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Nonviolent/Compassionate Communication—Let It Begin With Me  
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This OVERVIEW of Nonviolent/Compassionate Communication presents a guide for reframing how we express ourselves with honesty and clarity, while hearing others with respectful and empathic attention. Those familiar with NVC/CC are welcome to share their experience. Join in exploring NVC/CC as a change agent for us individually and in the world.

**Acknowledgement:** Nonviolent Communication has been part of UUCC, and includes participation from the larger community, for a number of years. A primary person in arranging trainings, information sessions, and practice groups, is Helen Wing. Thoughts and resources from Helen are included in this presentation. Thank you, Helen

Those who have had training and/or have participated in practice sessions are invited to share in a sentence or two throughout the session, about how NVC/CC has affected them.

**Focus of this presentation:** This is an *overview* of a process for communication that starts with each of us as individuals. How we approach communication affects the flow and outcome, including how we are compassionate toward ourselves. The content is taken from material from Helen Wing, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life* by Marshall Rosenberg, from application of NVC in my own experience.

**Background/overview** Nonviolent communication, a model developed by Marshall Rosenberg, is an approach to communication based on the human needs and feelings that underlie all behavior. Rosenberg's work began during the 1960s civil rights era, and seeks to teach a means of *developing empathy* as a basis for communication rather than the models of blame and judgment we have all learned so well.

Terminology: Nonviolent versus Compassionate

Nonviolent communication (NVC): Moving from a violent society

Compassionate communication (CC): Moving toward a compassionate society

“Believing that it is our nature to enjoy giving and receiving in a compassionate manner, I have been preoccupied most of my life with two questions. What happens to *disconnect* us from our compassionate nature, leading us to behave violently and exploitatively? And conversely, what allows some people to *stay connected* to their compassionate nature under even the most trying circumstances?” Marshall Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication*, p1

<(Reading: “Murderer, Assassin, Child-Killer”, *Nonviolent Communication*, p. 13-14)>

“Within a few months I covered one wall in my room with acts of “*passive*” violence which Grandfather [MK Gandhi] described as being more insidious than “physical” violence. He then explained that violence ultimately generated anger in the victim who, individual or as a member of a collective, responded violently. In other words, it is passive violence that fuels the fire of physical violence. It is because we don't understand or appreciate this that either all our efforts to work for peace have not fructified or that each peace has been temporary. How can we extinguish a fire if we don't first cut off the fuel that ignites the inferno?”

Arun Gandhi, “Foreword”, *Nonviolent Communication*, Marshall Rosenberg

## NVC/CC IS NOT ABOUT

Being nice <> Being right or wrong <> Avoiding conflict  
OR Getting what we want

As a people, we are semi-literate regarding feelings and needs.

Over the course of our lives we LEARN:

- To crave being right - to fear being wrong
- To judge and blame
- Make comparisons
- Make demands
- To think of our needs as bad - “needy” is not good
- To value thinking over feeling (head over heart)

NVC/CC challenges these habitual ways of being with assertions that:

>All humans have the same needs. Needs are Universal.

>Feelings result from Needs being either met or unmet. When needs are met we feel happy, pleased, energized, satisfied, excited, etc. When needs are unmet we feel sad, hurt, scared, troubled, distressed, disappointed, anxious, irritable, etc.

>Actions are attempts to meet needs.

>Judgments that imply “wrongness” are indirect, and often tragic expressions of unmet needs.

>When we perceive the other as “enemy” or feel despairing we need **self-empathy**. Only then can we move toward empathy or compassion for the other.

>The purpose of NVC is to promote giving willingly from the heart. A core belief is that it is in our nature to enjoy giving and receiving in a compassionate manner.

*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right-doing, there is a field. I'll meet you there. Rumi*

**Preparing for the Process** An attitude is in the mindset, the core beliefs we carry with us into any situation. The four Nonviolent Communication (NVC) steps [observing, feeling, needing, and requesting] rest on the assumption that people’s deepest satisfaction can be found in connecting fully to our own needs, including our need to be supportive of others in meeting their needs. Those who practice NVC and many others see the most basic energy of the universe as one of cooperation, connection, and compassion – that our hunger to give and receive these is our core motivator. Compassionate Communication: Attitude (SGM Session, UUCC)

Respect: Inherent worth and dignity of every person

*Acceptance* is respect for another – and myself --wherever we are in our life journeys. Respect for the inherent worth and dignity of every being allows connection, discovery, and growth.

*Assumptions* indicate that we know how another thinks, feels, or is going to act or react.

Assumptions are dismissive: “I can read you” or “I know you better than you know yourself!” implies influence over me. Resistance to assumptions is immediate and deep – anger from being dismissed, withdrawal from interactions, distrust that my thoughts will even be considered.

May we embrace *acceptance* and dispense with *assumptions*.

## NVC Process

We *observe* what affects our well-being.

We *feel* in relation to what we observe.

We *have needs* that underlie our feelings.

We *make requests* in order to enrich our lives.

Two parts of NVC:

1. Expressing honestly through the process
2. Receiving empathically through the process

Observe without evaluating or judging

Feel rather than define what people do to us.

Take responsibility for our own feelings

Own our own needs.

Make requests clear, positive and doable.

**Empathy:** We empathize with others, trying to understand what they are feeling and needing. The goal is to understand rather than to “be right”. We do this *after* we have empathy for ourselves.

## OBSERVATION

**Observations;** Specific to time and context, concrete. These are descriptive of what you have actually seen and heard with no interpretations mixed in. Quoting what someone said is preferable to paraphrasing. Simplicity and clarity.

Observation entails the *separation from evaluation*. Observations are key to clearly and honestly express how we are to another person. When we combine observation with evaluation, the focus may change from the *objective* to the *subjective*, and prompt response that can be disputed. NVC/CC does not mandate that we remain completely objective and refrain from evaluating. It requires that we maintain a separation between our observations and our evaluations.

### Observing without evaluating

- > When we combine **OBSERVATION** with **EVALUATION** people may hear criticism.
- > When we hear criticism we are apt to become resistant or defensive.
- > Thus it is helpful to learn to distinguish observations from evaluations.

## EXERCISE

### OBSERVATION OR EVALUATION?

Circle the number in front of any statement that is an *observation only*, with no evaluation mixed in. (Answers are at the end. See Marshall, p.34-35 for explanations.)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. “John was angry with me for no reason.”                  | 7. “Pam was first in line every day this week.” |
| 2. “Yesterday Nancy bit her fingernails while watching TV.” | 8. “My son often doesn’t brush his teeth.”      |
| 3. “Sam didn’t ask for my opinion during the meeting.”      | 9. “Luke told me I didn’t look good in yellow.” |
| 4. “My father is a good man.”                               | 10. “My aunt complains when I talk with her.”   |
| 5. “Janice works too much.”                                 | Not in book                                     |
| 6. “Hemy is aggressive.”                                    | 11. “He’s often dismissive of my suggestions.”  |
|   | 12. “Jennifer betrayed her friend’s trust.”     |

We also may use language that may be alienating or confusing. *Words that add to or complicate phrasing deprive us of the ability to communicate simply and without judgment.* This decreases the clarity, detracts from the meaning, and pulls attention from the statement itself.

*Adjectives of judgment:* a ‘good’ way to do this, or a ‘good’ way to get there, can become “a way” What is a good way for one person may not be a good way for another person. The valuative word causes a pause, even if slightly, and disrupts the flow of meaning.

‘*Lead-ins*’ and *insertions* cloud communication:

“I know that I am not as experienced as you, BUT.....

“I know that the sun is shining now, BUT

“AND I know that you know this, BUT.....”

“HOWEVER,.....”

Lead-ins and insertions are a challenge for a response and distract the listener.

*Absolutes* may not be absolute! The words such as “always”, “never”, “ever”, “only” and “whenever” cloud observations. They are generally not needed for the meaning to be clear.

*It is easier to relate with language that is direct, that flows smoothly and does not require interpretation.* On a personal note, technology helps. I tend to write by saying first what I feel or think about the content, then go back and delete the value statements and work in other parts of nonviolent communication. Rereading and rewriting helps to delete wording that detracts from what I want to say. The essence: *If I were the person reading my writing or hearing me, is what I am saying as objective as I can make it?*

Let me say what I mean, mean what I say

Without cluttering words to bring meaning *my* way. Clarity.

May I honor your intelligence with space in my speech

For us to relate with the presence of each. Respect.

Let derailing words not enter our exchange,

So we are truly free to make some change. Flexibility

Let me not evaluate as we try to connect,

But let meaning arise as on each other’s words we reflect. Connection

May our words hold space for our feelings and needs,

As with compassion we sow true communication seeds.

HZ

## FEELINGS

Feelings are red flags or signposts pointing to needs, met or unmet.

In NVC, we distinguish between words that express *actual feelings* and those that describe *what we think we are*, or what how we think others see us..

1. “I feel *unimportant* to the people with whom I work.” The word *unimportant* describes how I think others are evaluating me, rather than an actual feeling, which might be “I feel *sad*” or “I feel *discouraged*.”
2. “I feel *misunderstood*.” Here the word *misunderstood* indicates my assessment of the other person’s level of understanding rather than the actual feeling. In this situation, I may be feeling *anxious* or *annoyed* or some other emotion.

3. "I feel *ignored*." Again, this is more of an interpretation of the actions of others than a clear statement of how we are feeling. No doubt there have been times we thought we were being ignored and our feeling was *relief*, because we wanted to be left to ourselves. No doubt there were other times, however, when we felt *hurt* when we thought we were being ignored, because we had wanted to be involved.

To make the shift to *actual feelings* when you catch yourself using words like the above ask yourself, eg., "How do I feel when I think someone has *abandoned* me?" Do I feel hurt, sad, lonely, angry?"

When we say "I feel" followed by *like, that, as if, it, you, he, she, they*, what is expressed is most likely what we are *thinking*, not what we are *feeling*. And the thoughts are most likely to be ***evaluations, judgments, or criticism***.

For example: "I feel *like* a failure." is more accurately a thought that expresses a judgment. An expression of feeling might be "I feel disappointed and discouraged with the grade I got on the exam". "I feel *that* you behaved irresponsibly" is also a thought that expresses judgment. A feeling statement might be "I feel irritated when you (describe the behavior you *think* is irresponsible).

### EXERCISE EXPRESSING FEELINGS

Circle the number in front of any statement that expresses a *feeling*. (Answers are at the end. See Marshall, p.47-48 for explanations.)

1. "I feel you don't love me."	6. "You're disgusting."
2. "I'm sad that you're leaving."	7. "I feel like hitting you."
3. "I feel scared when you say that."	8. "I feel misunderstood."
4. "When you don't greet me, I feel neglected."	9. "I feel good about what you did for me."
5. "I'm happy that you can come."	10. "I'm worthless."

On the following chart, the first set of columns are FEELINGS. The last column is NON-FEELINGS (or evaluations that we give in the relation).

The distinction is:

Feeling: *Can anyone else make me feel this way?* If NO, it is a feeling. Non-Feeling: *Is this a perception from the action of another?* If YES, it is an evaluation.

*"No one can make you feel inferior without your consent."* Eleanor Roosevelt, *This is My Story*

To move from a non-feelings (or what we think others are doing to us) to feelings:

Select an item from the Non-Feeling section.

Identify feelings from listing that more clearly define your feelings.

Feelings are reactions to needs, met or unmet. We can only address *our needs*, related to *our feelings*.

**FEELINGS****SAD**

Anguished  
Ashamed  
Brokenhearted  
Depressed  
Disappointed/  
discouraged  
Disheartened  
Fragile  
Helpless/despairing  
Lonely  
Miserable/numb  
Troubled/hurt  
Vulnerable

**GLAD**

Confident/thrilled  
Delighted  
Encouraged  
Excited  
Grateful  
Happy/ecstatic  
Hopeful/eager  
Inspired/elated  
Optimistic  
Proud  
Relieved/secure  
Satisfied

**MAD**

Agitated  
Annoyed/irritated  
Impatient  
Jealous  
Pessimistic  
Resentful  
Restless  
Upset  
Bitter/hostile  
Disgusted Furious/  
outraged  
Hateful

**TIRED**

Burned out  
Distracted  
Exhausted/frazzled  
Fatigued/depleted  
Fragile  
Helpless  
Indifferent  
Lethargic  
Overwhelmed  
Restless  
Off center  
Weary

**SCARED**

Alarmed  
Anxious  
Guarded  
Horrified  
Terrified  
Jealous  
Lonely  
Nervous/ suspicious  
Overwhelmed  
Guilty  
Panicky  
Shocked  
Tense/wary  
Worried/disturbed

**CONFUSED**

Bewildered  
Doubtful  
Frustrated  
Conflicted  
Hesitant/cautious  
Hurt  
Puzzled/rattled  
Reluctant/unclear  
Skeptical  
Torn/unsure  
Troubled  
Unsettled  
Uncomfortable  
Uneasy/disturbed

**PEACEFUL**

Absorbed/ alive  
Amazed/dazzled  
Blissful/awed  
Calm/relaxed  
Comfortable  
Confident  
Content/satisfied  
Fulfilled  
Loving  
Relaxed  
Secure  
Serene

**LOVING**

Affectionate/warm  
Alive  
Appreciative  
Aroused  
Content  
Fulfilled  
Moved  
Nurtured/nurturing  
Sensitive  
Tender  
Trusting  
Loved

**PLAYFUL**

Creative  
Curious/intrigued  
Eager/interested  
Energetic  
Exhilarated/  
exuberant Fascinated  
Free/adventurous  
Inspired  
Invigorated/refreshed  
Passionate  
Stimulated  
Joyful

**NON-FEELINGS**

Feelings mixed with  
Evaluations or what  
we THINK people do  
to us.

Abandoned  
Abused  
Accepted  
Attacked  
Betrayed  
Blamed  
Cheated  
Coerced  
Criticized  
Distrusted  
Dismissed  
Hassled  
Ignored  
Intimidated  
Inadequate  
Invalidated  
Insulted  
Left out  
Let down  
Manipulated  
Misunderstood  
Neglected  
Overworked  
Patronized  
Pressured  
Putdown  
Rejected  
Threatened  
Unappreciated  
Unheard  
Unseen  
Unsupported  
Unwanted  
Used

## NEEDS

**Needs:** The cause of feelings is needs (met or unmet). Needs are universal and not specific to individuals.

Unfortunately, most of us have never been taught to think in terms of needs. We are accustomed to thinking about what's wrong with other people when our needs aren't being fulfilled. Thus, if we want coats to be hung up in the closet, we may characterize our children as lazy for leaving them on the couch. Or we may interpret our co-workers as irresponsible when they don't go about their tasks the way we would prefer them to.

It has been my experience over and over again that from moment people begin talking about what they need rather than what's wrong with one another, the possibility of finding ways to meet everybody's needs is greatly increased. The following are some of the basic human needs we all share.

### EXERCISE ACKNOWLEDGING NEEDS

Circle the number in front of each statement where the speaker is acknowledging responsibility for his or her feelings by identifying a need. (Answers at the end. See Marshall, p.65-66, for explanation.)

1. You irritate me when you leave company documents on the conference room floor.”	6. “I’m discouraged because I would have liked to have progressed further in my work by now.”
2. “I feel angry when you say that, because I am wanting respect and I hear your words as an insult.”	7. “Things people say sometimes hurt me.”
3. “I feel frustrated when you come late.”	8. “I feel happy that you received that award.”
4. “I’m sad that you won’t be coming for dinner because I was hoping we could spend the evening together.”	9. “I feel scared when you raise your voice.”
5. “I feel disappointed because you said you would do it and you didn’t.”	10. “I am grateful that you offered me a ride because I was needing to get home before my children arrive.”

Emotional Slavery to Emotional Liberation: Needs and the way we relate to others. (p.57-59)  
Stage 1; Emotional Slavery. We believe we are responsible for the feelings (thereby meeting the needs) of others. This can be overwhelming and detrimental to the relationship.

Stage 2: We become aware of the high cost of trying to accommodate the needs of others at our own expense. We are clear what we are not responsible *for*, but have not learned how to be responsible *to* others in a way that is not emotionally enslaving, or tends to pull us back in.

Stage 3: Emotional Liberation, we respond to the needs of others out of compassion, not out of fear, guilt, shame. Our actions are therefore fulfilling to us, as well as to those who receive our efforts. We accept full responsibility for our own intentions and actions, but not for the feelings of others. At that stage, we are aware that we can never meet our own needs at the expense of others.

## UNIVERSAL HUMAN NEEDS

PHYSICAL SURVIVAL	AUTONOMY	Healing	limitations
Air/food/water	To choose one's goals & ways to realize them	Learning/mastery	
Touch	Independence	Meaning	INTERDEPENDENCE
Shelter	Choice	Teaching	Acceptance
Health	Individuality	To create/generate	Appreciation
Safety/security	Self-empowerment	SPIRITUAL	Belonging
Consistency	Solitude	Beauty	Closeness
Sexual expression	Freedom	Harmony/peace	Community
Rest/relaxation	(emotional, spiritual & physical)	Order	Compassion
NURTURANCE		Inspiration	Connection
Touch		Mutuality	Consideration
Physical affection		CELEBRATION OF LIFE	Cooperation
Warmth	INTEGRITY	Aliveness	Emotional safety & freedom
Tenderness	Self worth	Delight	Empathy
Caring	Authenticity	Excitement	Inclusion
Bonding	Respect	Humor	Intimacy
Comfort	Self respect	Intensity	Love
	Purpose/meaning	Passion	Reassurance
MENTAL	Vision/dreams	Play	Respect
Stimulation/challenge	Honesty	Pleasure	Support
Clarity/to understand	Effectiveness	Stimulation	Trust
Comprehension	SELF-EXPRESSION	To mourn loved ones	Understanding
Information	Creativity	Grieving visions and dreams unfilled	Warmth
Awareness	Growth	Mourning	Contribution to life
Reflection			

## REQUESTS

**Requests:** Doable, clear, and stated in positive action language (what you want - not what you don't want). *By definition, a request means we are open to hearing "No", which signals an opportunity for further dialog.*

There are two kinds of requests: **action requests** - where you are asking someone to do something and **connection requests** - where you ask questions like "Would you be willing to tell me back what you heard me say?" or "Would you be willing to tell me how you feel about what I just said?"

Summary from Marshall Rosenberg, p.85

The fourth component of NVC addresses the question of *what we would like to request of each other to enrich each of our lives*. We try to avoid vague, abstract, or ambiguous phrasing, and remember to use positive action language by stating what we *are* requesting rather than what we *are not*.

Each time we speak, the clearer we are about what we want back, the more likely we are to get it. Since the message we send is not always the message that's received, we need to learn how to

find out if our message has been accurately heard. Especially when we are expressing ourselves in a group, we need to be clear about the nature of the response we are wanting. Otherwise we may be initiating unproductive conversations that waste considerable group time.

Requests are received as demands when listeners believe that they will be blamed or punished if they do not comply. We can help others trust that we are requesting, not demanding, by indicating our desire for them to comply only if they can do so willingly. The objective of NVC is not to change people and their behavior in order to get our way; it is to establish relationships based on honesty and empathy that will eventually fulfill everyone’s needs.

**EXERCISE  
EXPRESSING REQUESTS**

Circle the number in front of each of statement in which the speaker is clearly requesting that an action be taken. (Answers at the end. See Marshall, p.88-89 for explanation)

<p>1. “I want you to understand me.”</p> <p>2. “I’d like you to tell me one thing that I did that you appreciate.”</p> <p>3. “I’d like you to feel more confidence in yourself.”</p> <p>4. “I want you to stop drinking.”</p> <p>5. “I’d like you to let me be me.”</p>	<p>6. “I’d like you to be honest with me about yesterday’s meeting.</p> <p>7. “I would like you to drive at or below the speed limit.</p> <p>8. “I’d like to get to know you better.”</p> <p>9. “I would like you to show respect for my privacy.”</p> <p>10. “I’d like you to prepare supper more often.”</p>
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**SUMMARY OF THE SESSION**

This has been a brief overview of Nonviolent Communication/Compassionate Communication. You are invited to use the process of communication, using this grid.

Process Component	Your Notes
OBSERVATION Being here right now	
FEELING(S) from the Observation	
NEED(S) from Feelings	
REQUEST of yourself or others.	

## ***ANSWERS TO THE EXERCISES***

are noted here. The explanations from Marshall are found in Marshall Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication* on the pages noted for each Exercise.

### **This Handout, p. 3 OBSERVATION OR EVALUATION?**

Answers are here. See Marshall, p.34-35 for explanations.)

Observations: #2, #3, #7, #9. Note #11 and #12 were added and are not observations.

### **This Handout, p. 5 EXPRESSING FEELINGS**

Answers are here. See Marshall, p.47-48 for explanations.)

Feelings: #2, #3, #4, #9

### **This Handout, p 7 ACKNOWLEDGING NEEDS**

Answers are here. See Marshall, p.65-66, for explanation.)

Needs: #2, #4, #6, #10

### **This Handout, p. 9 EXPRESSING REQUESTS**

Answers are here. See Marshall, p.88-89 for explanation)

Request: #2, #7

## **NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION/COMPASSIONATE COMMUNICATIONS RESOURCES**

### **BOOKS**

Rosenberg, Marshall B., PhD. *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 2003. Puddle Dancer Press

Leu, Lucy. *Nonviolent Communication: Companion Workbook: A Practical Guide for Individual, Group or Classroom Study*. 2003

*Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life, 3rd Edition: Life-Changing Tools for Healthy Relationships (Nonviolent Communication Guides)* by Marshall B. Rosenberg (Author), Deepak Chopra (Foreword) (Paperback Sept. 2015)

Hart, Sura & Hodson, Victoria Kindle, M.A. *The Compassionate Classroom: Relationship Based Teaching and Learning*.

### **OTHER**

[www.cnvc.org](http://www.cnvc.org) Official website of the Center for Nonviolent Communication. Has links to articles, Bookstore for ordering books, videos, etc. and training opportunities.

**LEVEL 1/ Introductory Offerings** for the beginner, And those who have read books/seen tapes of the process and now want to have experience with others.

**LEVEL 2/ Intermediate Trainings** for participants who have completed a Level 1 workshop and want more personalized practice in real life situations.

[www.mainenvcnetwork.org](http://www.mainenvcnetwork.org) Website of the Maine NVC Network with links to information about upcoming trainings in Maine.

Google Puddle Dancer Press + NVC it should lead you to the Puddle Dancer site that has an articles archive. Many articles can be downloaded.