

Workbook:

NVC - key ingredients

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A woman dreamt she walked into a brand new shop in the market place and, to her surprise, found God behind the counter. 'What do you sell here?' Everything your heart desires,' said God. Hardly daring to believe what she was hearing, the woman decided to ask for the best things a human being could wish for. 'I want peace of mind and love and happiness and wisdom and freedom from fear,' she said. Then as an after thought, she added, 'Not just for me. For everyone on earth.' God smiled, 'I think you've got me wrong, my dear. We don't sell fruits here. Only seeds. (Anthony de Mello 1987)

IN EACH human being there are seeds of compassion, autonomy, willing cooperation and joy in life. Using Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is a way to nourish these seeds and help them grow. What does using the Nonviolent Communication process involve?

Clear intention

NVC can be used unilaterally by someone with a clear intention, without the other person having any knowledge of the process – or even any similar intention.

Intentions that are in harmony with the process of NVC are:

- compassion
- respect for each human being
- acting in such a way as to meet everyone's needs
- exchanging resources and resolving differences harmoniously
- enjoying life together

Attention in the present

Right now is the only moment when we are alive and can make a difference. Using the NVC process involves present moment awareness of what is going on in ourselves and others.

NVC recommends doing this by focusing our attention on the following life connected information.

RIGHT NOW

WHAT ARE YOU

- Observing
- Feeling?
- Needing?
- Requesting?

WHAT AM I

- Observing?
- Feeling?
- Needing?
- Requesting?

Awareness of people's needs (including our own) is at the heart of the NVC process. What people are observing and feeling arises from whatever need is present. NVC adds a request for action, designed as one step towards meeting the need, right now. In this way using NVC ensures that people's actions are efficient and will enhance life.

Needs are universal to all human beings, so connecting on this level of needs brings people into kinship with each other, and brings forth the wish to cooperate and enrich each other's lives.

Communication

Communication is different from two people taking turns at self-expression. It is a way of coming together and really meeting one another. Communication produces

- contact
- connection
- exchange.

Sadly, the way we think, listen and use words often interferes with true meeting. So NVC educates us in how to:

- avoid pitfalls inherent in the language we are accustomed to using
- choose to stop thinking in terms of who is right and who is wrong
- identify with accuracy observations, feelings, needs and requests.

Observations

A common pitfall is to mix judgements into the observation. For example:

When I see you deliberately ignoring her . . .

The observation behind this might be:

When I hear her say 'good morning' as she approaches you, and I see you turn your head and look out the window without saying anything . . .

A safe rule for observation language is to include only what you can see or hear people do. You can refer to the past or the future in this step by saying what you are remembering or imagining someone saying or doing. So a sentence structure that leads you into observation language is:

When I see/hear/remember/imagine . . .

Feelings

Starting a sentence with 'feel' is no guarantee that a feeling will be expressed! For example:

'I feel that . . . or 'I feel you . . . ' usually precedes a thought such as 'feel that colleagues should be able to talk to each other' or 'I feel you are being childish.'

What NVC suggests for this step is to find a word that expresses your present emotion. In this example, it might be 'I feel sad' or 'I feel worried.'

But be aware! Interpretations creep in easily when we mean to express a feeling: for example, 'I feel used.'

You will have a chance to express what is underlying these interpretations more accurately and productively, when you say your present need in the next step.

Causal link between feelings and needs

'I feel . . . because I need . . . '

'Are you feeling . . . because you are needing

If there were one language structure that could prevent misery and violence, this would be it! This insight is perhaps the most powerful in NVC.

When feelings are expressed without the link to needs being made clear, people often disconnect from each other. Identifying this causal link is a breakthrough in human relations!

Needs

Needs are what bring us to life. They can be

- physical: e.g., food, shelter, warmth
- social: e.g., company, support, trust
- spiritual: e.g., beauty, humour, peace.

Sentences that lead into needs start: 'I need/I would like/I would have liked/I want/ . . . The main pitfall in expressing needs is to mix them with requests. In NVC needs are general which gives us an awareness that they can be satisfied in a number of ways. Expressing this means leaving out specific people, places, or circumstances from the need by saying: 'I would like people to communicate openly' rather than 'I need you to grow up.'

As needs are the core of what connects people compassionately, to miss this step and go direct to requests greatly increases the likelihood of misery and conflict, and decreases the likelihood that compassion will emerge and everyone will get their needs met.

Requests

The skill in making a request is to identify what you want someone else to do, in relation to your present need, and ask for it! Now is the time to be specific. For example: 'Would you be willing to come for a walk with me for five minutes and tell me what is going on in you?'

'Would you be willing?' is not an empty phrase – it accurately expresses the essential difference between a request and a demand. The NVC process involves always being open for a person to say no!

Requests come easier when you realise that to ask someone to do something for you is a gift to them. Contributing to life, by meeting other people's needs, is one of the deepest satisfactions people can receive.

Putting it together

When I hear her say 'good morning' as she approaches you, and I see you turn your head and look out the window without saying anything, I feel sad because I would like people to communicate openly. Would you be willing to come for a walk with me for five minutes and tell me what is going on in you?

Listen to this sentence with blame and interpretations muddled in:

When I see you deliberately ignoring her, I feel you are being childish. I need you to grow up and stop being so pig-headed!

Which would you predict to be more likely to get needs met?

Remember to dance

And so the communication dance begins. Having expressed their present observation, feeling, need and request, the speaker now listens empathetically for these elements of life-connected information in the other person's response – however they express it. When one person uses the NVC process for a few exchanges, both in listening and expressing, the whole tone of the interaction alters, and a new quality of human connection emerges.

Results

NVC transforms

- blame (it's your fault . . .)
 - criticism (that's just not good enough)
 - labels (lazy, English, neurotic)
 - insults (you stupid idiot)
 - threats (if you don't . . . I'm going to . . .)
 - attack (various forms of 'I want to demolish you')
 - self-diminishment (doing any of the above to ourselves)
 - guilt, depression, anger and shame
- . into life-giving messages.

NVC facilitates . . .

- openness and clarity
- accurate understanding
- being honest without insulting
- giving and receiving feedback that supports learning and self-esteem
- hearing 'no' without taking it as a rejection
- saying 'no' without fear or guilt
- apologising without losing self respect
- speaking out without making matters worse
- handling conflict with confidence
- responding with compassion in difficult situations
- using time effectively
- enjoying team work
- acting out of choice, not fear.

No printed description can convey how it feels to be in the atmosphere of this kind of communication. Maybe it's how a drooping plant feels when it suddenly rains just the right amount, and then the sun comes out, and the plant can feel itself reviving and growing.

Using NVC helps to grow something in your being and in the being of those with whom you communicate. Whether you call it compassion, or clarity, warmth, understanding, gentleness and strength combined, NVC brings humanity to daily life.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Bridget Belgrave has twenty years experience in the field of personal development. Since 1996 she has been working with the international Center for Nonviolent Communication as a certified trainer. www.LifeResources.org.uk

More information about the Center for Nonviolent Communication (CNVC): www.cnvc.org

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