

The Amazing Power of Empathy Based on Nonviolent Communication (NVC)

Bren Hardt, CNVC Certified Facilitator

Whole-Hearted-Communication.com

Based on Nonviolent Communication, developed by Dr. Marshall
Rosenberg; CNVC.org



IMAGINE ... connecting with the human spirit in each person in any situation

IMAGINE ... interacting in a way that everyone's needs are equally considered

IMAGINE ... shifting patterns of thinking that lead to reaction or anger, depression, guilt, shame

NVC has one purpose: To connect us compassionately with our true self, others, and Life

NVC asks two questions: 1. *What's alive in me? What's alive in you?* 2. *How can we contribute to making life more wonderful?*

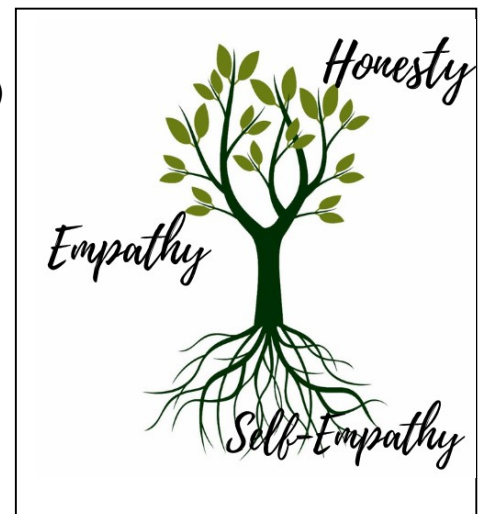
Three ways to achieve connection in NVC

- **Listening** so others feel not only heard but understood. (**Empathy**)
- **Speaking** so others can truly hear us (**Honesty**)
- **Connecting to ourselves** for clarity, compassion & empowerment

Four main skills/components

1. identifying the **neutral facts** stimulating feelings
2. tuning into and naming emotions / **feelings** free of interpretation
3. identifying our values, wants, **needs** without reference to strategy
4. making clear, negotiable **requests** rather than demands

Zero Step: Pause, breathe, check if our intention is to connect.



A few NVC premises

1. All human beings have capacity for and respond to respect and compassion.
2. All behavior, however ineffective or tragic, is an attempt to meet a universal human need.
3. The path to happiness is choosing to transform our “right/wrong” judgments into needs.
4. Connection arises from mutual understanding of the needs behind our behavior.
5. We will fare better to understand needs than work mutually toward solutions. (Power-with)

“The objective of Nonviolent Communication is not to get what you want. The goal is to create a quality of connection that seeks to get everyone’s needs met through “compassionate giving” – acting from a natural enjoyment of contributing to each other’s well being.” - Marshall Rosenberg, PhD., creator of The Center for Nonviolent Communication (NVC), www.cnvc.org, and author of *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*.

“This workshop is based exclusively on the NVC process as I understand it at the present time.”—Bren Hardt



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FACETS OF EMPATHY

1. **Empathic Presence** – Be there; don't do anything. Rest full attention on the speaker with the intention to connect and understand their perspective; let go thinking or trying to understand, listen with unconditional positive regard, warm curiosity, spaciousness and stillness without losing awareness of self.
2. **Empathic Understanding** – an internal frame through which you can make sense of the other person's experience with a focus on their feelings and needs and they become aware of this connection, they sense they are "gotten".
3. **Empathic Reflection** – Verbal confirmation of the empathic understanding. This involves reflecting back to the speaker what you're hearing them say in a way you guess they would like to be heard, in a way that is true for them, their world, their reality, their mindset. Reflect what they observed, what they feel, what they are wanting to happen instead. Avoid agreeing/disagreeing with their interpretations.

Empathic Reflection can take a number of forms including (1) using the person's own words or (2) a paraphrased summary (recap) or (3) a reflection that ties the feelings to the needs or longings, and more.

If you sense the person sharing an experience is wanting support, use a **needs-based reflection*** that connects observation, thoughts, feelings, and wishes to needs. There is healing power in relating directly to needs because needs words are so powerful.

When we practiced in the class, we used a template as "training wheels":

Are you ___feeling___ because of the need of ___need/value___?

* “Needs-based reflection runs the risk of saying things that have very little to do with what’s truly going on for the person who spoke. By definition, this kind of reflection involves much more interpretation than offering a summary, and the interpretation can easily be filtered through the life experience of the person who offers the reflection and be completely off. The risk is worth it. It helps focus the other person’s attention on what they want instead of on their own opinions, analysis, or what should be done. In that way, it provides deeper understanding of self along with direction about where to move.

“If your guess matches what is true, the sense of being understood provides an enormous gift. If your guess is not accurate, the attempt itself reminds the other person that they matter. Both on the receiving end of empathy and when offering it to others, I relish the power of focusing on what’s wanted and having energy to move towards it.”- Miki Kashtan, CNVC certified Trainer, The Fearless Heart and Making Life Work.

Other forms of Empathic Reflection are presented by trainers of Nonviolence Communication. Some of these include empathic expression, acknowledgement guess, using metaphors, and more.

Suggested practices while you are offering empathy

If you are just learning about NVC, it is important to use the FEELINGS INVENTORY and NEEDS INVENTORY as interpretations or thoughts are habitually confused with feelings (e.g. Betrayed; misunderstood). Strategies for meeting needs are habitually confused with universal human needs (e.g. Money; obedience).

- Develop trust in every human being’s capacity for self-connection, and in the quality of healing that happens when people learn to trust themselves.
- Remember you are just holding a non-judgmental space of presence to support the other person’s self-understanding or self-expression; we do not present ourselves as experts.
- If you are at a loss to get a sense of what the person wants, begin with one of the 4 basic needs: Meaning, Autonomy (freedom), Connection, Survival.
- Remember that just as important as the words you use are: 1. Gentle eye contact 2. Kind facial expression 3. Warm tone of voice 4. Expressive hand and body gestures 5. Relaxed disposition 6. Slow speech rate 7. Brevity (The more you speak, the more it becomes about you.)
- Go slow and follow the persons’ lead. Guess one need per response.
- Even if we have ideas of what might be useful for the other person, we try to refrain from making empathy guesses in those directions,
- Even if your guess is not accurate, the attempt itself reminds the other person that they matter and may nudge them to think of their need(s) themselves.

- NVC suggests an unusual pairing of feelings and Universal Human Needs; we pair the unpleasant emotion with the “dream”, the universal quality we yearn for. You are likely used to hearing the opposite. So, stay expressing the ESSENCE of the need. *“Are you upset because you want to know you matter?”*

Refrain from expressing the DEFICIT of the need: e.g. *“Are you upset because you are not getting consideration?”*
Or *“Are you upset because your need to be seen for your intentions was not met?”*

- You may wish to add a specific flavor of the need for more resonance. For example: To fine tune a guess in the “freedom” category, your need guess might be: *“Could it be freedom to express opinions?”* or *“Are you wanting the autonomy to make decisions about one’s life?”*
- Guess a feeling or reflect energetic reality without joining the person in their judgment, without agreeing or disagreeing. E.g. To the expression “He’s the biggest idiot I have ever met.”
 - ◆ *“You really hate what he said.”*
- Repeat what you heard: e.g. “I miss him.” ◆ *“You miss him.”*
- Invite the speaker to go deeper. ◆ *“Tell me more. I really want to understand.”*
- Summarize what you’re getting. ◆ *“It seems like maybe you are torn between X and Y?”*
- Guess under the words said to a need or value, the WHY of the emotion
e.g. *“It’s hard for me to take this much time for this training.”*
 - ◆ *“You want to support your kids & spouse?”*
- As you gain skills, you can speak more naturally, perhaps dropping words “feeling” and “need”. For example:
 - ◆ *“If I’m hearing you, it sounds like you’re confused about what to do and would really appreciate some support in figuring it out... is that accurate?”*
- Empathy allows the speaker to touch deeper levels within themselves. Stay with empathy until you notice (1) a sense of release of tension or (2) the flow of words comes to a halt.

If the person is upset about something involving you...

- ... keep yourself out of the empathy guess! Remain clear that the source of upset is that person’s perceived unmet needs; this helps you keep your heart open instead of adopting a defensive attitude. (If you cannot set yourself aside temporarily in order to receive the other person, ask for a pause and come back to the conversation after you are resourced by self-empathy or empathy from another.)

Example: *“You always leave such a mess when you come home from soccer.”*

- AVOID: *“Are you ticked-off and wanting me to pick up after myself better?”*
- SUGGESTED: ◆ *“Are you ticked-off and wanting some order around here?”*

◆ Please ask before distributing this information to others. Profound appreciation to other CNVC certified trainers including Kathy Simon and Miki Kashtan.

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