space that was full of justification just moments before.

I hope that woman stops back at the booth next year. I'm eager to engage with her again. And I'm grateful that Mourn, Celebrate, Learn has become a part of my daily practice. I don't have to dread mistakes; I now know how to find the life enhancing energy within any choice.

Mourn, Celebrate, Learn: The Steps

The Mourn, Celebrate, Learn (MCL) process helps us to make good use of all our experiences, no matter how our minds might be judging them. Often we say or do things that don't ultimately nourish needs. It can be minutes, hours, days or weeks before we realize that we're carrying around uncomfortable feelings and self-judgments. Once we recognize these feelings and thoughts, we have the opportunity to get curious about what needs they are pointing to, and what circumstances seem to have stimulated them. Oftentimes we discover that we have acted in a way that did not produce outcomes we enjoyed. The good news is that we can start where we are.

The MCL process invites you to:

- Recall the incident and the details of what you said or did that you are not comfortable with.
- Recall the circumstances that triggered your action and allow the memory to guide you to the needs you were trying to nourish when you chose to do or say what you did or said.
- Allow yourself to MOURN how those actions didn't nourish those needs.
- Tune into the beauty of those needs.
- Recall the incident again, this time considering anything that you did and said that you are comfortable with.
- Allow yourself to CELEBRATE that needs were nourished by those actions.
- Tune into the beauty of those needs.
- Now that you more fully understand the choices you made at the time, what did you LEARN? Are there any requests that you have of yourself? Are there any plans you'd like to make about how to support yourself in choosing differently in the future?

This exercise was developed by Leah Boyd, co-teacher of the Maine NVC Integration Program, inspired by the work of Ike Lasater and John Kinyon, Mediate Your Life

PEOPLE'S STORIES

To Be Continued
by Alicia Hafford

A year ago, I would have started this by describing myself as being a reformed criminal, a recovering addict that had mental health issues. For a long time I believed these labels defined me, and when I believed these things, that's how people treated me.

This is not how this story begins!

One day, after being homeless for almost five months, I discovered LINC Wellness Center. I figured at this point in my life I didn't have a lot to lose, so I took a chance and started to go there regularly. There I was able to have compassionate and kind conversations in a warm, caring and kind environment. There I wasn't judged or made fun of. There I discovered – I was the secret ingredient!

I redefined how I had come to know myself. I was almost 45 years old and the thought of being something other than what I had created for myself seemed impossible and scary. I learned that our culture has been stuck in blame, whether it be on myself or towards others – at this point I had become an expert at blaming.

When I was introduced to Nonviolent Communication I learned about empathy, feelings and universal human needs. I thought, "Feelings? Oh I have three of those – mad, sad and glad. Needs – I don't think I have many of those other than food, shelter and water." I learned that I experienced more than just three feelings. In fact, in any given situation, I experienced many feelings and needs. Before, I believed by limiting my feelings and needs I would keep myself from getting hurt ... boy was I wrong!

I've also taken Intentional Peer Support, and it's similar to Nonviolent Communication due to its core values of connection, worldview, mutuality, and moving towards what we want. Connection is seeking to understand what's happening in me and not assuming what is happening for someone else. Worldview is how we all have come to know the world. Mutuality is when I challenge and negotiate power in relating. Moving towards is focusing on my hopes, goals and dreams, with a vision that has a clear focus on what I want and is stated in the positive.

Then there's my second bible, Pathways to Recovery, a self-help class I am now facilitating. In it I discovered I had many strengths, such as – I'm strong, eager to learn, tenacious, loyal, dependable, brave, funny – just to name a few. Now, having a renewed sense of self, I've created plans for all eight dimensions of wellness that Pathways teaches.

I have taken this self-help class three times. During each class I have chosen a different domain. The first class, I was homeless, so I focused on housing and I created a step-by-step plan on how I would find an apartment. I found a place within a month. The second time, I had not worked in over 26 years, so I focused on meaningful work. I applied for and got a part time job at LINC, and I've been there over a year and a half. The last time I took Pathways, I focused on wellness. I created another step-by-step plan, for cutting back on the amount of cigarettes I use each day. I have a plan for getting a gym membership at the YMCA and getting to a healthy weight. My focus remains on breathing with ease and living an active, healthy life.

Life is very different now than when I began this journey almost two years ago. Three months after being at LINC, I was asked to run for Secretary of the Maine Association of Peer Support and Recovery Centers, and now I'm running for a third term. It has definitely been hard work, and a daily practice of challenging my habits and how I view myself and others.

I am more than worth the effort.

My life still has its challenges, and I have the ability to approach them with empathy and compassion. I know I can face anything that comes my way! I see myself as a person who has experienced addiction, criminal charges, and intense times of grief and sadness, due to life's challenges. I have had many labels put on me, and some I have put on myself, like mother, friend, aunt, cancer survivor, and so many more.

The only label I have now is ALICIA.

I was a criminal for a long time, and it just doesn't suit me anymore. I spun in and out of jail and prison since the age of 12. I was angry with the world, with the man who abused me as a child, with myself. I was violent. I had drug and alcohol problems. I rejected my two kids and thought, "good riddance." I just didn't care about others. I welcomed the idea of overdosing; it seemed like a good way to end it all.

I am so different now. I almost want to change my name. Today I identify myself as a loving person. I have joy and happiness with myself. I'm proud of myself for succeeding. I have hopes that others succeed. I mean, I'm still Alton. I still have the capacity to go the other way, but my hope is that I don't. Today I would call myself a compassionate loving person, kind of a wimpy human being, like a sissified tweety bird. - Okay, I don't really mean that. The work I've done, opening up my wounds, learning to communicate in a healthy positive way, reconnecting with my family, finding forgiveness - all this took courage. So, I guess I'm a courageous tweety bird now.

Quoted from the book jacket of Alton Lane's memoir, Only Human: a Journey from Convict to Mentor, available from Amazon and Thrift Books

In the following excerpt, Alton reminisces about his first encounter with NVC, after decades of drug and alcohol abuse and violent felony behaviors.

The Nuttiest Woman I've Ever Met

by Alton Lane

I was in limbo, just floating aimlessly through my life for the next few years after I finally got off the drugs. I had a lot inside and I never told anyone what was going on. I didn't even know what was going on inside me. All I knew was that there was a pile of shit in there. I was getting depressed a lot. Sometimes I wouldn't want to get out of bed for a week. I wouldn't take a shower. I wouldn't shave. Just fuck everybody. I don't care anymore. Then a week later I'd feel happy, or I'd think I was happy.

My license had been suspended long ago and I wasn't supposed to be driving. One day Ronda was sick, I couldn't get a hold of my sister, and my neighbor was drunk, so I drove a mile down the road to buy dinner and some medicine. Of course I got pulled over and they gave me another driving charge.

Instead of going to jail again I went to the reentry program in Belfast for six months. It's a program for men coming out of prison. They try to teach life skills and how to communicate with your families.

I thought, "This is stupid. They've piled me up with classes. 300 hours of this shit. None of these classes even make sense. Resilience class. Epictetus Club. Mindfulness class. Meditation. They're all stupid. I should have just done my time in jail. How does this even pertain to my life?"

I went to this Nonviolent Communication (NVC) class taught by a woman named Peggy Smith. In the first class I told her she was crazy. I said, "You're the nuttiest woman I've ever met. You're higher than I've ever been if you think I'm going to sit here in this class with a bunch of men and talk to you about how I feel. You're nuts. It's not happening. Let's just forget this."

During my second Nonviolent Communication class, Peggy asked us to tell a story about a time we did something nice for someone. I told her, "I ain't never done nothin' nice for anybody." Then I thought about it. A memory surfaced.

One time Ronda and I saw this Christmas tree with a bunch of papers on it at Walmart in Bangor. I thought, this is a weird way to decorate a tree. I looked closer and saw each piece of paper had a child's name on it, their age, and what they wanted for Christmas. These kids had nothing.

My father had died earlier that year of mesothelioma from working with asbestos, and my siblings and I had won a lawsuit payment. I was walking around Walmart with a pocket of hundred dollar bills that would scare you. I didn't see anybody else buying anything for these Christmas tree children. What else are you going to do when you have \$40,000 in the bank?

Right then and there, I emptied the tree. We ended up spending a LOT of money. I bought portable DVD players, helmets, kneepads, and skateboards. I had two carts. Ronda had two carts.

When we pulled up to the checkout, I asked the woman behind the counter, "Now where do you want all this stuff?"

She says, "Sir, I don't understand."

I said, "Do you see any papers on your tree? Your tree's gone."

"Are you serious?"

"I'm pretty serious. Now, where do you want this stuff? I want to go back. I still have to get bicycles. And I want to go home tonight, so let's get this shit moving."

"Oh my God. Just push 'em over there."

"By the way, I'm going to need some help, because I'm going to need almost every bicycle you got on your rack." So we went back and got bicycles. It was crazy. It was quite a night.

I shared that story in class. Peggy asked me, "Now that you remember that, how do you feel?" I didn't know how to even think about that question. I was so high when it happened; I'm lucky I even thought to look at the tree. I would never have considered how I felt.

I went back to my bunk and thought about it and cried. Wow. Maybe I have done something good for people. I felt good, really good. I had never been able to pick out good feelings. I didn't know what it meant. It wasn't my usual feelings of rage.

I know what it's like to not have anything. When I was a kid we didn't have shit. We'd buy sneakers from the Salvation Army that already had holes in them. I was lucky to get four pairs of socks at Christmas. My mom wrapped two pairs in each package so it looked like I was getting two presents. I know they did the best they could. We didn't have a lot, but we always had something to eat.

When I finally connected the feeling that came from remembering that act of kindness at Walmart to the needs inside me, needs I didn't really know I had, this class took on a whole new meaning. It showed me that everything that I had done in life was driven by my needs. It was so true. It was so true. I thought, "She's not crazy anymore. This woman knows what she's talking about."

Empathy at the Trucking Company

by Leah Boyd

From 1996 - 2010, I worked in the office of a Maine-based trucking company that grew during that time from six employees to sixty employees. I began as part-time office help and ultimately became the office manager and HR Director.

There were some unique communication challenges at the trucking company. Because the drivers did their routes alone and at night, they had little opportunity to talk about what they were encountering out there. At the administrative level, policies and procedures were being determined based on what seemed to make sense from an efficiency standpoint; however, drivers were often in violation of company policy. There were frequent injuries, accidents and misrouted freight.

I had begun to study *NVC*, and was becoming very inspired by the idea of empathy in the workplace. I decided to explore ways to increase empathy within the trucking company. I was curious what the impact might be and I figured if it could work there, it could work anywhere. I undertook several projects to foster more connection between drivers and management. These included creating a company newsletter, quarterly safety surveys, safety meetings and special training events. Absolutely the most effective program I stumbled upon for increasing empathy was my *NVC*-modified version of the Near Miss program. I'd like to share how that program worked.

A "near miss" occurs when something has happened that could easily have resulted in injury or damage to property, but by some good fortune it didn't go as badly as it could have. For example, someone carrying a heavy box slips on the ice and lands in such a way that neither they nor the contents of the box are harmed. A "near miss" could also be modified to include other types of close calls, such as an error that might have caused a serious financial problem for the company, loss of a customer, harm to the well-being of the organization, etc.

A Near Miss program provides a structure for employees to talk confidentially about their near misses, allowing both themselves and the organization to learn from them. My *NVC* modification was to add empathy as the all-important first step in our Near Miss program. My process had three steps:

An employee told me about their near miss and I listened empathically. I was quiet and if I spoke at all it would only be to guess feelings and needs. These employees, who did a very difficult job in the long, lonely hours of the night, just soaked in this experience of being deeply heard.

When the employee had received sufficient empathy, they usually shifted to the details of whatever they had done that led to the close call, and at this stage I would shift to listening for understanding the details along with the needs.

Once the details were clear, I would accompany the employee in exploring how to prevent this happening again. Often the ideas that resulted were a mixture of what the individual could do differently and what the company might do differently. This often led to suggestions for policy or procedure changes, improvements to equipment, etc. I would anonymously report the suggestions to administration and because they were so practical and often brilliant, they became the basis for many positive changes.

At the trucking company we saw impressive results from bringing empathy into our operations – dramatic decreases in injury rates and more compliance with company policies were two of the biggest. Employees naturally became much more honest and forthcoming in reporting the details of their actual injuries and accidents as well. I began using the Near Miss format for processing workplace injuries with our employees. This led to even more improvements in our operations.

Not all workplaces are as potentially dangerous as the trucking business. Still, with some creativity, every business can find places that could be the entry point for increasing empathy. Looking for the circumstances

where employees may experience fear, anxiety, or shame, and finding a way to shift this paradigm is the way forward.

I also want to say that empathy even goes beyond simply improving safety statistics or even creating smoother communication. Businesses and organizations face multiple layers of challenge and liability and are very dependent on their employees to carry out operations in a way that serves not only their own needs but the needs of the organization. Businesses often need quick and effective solutions to complex and perplexing situations. When employees feel heard, have an opportunity to contribute and are clear that they matter, they become even more wise, creative and competent. As a result, both individuals and the company at large are able to weather challenges and thrive.

RESOURCES AND WORKSHEETS

Suggestions for Reading

Anything by Marshall Rosenberg, especially:

- Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life, with the companion NVC Workbook, by Lucy Leu
- Practical Spirituality
- Speak Peace in a World of Conflict

Connection, Bonnie Frazier

Connecting Across Differences, Jane M. Connor and Dian Killian

Your Resonant Self and Your Resonant Self Workbook, Sarah Peyton

Choice: A Field Guide for Navigating the Polarization of Our World and Living Interdependently, Kathleen Macferren and Jared Finkelstein

The Anti-Racist Heart: Self-Compassion and Activism Handbook, Roxy Manning and Sarah Peyton

Being Genuine: Stop Being Nice, Start Being Real, Thomas D'Ansembourg

Humanizing Health Care, Melanie Sears

Heart to Heart: Three Systems for Staying Connected, Gina Simm

Connection Parenting, Pam Leo

Any books by Sura Hart and Victoria Kindle Hodson

Kazu Haga:

- Fierce Vulnerability: Healing from Trauma, Emerging Through Collapse
- Healing Resistance

Feelings and Needs

A set of **Feelings and Needs cards**, as well as other free resources, can be downloaded/printed for free here:
opencommunication.org/resources.html

Feelings

FEELINGS GUIDE ME TO UNIVERSAL NEEDS

Joy & Contentment

glad	happy	tender	warm
joyful	pleased	peaceful	eager
refreshed	intrigued	relieved	thankful
delighted	relaxed	serene	adventurous
invigorated	thrilled	excited	calm
content	curious	amazed	inspired
bubbly	invigorated	energetic	loving
touched	vivacious		

Fear & Anxiety

afraid	alarmed	anxious	cautious
troubled	apprehensive	lonely	nervous
shocked	tense	worried	terrified
restless	numb	torn	confused
rattled	uneasy	unsure	bewildered

Anger & Frustration

aggravated	agitated	angry	annoyed
cranky	frustrated	furious	impatient
indignant	infuriated	resentful	upset

Sadness & Grief

sad	fragile	anguished	troubled
lonely	discouraged	exhausted	melancholy
despairing			

FEELINGS GUIDE ME TO UNIVERSAL NEEDS

(NEEDS list next page)

Beware!! Thoughts disguised as feelings (more examples on page 91)

attacked	rushed	bullied	overworked
ignored	stupid	rejected	betrayed
manipulated	intimidated	unappreciated	etc., see list p.

Needs & Values

FEELINGS GUIDE ME TO UNIVERSAL NEEDS

Connection

acceptance	appreciation	cooperation	community
compassion	consideration	empathy	intimacy
love	mutuality	nurturing	self-respect
safety	stability	support	to see and be seen
to be heard	to be understood	to be seen for my true intentions	
understanding	trust	interdependence	honoring agreements

Meaning

celebration of life	challenge	clarity	competence
contribution	creativity	discovery	growth
learning	mourning	purpose	stimulation
self-expression	to matter	to understand	to explore and honor my own values

Honesty

authenticity
integrity
presence

Peace

beauty
ease
harmony
inspiration
order

Autonomy

choice
space
spontaneity
freedom

Play

joy
fun
humor

Well Being

air / food / water
belonging
movement / exercise
sensory stimulation
rest / sleep
touch
intimacy

Examples of Faux Feelings
(not an exhaustive list)

accepted/rejected
appreciated/unappreciated
attacked
betrayed
bullied
criticized
disliked
distrusted/trusted
harassed
ignored
intimidated
left out
manipulated
misunderstood
neglected
overpowered
pressured
put down
stupid
tricked
unwanted

Empathy Blocks

Advising: "I think you should . . ."

Educating: "This could turn into a positive experience if you just . . ."

One-Upping: "That's nothing, wait till you hear what happened to me."

Consoling: "It wasn't your fault; you did the best you could."

Sympathizing: "Oh you poor thing."

Story-telling: "That reminds me of something I heard on the news . . ."

Shutting down: "Cheer up. Don't feel so bad." "Come on, let's go (for an ice-cream) (to the gym)."

Questioning: "When did this begin?"

Correcting: "That's not how it happened."

Reassuring: "It will all be OK."

Denial of Feelings: "Don't worry. It's silly to worry."

Minimizing: "This isn't so important."

Diagnosing: "Your problem is you're a compulsive worrier."

Analyzing: "I think you are reacting like this because of your personality type."

Spiritualizing: "When one door closes, another always opens." Or "It's probably karma."

**“DON'T GIVE UP HOPE!”
- HH Dalai Lama**

Keep On Keep'n On

I've been struggling to write a piece for the newsletter. It's been weeks now that I have quietly demanded that "today-would-be-the-day" that I got it done. Yet each night I went to bed with it unwritten and bigger "should" energy building inside.

It's been a busy summer and early autumn. Most of August I was facilitating dialogue with international educators at Seeds of Peace International Camp. Since my return home there has been almost daily care of my elderly mother, harvesting of the garden, some amounts of self-care, stacking wood in preparation for winter, and getting the autumn *NVC* events moving. These take time, and I noticed that I was also using all this busyness to avoid writing for the newsletter.

Slowly some curiosity was also growing: what needs were stirring in me that were blocking my writing? I got in touch with the desire to be effective and to contribute something that would actually be beneficial. I found myself asking, "What more can I say? I've already written what I know about *NVC*." I found my aching for community and companionship seemed to censor the flow of writing. An old fear grew strong, that the quality of the writing would be insufficient to communicate what I longed to say.

So what DO I want to share with you? I want to let you see into the lives of the people I am privileged to know through my *NVC* work. I want you to be as inspired as I am to keep practicing, to keep integrating the vision that Marshall Rosenberg held out to us. He envisioned a world in which people experienced Power With; where people were in touch with their own needs and held them with equal importance to the needs within others. He envisioned a world where we all understood that we mattered – where every moment mattered.

October 6, 2014, was Marshall's 80th birthday. What an effect he has had on my life and the lives of an ever-growing number of people. In the past two months I have had the honor to share *NVC* in many venues: at Seeds of Peace International Camp, at the Midcoast Regional Reentry Center, at a peer support center in Augusta, at the Common Ground Fair, in a new session of the Maine *NVC* Integration Program, in an Advanced Practice Group, and in individual coaching sessions. What keeps me going – what I think kept Marshall going – is the realizations expressed by participants, no matter what the venue.

"I see now that when I'm angry, the other person is having feelings and needs too. I can see a wider perspective."

"I know that I suffer. Now I can see you suffer more." "I always thought my emotions were a big sign over my head reading, 'mentally ill.' Now I understand my emotions are just emotions, and that there are beautiful needs underneath. Its OK to have emotions; everyone does."

"Those cards are like magic. I can help my friends who haven't taken this course when they are overwhelmed. We go through the cards and they feel better."

"I never knew I could speak to someone for the 'other side' without screaming at them. You helped us talk and listen to each other. Amazing."

"I started drinking when I was nine so I wouldn't feel my feelings. My life was hard - I always felt terrible. I see that I drank to not feel. Now I know feelings help me find needs, and that feels good. I don't have to drink. When I drink I get violent – that's not good for anyone."

These are just a few of the ways people have let me know what an impact *NVC* is having in their lives. Hearing these nourishes me deeply, like a wonderful banquet of wholesome, organic food. They provide me with a

strength and determination to keep practicing myself, even though often in my day-to-day life I don't practice fully before speaking. (So many opportunities to practice beneficial regret.)

The world is hungry for sustainable relationships based on authentic harmony. Maine is a special place and I envision its potential as a model of needs-based community. This moment matters! I invite you to renew and deepen your connection to the life-serving essence of *NVC*. Let's help each other by holding our *NVC* intentions dearly and practicing whole-heartedly. Our efforts matter.