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 Marchall 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

**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.)

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

| 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

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

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

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

Abandoned
Abused
Accepted
Attacked
Blamed
Cheated
Coerc
Criticized
Distrust
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
Unwanted
Used

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

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

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

SCARED
Alarm
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

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
Blamed
Cheated
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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 what’s wrong with one another, the possibility of finding ways meet everybody’s needs is greatly increased. The following 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
- Air/food/water
- Touch
- Shelter
- Health
- Safety/security
- Consistency
- Sexual expression
- Rest/relaxation

NURTURANCE
- Touch
- Physical affection
- Warmth
- Tenderness
- Caring
- Bonding
- Comfort

MENTAL
- Stimulation/challenge
- Clarity/to understand
- Comprehension
- Information
- Awareness
- Reflection

AUTONOMY
- To choose one’s goals
- & ways to realize
- Independence
- Choice
- Individuality
- Self-empowerment
- Solitude
- Freedom
- (emotional, spiritual & physical)
- INTEGRITY
- Self worth
- Authenticity
- Respect
- Self respect
- Purpose/meaning
- Vision/dreams
- Honesty
- Effectiveness
- SELF-
- EXPRESSION
- Creativity
- Growth

Healing
- Learning/mastery
- Meaning
- Teaching
- To create/generate
- SPIRITUAL
- Beauty
- Harmony/peace
- Order
- Inspiration
- Mutuality
- CELEBRATION
- OF LIFE
- Aliveness
- Delight
- Excitement
- Humor
- Intensity
- Passion
- Play
- Pleasure
- Stimulation
- To mourn loved ones
- Grieving visions and dreams unfilled
- Mourning

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)

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

**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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process Component</th>
<th>Your Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OBSERVATION</td>
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<td>Being here right</td>
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<td>FEELING(S) from</td>
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<tr>
<td>REQUEST of</td>
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<td>yourself or others.</td>
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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**


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.