



# Immersion in NVC Curriculum

with Roxy Manning and Oren Jay Sofer

September 2023 – April 2024  
A Nonviolent Communication Training

# THE LEADERSHIP TEAM

---

## Lead Trainers

---



**Oren Jay Sofer**



**Roxy Manning**

## Program Assistants

---



**Aïcha Doucouré**



**Brendon Bell**



**Emilia Poppe**



**Emily Chaffin**



**Eva Hamer**



**Jackson Lima**



**Jim Coates**



**Kris Leja**



**Lauren Brown**



**Leeza Pesenson**



**Lily Huang**



**Shannon Casey**



**Shu Liu**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

The Leadership Team	ii
Table of Contents	iii
Immersion in NVC: Program Overview	vi
Key Links and Information	viii
Invitation to Agreements for Multicultural Spaces	ix
Restorative Practices Resource	x
Key Assumptions and Intentions of NVC	1
Introduction to the Core Nonviolence Commitments	4
The List of the Commitments	5
Engaging with the Commitments	11
Nonviolent Communication Quick Reference Guide	12
Basics of Nonviolent Communication	13
Unpacking OFNR (Observations, Feelings, Needs, Requests)	20
Other Conversational Responses	28
Conventional Patterns of Communication	29
"FIX-IT" LANGUAGE	30
CNVC Key Differentiations	31
Increasing Diversity in NVC Circles	33
Empathy Groups	37
Tips for Leading Empathy Groups	39
Empathy Buddy Help Sheet	41
Receiving Empathy Skills	43
Deepening Empathy Skills	45
Four Ears <sup>®</sup> Graphic	81
Translating Habitual Responses	82
NVC Tree of Life: 3 Focus Options for Connection	84
Evaluations Masquerading as Feelings	86
Colloquial Giraffe Options	88
Colloquial Expression of Needs	90
Needs: Facets of Self-Connection	90
Needs: Layers of Self-Connection	92
Self-Appreciation in NVC	93
Self-Empathy Journal	94

Transforming Self-Judgments	96
Self-Judgments: Learning from “Mistakes”	98
Moment of Choice: Key Points	100
Moment of Choice: Practice	101
Self-connection, Authenticity and Vulnerability	102
Taking Responsibility for Our Feelings	103
Taking Responsibility for Our Feelings - Practice	105
Taking Responsibility for Our Actions	106
Transforming Judgments and Enemy Images	107
Working with Anger	109
Self-Connection: Interrupting Skills	111
Interdependence: Expression for Connection	112
Perspective Matters	113
The Circle of Experiences and Perceptions	114
Intention vs Impact Graphic	115
Intention vs. Impact Reflection	116
Power, Resources, and Choice	117
Safety, Choice and Entrustment	133
Privilege Identity Exploration (PIE) Chart	135
Privilege Identity Exploration	136
Social Structures	137
Types of Role Plays / “Role Beings” - Chart	139
Types of Role Plays / “Role Beings” - Summary	140
Mourning, Healing & Reconciliation – Keys	141
Healing and Reconciliation Process	143
Self-Judgments: Mourning and Self-Compassion	147
Requests in NVC	149
Making Requests	153
Connection Requests: Motivations and Examples	154
Goals of Connection Requests	158
Requests: Examples	159
Enriching Life with Requests	161
Linking Connection Requests to Needs	163
Requests Including Both People’s Needs	164
Requests: Connecting Requests to Needs	165

Working with Hearing “No” to Deepen Self-Connection	167
Hearing “NO” in NVC	169
Saying “NO” in NVC	170
Working with Others’ mixed “Yes”	171
Working with Our Own Mixed “Yes”	172
Facing “Demands”	173
Requests in a Group	174
Unique Features of NVC As a Feedback-Giving Tool	176
Feedback Giving	177
Giving Feedback Chart	182
Core Principles for Mediating Conflict	183
5- Step Mediation Model (MM) and 9 Skills	185
Preparing for Difficult Conversations	187
Key Tips for Dialogues Across Differences	188
Difficult Dialogues	190
Daily Practice Options	192
Useful Communication Phrases	195
List of Physical Sensations	198
Feelings Inventory	199
Universal Human Needs – Partial List	200
Needs Inventory for the Workplace	201

## **IMMERSION IN NVC: PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

---

### **September 9 & 10: Core Weekend Training**

A Strong and Vital Heart: Empathy under Fire, with Roxy and Oren (use Oren's zoom link)

*September 20, Wednesday 5:30-6:30pm PT: Zoom coaching call with Oren*

### **October 7 & 8: Core Weekend Training**

Maturing through Self-acceptance, with Roxy and Oren (use Oren's zoom link)

*October 22, Sunday 9:00-10:00am PT: Zoom coaching call with Roxy*

### **November 4 & 5: Core Weekend Training**

Being Real When It Counts: Authenticity and Vulnerability, with Oren

*November 25, Saturday 9:00-10:00am PT: Zoom coaching call with Oren*

### **December 2 & 3: Core Weekend Training**

A Deeper Freedom: Power, Resources and Choice, with Roxy

*December 21, Thursday 5:30-6:30pm PT: Zoom coaching call with Roxy*

### **January 6 & 7: Guest Workshops Online**

Bring friends or family to workshops on different topics with guest trainers; details TBA.

*January 20, Saturday 9:00-10:00am PT: Zoom coaching call with Roxy*

### **February 3 & 4: Core Weekend Training**

Radical Responsibility: Giving and Receiving Without Shame, with Oren

*February 14, Wednesday 5:30-6:30pm PT: Zoom coaching call with Oren*

### **March 2 & 3: Core Weekend Training**

The Art of Mourning, Healing and Reconciliation, with Roxy

*March 20, Wednesday 5:30-6:30pm PT: Zoom coaching call with Roxy*

### **April 6 & 7: Core Weekend Training**

Bridging the Gap: Skills for Mediation, with Roxy and Oren (use Roxy's zoom link)

*\* Please see below and our group forum for key links to join sessions.*

## Sample Weekend Schedule

---

9:00 - 9:15	Opening circle / Activity
9:15 - 10:15	Core Teaching, Q&A
10:15 - 10:25	Break
10:25 - 11:30	Small group practice sessions
2:00 - 3:00	Core Teaching, Q&A
3:00 - 3:10	Break
3:10 - 4:10	Small group practice sessions
4:10 - 4:30	Discussion and closing

- This is a sample schedule only; actual weekend schedules may vary
- Weekend start and end times will always be 9:00am – 4:30pm Pacific Time

## Immersion in NVC: Core Program Components

---

Each month of the program includes the following components:

1. **Core Weekend Training:** 1<sup>st</sup> weekend of each month
2. **Empathy Group:** 2<sup>nd</sup> week, small empathy group meets (new group each month)
3. **Zoom Coaching Call:** 3<sup>rd</sup> week, one hour call with Roxy or Oren
4. **Small Empathy Group:** 4<sup>th</sup> week, empathy group meets again

## Immersion in NVC: Ongoing Program Components

---

1. **Empathy Buddy:** Weekly one-hour meeting with your empathy buddy
2. **Self-study:** Self-guided learning based on monthly handout with materials in this packet and additional online resources
3. **Self-organized Practice:** Practice groups organized by and for participants; may be peer-led or assistant-led
4. **Private Coaching Call:** One 45-minute NVC coaching call with an assistant

## KEY LINKS AND INFORMATION

---

### Online Group Forum:

Join our online group forum here: <https://bit.ly/IN23-forum>

See the “Welcome! Start here” post for instructions, key links, program recordings, handouts, and additional program information.

### Zoom links for Weekend Sessions & Monthly Coaching Calls:

Roxy’s link: <https://bit.ly/Roxy-IN23>

Oren’s link: <https://bit.ly/Oren-IN23>

Meeting ID: 999 0790 4969

Meeting ID: 829 2862 7214

Passcode: 202324

Passcode: 202324

### Attendance and Absences:

Our program thrives on continuity of learning and deepening relationships. *Please do your best to miss no more than TWO full days over the course of our eight months.*

- Please [let us know here](#) as far in advance as possible if you can’t join a session.

### One to One NVC Coaching / Empathy Session with Assistants:

We invite you to sign up for one 45-minute private NVC coaching / empathy session with an assistant. Please sign up EARLY in the year, as slots fill up.

- **To schedule a session:** add your name to [this spreadsheet](#) (instructions there), then reach out to the assistant directly to schedule. <https://bit.ly/IN23-coaching>

### Questions?

**For technical support** with any aspect of our program, please email Brendan at [support@orenjaysofer.com](mailto:support@orenjaysofer.com). (Please allow 24-48 hours for a reply.)

**For questions about registration** or topics not listed, please email us at [nvc@orenjaysofer.com](mailto:nvc@orenjaysofer.com). (Please allow 24-48 hours for a reply.)

**Empathy buddies, monthly practice assignments, or conflict resolution:** See the “Welcome! Start Here” post in our [Group Forum](#) for a list of whom to contact.



## INVITATION TO AGREEMENTS FOR MULTICULTURAL SPACES

---

**Try It On:** Be willing to “try on” new ideas or ways of doing things that might not be familiar, entirely comfortable, or what you prefer.

**Practice Self-Focus:** Attend to and speak about your own experiences and responses. Do not speak for a whole group or express assumptions about the experience of others. We request to please ask for consent before speaking about another person’s experience.

**Understand The Difference Between Intent and Impact:** Try to understand and acknowledge impact. Denying the impact of something said or done by focusing on intent is often more destructive than the initial interaction, as this places emphasis on the doer of the statement/action rather than on the person impacted. We request stretching to name our intent and include the impact that is imagined which might require support as we grow our self-awareness and critical consciousness.

**Hold Awareness of and Sensitivity to Gender Identities:** Please respect the diverse ways in which people self-identify, especially regarding gender identity, expression, and pronouns (e.g., they/them, ze/hir, her/she, he/him, etc.). Calling or referring to a person by a gender pronoun they do not identify with can feel incredibly hurtful and even dehumanizing. Please also acknowledge that not everyone identifies with a particular gender pronoun and may instead prefer to be identified by their name.

**Practice Both / And:** When speaking, consider substituting “and” for “but.” This acknowledges and honors multiple realities and does not diminish or negate one’s perspective.

**Refrain From Blaming or Shaming Self and Others:** Practice giving skillful feedback in response to statements and actions made by people rather than critiquing or criticizing people themselves. Utilizing tools from our NVC practices grounded in observation, feelings, needs and requests can support opportunities for moving toward connection and understanding as we steer away from judgment and hold ourselves and others with care.

**Move Up / Move Back:** Encourage full participation by all present. Take note of who is speaking and who is not. If you tend to speak often, consider “moving back” and vice versa while maintaining awareness about privilege, power, and multiple identities in the room.

**Practice Mindful Listening:** Try to avoid planning what you’ll say as you listen to others. Be willing to be surprised, to learn something new. Listen with your whole self. Practice being curious and listening with your heart connected to the head.

**Confidentiality:** Take home learnings but don’t identify anyone other than yourself, now or later. If you want to follow up with anyone regarding something they said in this session, ask first and respect their wishes.

**Choose to Pass:** You can say “I pass” if you don’t wish to speak.

# RESTORATIVE PRACTICES RESOURCE

---

The purpose of this resource is to support the transformation of interpersonal and systemic tension and conflict in our community during the 2023-24 Immersion in Nonviolent Communication.

**We seek to create a framework that supports these qualities:** Equity, trust, inclusion of all, brave space, dignity, respect, connection, understanding, empathy, good will, flexibility, care, honesty, vulnerability, effectiveness, community restoration, healing, and clarity of process.

In this multicultural community, each of us brings wisdom and skills to conflict transformation that arise from our different experiences and traditions. We aim to honor the unique set of identities and world lens each person brings. By tending to conflicts, we believe we have an opportunity in this community to understand everyone's life experiences and be enriched by what we learn.

## **Multicultural awareness and practices to create inclusive space:**

- We acknowledge that each person is a complex, dynamic, multilayered human being with unique perspectives and experiences that matter.
- We acknowledge that we all are born into systems that impact our individual and group experiences, and that the ways we intersect individually with systemic patterns influences our experiences. Points of intersection include race, gender, sexual orientation, mental health, body ability, social class, language, culture, ethnicity, geography, religion and education.
- We hope that you will be curious about life experiences different from your own. When faced with new perspectives we invite you to:
  - listen with curiosity and respect, welcoming cultural norms different from your own.
  - suspend judgment and see the world through a lens different than your own.
  - if you have questions about race, equity, gender, systemic issues or life experiences different than your own, please ask designated assistants or community members rather than a person who holds the identity you are curious about (unless you have a prior agreement welcoming such questions). Understand that many find it exhausting to be asked questions about their culture from those outside of their culture and that receiving such questions may impact their sense of inclusion.

## **Considerations when working through conflict via digital communication:**

Sometimes using text messages, email, or social media platforms for actively working through conflict may exacerbate or even distract from the original tension or conflict. The lack of non-verbal cues can be limiting to establishing connection and the immediacy of digital communication may discourage pauses for self-connection before responding. *With these challenges in mind, we ask that you consider the following:*

- If all parties are open to it, schedule conversations live instead of communicating digitally.
- If you choose to communicate digitally, consider waiting 24 hours before responding to allow yourself time to pause and self-connect.
- Consider asking for support from someone else in between exchanges.

### **Restorative practices options during and after conflict:**

The following is a document of practices that can be selected when someone is experiencing interpersonal and or systemic tension or conflict. We affectionately refer to it as a “menu.” The order of these practices (depending on the situation) is from least to most human resources required.

Out of consideration for managing limited human resources we request that you try the lower resource-intensive options first. For example, first try self-empathy. If you’re not able to settle from that, you may choose to name impact in the moment or ask for someone else to support you with an empathic presence. If after utilizing both of those practices the tension is still alive for you, you may choose to move on to the next practice, and so on. With that said, we understand that given the nature of the tension or conflict, someone may be aware of our request and still consciously choose to start with a higher resource practice.

**Self-Empathy:** A person experiencing tension or conflict may practice self-connection as a method of transforming pain they are experiencing (see below for a worksheet on self-empathy).

**Name impact in the moment:** Ask for a pause to name impact in the moment it is experienced and to determine strategies to tend to it then or later.

**Empathic Presence:** A person may invite an empathy buddy, assistant, or any other member of the community to offer them empathic presence for the purpose of discovering what’s important to them, in a space removed from the larger group.

**1-on-1 Conversation:** If both people are willing and confident in their ability to resolve the conflict with each other directly, they may do so in a space removed from the larger group.

**Supported 1-on-1 Conversation:** This is the same as a 1-on-1 Conversation, but in the presence of a third person. This third person contributes their presence as needed to support reconciliation, from silent witnessing to active NVC mediation. Either of the two persons involved, or a third person, may invite such a conversation. Participation is voluntary.

**Group Process:** When a person experiencing or impacted by a conflict sees it as necessary for multiple members of the community to be present to address the conflict, they may initiate a group process, such as a Restorative Circle, a talking circle, or a facilitated group dialogue. Participation in such a process is voluntary for all involved.

**Restorative Circle:** One group process option is a Restorative Circle, involving facilitated Pre-Circles, Circle, and Post-Circle. Participation is voluntary.

**Emergent Requests:** Someone experiencing pain/disconnect may also simply notify the group of their needs and make an in-the-moment request for any specific form of support.



# KEY ASSUMPTIONS AND INTENTIONS OF NVC

---

## I. Assumptions Underlying the Practice of Nonviolent Communication

---

Our ideas about individual and collective human nature have evolved and will continue to evolve. These ideas shape our expectations of what's possible, the social structures we create, and how we interact with ourselves and other people. Therefore the assumptions we make can have a profound effect on the life we live and the world we collectively create.

Following are key assumptions that NVC practice is based on. Many traditions share these assumptions; NVC gives us concrete, powerful tools for putting them into practice. When we live based on these assumptions, self-connection and connection with others become increasingly possible and easy.

1. **All human beings share the same needs:** We all have the same needs, although the strategies we use to meet these needs may differ. Conflict occurs at the level of strategies, not at the level of needs.
2. **All actions are attempts to meet needs:** Our desire to meet needs, whether conscious or unconscious, underlies every action we take. We only resort to violence or other actions that do not meet our own or others' needs when we do not recognize more effective strategies for meeting needs.
3. **Feelings point to needs being met or unmet:** Feelings may be triggered but not caused by others. Our feelings arise directly out of our experience of whether our needs seem to us met or unmet in a given circumstance. Our assessment of whether or not our needs are met almost invariably involves an interpretation or belief. When our needs are met, we may feel happy, satisfied, peaceful, etc. When our needs are not met, we may feel sad, scared, frustrated, etc.
4. **The most direct path to peace is through self-connection:** Our capacity for peace is not dependent on having our needs met. Even when many needs are unmet, meeting our need for self-connection can be sufficient for inner peace.
5. **Choice is internal:** Regardless of the circumstances, we can meet our need for autonomy by making conscious choices based on awareness of needs.
6. **All human beings have the capacity for compassion:** We have an innate capacity for compassion, though not always the knowledge of how to access it. When we are met with compassion and respect for our autonomy, we tend to have more access to our own compassion for ourselves and for others. Growing compassion contributes directly to our capacity to meet needs peacefully.

7. **Human beings enjoy giving:** We inherently enjoy contributing to others when we have connected with our own and others' needs and can experience our giving as coming from choice.
8. **Human beings meet needs through interdependent relationships:** We meet many of our needs through our relationships with other people and with nature, though some needs are met principally through the quality of our relationship with ourselves and for some, with a spiritual dimension to life. When others' needs are not met, some needs of our own also remain unmet.
9. **Our world offers abundant resources for meeting needs:** When human beings are committed to valuing everyone's needs and have regained their skills for fostering connection and their creativity about sharing resources, we can overcome our current crisis of imagination and find ways to attend to everyone's basic needs.
10. **Human beings change:** Both our needs and the strategies we have to meet them change over time. Wherever we find ourselves and each other in the present, individually and collectively, all human beings have the capacity to grow and change.

## II. Key Intentions when Using Nonviolent Communication

---

Having clarity about our intentions can help us live and act in line with our values. We hold the following intentions when using NVC because we believe that they enrich our lives and contribute to a world where everyone's needs are attended to peacefully.

### A. *Open-Hearted Living*

1. **Self-compassion:** We aim to release all self-blame, self-judgments, and self-demands, and meet ourselves with compassion and understanding for the needs we try to meet through all our actions.
2. **Expressing from the heart:** When expressing ourselves, we aim to speak from the heart, expressing our feelings and needs, and making specific, do-able requests.
3. **Receiving with compassion:** When we hear others, we aim to hear the feelings and needs behind their expressions and actions, regardless of how they express themselves, even if their expression or actions do not meet our needs (e.g. judgments, demands, physical violence).
4. **Prioritizing connection:** We aim to focus on connecting open-heartedly with everyone's needs instead of seeking immediate and potentially compromised solutions, especially in challenging situations.
5. **Beyond "right" and "wrong":** We aim to transform our habit of making "right" and "wrong" assessments (moralistic judgments), and to focus instead on whether or not human needs appear met (need-based assessments).

## ***B. Choice, Responsibility, Peace***

1. **Taking responsibility for our feelings:** We aim to connect our feelings to our own needs, recognizing that others do not have the power to make us feel anything. This recognition empowers us to take action to meet our needs instead of waiting for others to change.
2. **Taking responsibility for our actions:** We aim to recognize our choice in each moment, and take actions that we believe will most likely meet our needs. We aim to avoid taking actions motivated by fear, guilt, shame, desire for reward, or ideas of duty or obligation.
3. **Living in peace with unmet needs:** We aim to work with our feelings when we experience our needs as unmet, connecting with the needs rather than insisting on meeting them.
4. **Increasing capacity for meeting needs:** We aim to develop our internal resources, particularly our NVC skills, so we can contribute to more connection and greater diversity of strategies for meeting needs.
5. **Increasing capacity for meeting the present moment:** We aim to develop our capacity to connect in each moment with our own and others' needs, and to respond to present stimuli in the moment instead of through static stories about who we and others are.

## ***C. Sharing Power (Partnership)***

1. **Caring fully for everyone's needs:** We aim to make requests and not demands, thus staying open to the other's strategies to meet their needs. When hearing a "No" to our request, or when saying "No" to another's request, we aim to work towards solutions that attend to everyone's needs, not just our own, and not just the other person's.
2. **Increasing capacity for needs-based sharing of resources:** We aim to develop and practice needs-based strategies for sharing our world's resources with the goal of meeting the most needs for the most number of people and for the natural environment.
3. **Protective use of force:** We aim to use the minimum force necessary in order to protect, not to educate, punish, or get what we want without the other's agreement, and only in situations where we find that dialogue fails to meet an immediate need for physical safety. We aim to return to dialogue as soon as we have re-established a sense of physical safety.

# INTRODUCTION TO THE CORE NONVIOLENCE COMMITMENTS

---

by Miki Kashtan

I have not found a word that captures the exact meaning that I am looking for. Commitment may be a bit too rigid, as it tends to connote “should,” invoking the non-choiceful energy of obligation and duty. “Intention” is not strong enough, in my mind, to carry the unwavering force of staying the course even when the going gets hard. Somewhere I also want to capture the unpredictability of life. These commitments are not a promise, which none of us can give. I understand how challenging life is and imagine that, no matter how strong the choice, every single one of us at some point or another will not find sufficient inner resources to follow through on these.

In order to soften the intensity of “commitment” without losing the strength, I am choosing to use the word “aim” rather than “commit” in the actual wording of the commitments. I want the words to remind any of us who makes the choice to follow this path of the overarching clarity that this is what we want and aim for, that we have no in-principle objection to living life in this way, no matter what anyone else is doing, no matter what the structures of the world look like, no matter what the circumstances are.

This is a tall order. This, to me, is a mobilized life. The commitments serve as a compass, a reminder, a scaffolding that can hold us in living by choice in a world that is not of our choosing. Such an individual commitment to nonviolence, within a patriarchal world, means finding ways to transcend and transmute the legacy of separation, scarcity, and powerlessness. This means encountering and committing to transform the implicit ways we participate in responding to life according to the patriarchal frameworks we have all been exposed to. Each of the commitments, in one form or another, engages with and offers an alternative or antidote to one or more of the central mechanisms of patriarchy: controlling people and life, applying right/wrong frameworks to making sense of the world, seeing reality through an either/or lens, blaming and shaming self and others in response to whatever doesn’t work, and engaging in domination and submission as elemental forms of relationship.

Instead, these commitments provide a framework based on the pillars of nonviolence: courage, truth, and love, and offer a comprehensive approach to life within ourselves, with others, and within the larger systems that still shape our lives even as we aim to change them and their effects. Part of this framework is a continual leaning into trust even when we don’t know and can’t know. One of the ways that I understand patriarchy is as a response to traumatic events that led to loss of trust in life. As trust in life may still be missing, the commitment to “Natural Abundance” explicitly invites us back into that trust, which may feel awkward. I still welcome the reminder when I come across it as I look through the commitments.

While the choice to extend ourselves to life fully, without conditions, is ours to make, most often we will encounter a gap between our capacity and our commitment. To bridge that gap, to be able to continue facing reality – external and internal – and focus on what matters to us most, we need each other. This is why each of these commitments includes a reference to seeking support.



Patriarchal structures provide both implicit and overt support for behavior that aligns with the status quo. This means that community is essential for embarking on and sustaining the journey of embracing nonviolence fully. We live in a world that is not designed to meet human needs. Because of that, no matter how far we are on the path, sustaining where we are and meeting the world where it is continues to be a journey. This is why I call on all of us to welcome and seek support for staying on track with these commitments.

## THE LIST OF THE COMMITMENTS

---

### Relating to Myself

1. **Openness to Myself:** Even when I act in ways I really don't like, I aim to keep my heart open to myself. If I find myself in self-judgment and unable to connect with needs, I aim to seek support to reconnect with myself and hold with compassion the needs motivating my actions.
2. **Openness to the Full Emotional Range:** Even when my feelings are uncomfortable for me, I aim to stay present with myself and keep my heart open to the fullness of my emotional experience. If I find myself contracting away from my experience, numb, or shut down, I aim to seek support to release defendedness, bring tenderness to past experiences that may have created my reaction, and open to what is.
3. **Risking my Significance:** Even when I am full of doubt, I aim to offer myself in full to the world. If I find myself thinking that I am not important or that my actions are of no significance, I aim to seek support to bring my presence and gifts to life and choose to engage in a co-creative manner.
4. **Responsibility:** Even when overwhelmed with obstacles or difficult motions, I aim to take full responsibility, within an interdependent context, for my feelings, my thoughts, my needs, my actions, and my life. If I find myself giving my power away to other people, larger forces, habits, or analytic categories such as my past or any labels I put on myself, I aim to seek support to find the core source of choice within me, to attend consistently to my needs and my goals, and to ask for what I want along the way.
5. **Care for My Life:** Even when I am stressed, overwhelmed, or in disconnection, I aim to maintain my commitments to my well-being, and to take actions that nourish my life in community with others. If I find myself letting go of strategies that I know contribute to my life, or retreating from connection to attend to my needs, I aim to seek support to ground myself in the preciousness of including my own life in my interdependent circle of care.

6. **Tenderness towards Limits:** Even when I am drawn to overstretching myself (including towards any of these commitments), I aim to remain attentive to the limits of my capacity in any given moment. If I find myself pushing beyond my capacity, I aim to seek support to honor the natural wisdom of my organism and to stretch only within my current limits as I grow my capacity over time.

## **Orienting towards Others**

7. **Loving No Matter What:** Even when my needs are seriously unmet, I aim to keep my heart open. If I find myself beset with judgments, anger, or other strong reactions, I aim to seek support to learn from and transform my judgments and meet others with love.
8. **Assumption of Innocence:** Even when others' actions or words make no sense to me, frighten me, or have a harmful impact, I aim to assume a need-based human intention behind them. If I find myself attributing ulterior motives, assigning labels, or analyzing others' actions, I aim to seek support to ground myself in the premise that regardless of how far from serving life someone's action appears to be, and even if I choose to use force for protection, ultimately their action is an attempt to meet needs no different from my own.
9. **Empathic Presence:** Even when others are in pain, disconnected from themselves, expressing intensity, or in judgment, I aim to maintain a relaxed presence with their experience. If I find myself attempting to fix, offering unsolicited advice, listening or speaking without heart connection, or turning my attention elsewhere, I aim to seek support to regain my faith in the transformative power and the gift of just being with another.
10. **Generosity:** Even when I am afraid or low-resourced, I aim to keep reaching out to offer myself to others and to respond to requests to share resources on the basis of needs. If I find myself contracting in fear or unwilling to give, I aim to seek support to release any thoughts of scarcity and embrace opportunities to participate in the flow of resources to where they are most needed.
11. **Receptivity:** Even when I am disconnected from my needs, I aim to make myself available to receive unconditionally what others and life offer me. If I find myself believing that I am less than or don't deserve to have resources given to me, or resisting receiving in some other way, I aim to seek support to open to the flow of resources attending to my needs without expecting myself to give anything back.
12. **Discernment and Courage:** Even when I am aware of a potential cost of my actions, I aim to make my choices based on the strongest possible alignment with my purpose and values within a clear assessment of available data, resources, and information about short and long term effects, rather than based on fear. If I find myself hiding, justifying non-action, protecting myself based on habit, or rebelling without discernment, I aim to seek support to restore my

capacity to live in integrity, persist in moving towards purpose, and accept the full range of results that then emerges.

## Interacting with Others

13. **Authenticity and Vulnerability:** Even when I feel scared and unsure of myself, I aim to share the truth that lives in me with others while maintaining care and compassion for all. If I find myself hiding or protecting, I aim to seek support to embrace the opportunity to expand my sense of self and engage even if I may still experience shame or fear.
14. **Availability for Feedback:** Even when I want to be accepted and seen for my intentions, I aim to make myself available to receive feedback from others about the impact of my choices in order to learn and grow. If I find myself defensive or slipping into self-judgments, I aim to seek support to find the beauty and gift in what is being shared with me.
15. **Offering Feedback:** Even when I am afraid of potential conflict, I aim to create opportunities to offer honest, purposeful, and caring feedback to others as information to consider about the impact of their actions on me, others, and life. If I find myself withholding information that might benefit a relationship or a shared purpose, I aim to seek support to ground myself in the power of mindful feedback to increase capacity and connection.
16. **Openness to Dialogue:** Even when I am very attached to a particular outcome, I aim to remain open to shifting through dialogue. If I find myself defending a position or arguing someone else out of their position, I aim to seek support to release the attachment, connect with my needs and the needs of others, and reach for mutually beneficial strategies to emerge out of connection with needs.
17. **Engaging with Conflict:** Even when I have inner or outer obstacles to connecting with someone, I aim to move towards working out issues between us with assistance from others when needed and in a manner that cares for everyone's physical and emotional well-being. If I find myself retreating from engagement, I aim to seek support to restore my willingness to seek healing, reconciliation, or learning through facing conflict, using the full range of available strategies, including mourning the current limits of any relationship.
18. **Using Force with Care:** Even when pathways of dialogue are closed and I come to believe that the only option for preventing imminent harm or damage is using force, I aim to remain steadfast with the choice to use the least amount of force possible with the most amount of love possible and to mourn the impossibility of a fully nonviolent response within a violent culture. If I find myself wishing to hurt or harm or closing my heart while using force, I aim to seek support to bring my intention back to maintaining love and care for the humanity and dignity of everyone and using force only for the purpose of protecting life and finding solutions that work for all.

19. **Interdependence:** Even when I experience separation or deep isolation, I aim to open my heart to the fullness of the interconnectedness of all life and to my place within it. If I find myself retreating into self-sufficiency, separation, or mistrust in my own gifts or those of others, I aim to seek support to remember the beauty and relief of resting in interdependence, including the many ways each of our lives depends on and is affected by the entire web of life, including the gifts, actions, and efforts of others.
20. **Natural Abundance:** Even when in the grip of fear of scarcity, I aim to reach towards life to take what I need, no less and no more, in support of regeneration and sufficiency for all now and into the future. If I find myself accumulating or denying myself the basics, I aim to seek support to trust the ancient wisdom that life flows when we share the fruits of nature and our labor based on needs.
21. **Integration:** Even when facing significant challenges, I aim to integrate seeming opposites such as process and results, autonomy and interdependence, or power and love, into paradoxical tension rather than experiencing them as opposed to each other. If I find myself thinking in binary ways or identifying with one side of such a pair or framing things as tradeoffs, I aim to seek support to go beyond either/or to realign myself with the wholeness of life and embody multiple sides of any seeming opposition.
22. **Accepting What Is:** Even when things fall apart, people don't come through, or calamities take place in the world, I aim to remain open to life without having to like it. If I find myself contracting away from life, drawn to ideas about what should happen, or wishing to control other people's behavior, I aim to seek support to face reality, mourn, find a sense of peace with unmet needs, and choose responses and actions from clarity about how I want to interact with life.
23. **Celebrating Life:** Even when I am faced with major difficulties (personal, interpersonal, or global) I aim to maintain an attitude of appreciation and gratitude for what life brings me. If I find myself becoming cynical or experiencing only pain and despair, I aim to seek support to connect my heart with the beauty and wonder that exist in life even in the most dire circumstances.
24. **Mourning:** Even when it might be easier to turn away from the gap between my vision and the reality around me, I aim to sustain the practice of mourning, including in community, to learn and to regenerate my capacity to creatively respond with integrity to difficult situations. If I find myself acting against something rather than towards vision or shutting down altogether, I aim to seek support to remember the precious gift of tears to fill the gap with mourning, softening the tendency to either suppress my wanting or force the world to conform, and reducing the chances I'll resort to violence in thought, word, or action.

25. **Humility:** Even when I have vast experience and knowledge, I aim to stay present to how little I truly know and how much I am simply part of the unfolding of life. If I find myself trying to control a situation or relying on my authority to avoid engaging with differences, I aim to seek support to release attachment to outcome, embrace complexity and uncertainty, listen to multiple perspectives, and surrender to the awe and mystery of life in its capacity to adapt, transform, and regenerate.

## Engaging with the World

26. **Leadership:** Even when I have no formal authority, when attached to outcome, when others are polarizing, or when I don't fully trust my own power to influence outcomes, I aim to take responsibility to unilaterally choose to care for the whole in interdependent relationships with others. If I find myself choosing a narrower focus or acting without full agency, I aim to seek support to remember that, regardless of others' choices, I am free to act fully in line with my biggest vision and highest values.

27. **Vision:** Even when consumed with horror about the way things are, I aim to generate the most detailed vision that my imagination can conjure of how things can be, at all levels, based on principles of care for all life, needs-based resource flow, and contributions based on willingness. If I find myself joining with others in acting from anger at what's not working without clear vision of what we would do if we happen to succeed, I aim to seek support to ground myself in the inspiring power of vision to mobilize action based on love of the possible.

28. **Multilevel Perspective:** Even when an individual, interpersonal, or systemic lens appears compelling on its own, I aim to maintain my capacity to view and engage with reality from all three perspectives for full choice about contributing to change and attending to more needs. If I find myself consistently overlooking any of these layers, I aim to seek support to refocus my attention on the interconnection of all aspects of life to discern how to respond in each moment.

29. **Social Self-Reflection:** Even when I don't see how the larger social circumstances into which I was born shape my behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs, I aim to seek to understand the patterned differences that arise between those socialized into different social locations, and to choose to act with others across power differences to make it possible for all to partake in shaping our collective future. If I find myself defending, blaming, sinking into shame, giving up my power, or otherwise retreating from engagement, I aim to seek support to act with care for self and others based on compassionate understanding of the social context of our individual choices.

30. **Transparency:** Even when I feel protective of information or concerned about potential misinterpretations, I want to transparently reveal to others decisions, including ones I regret, and the circumstances and reasoning that led to those decisions, financial data, and other

information relevant to personal and organizational function. If I find myself safeguarding information, I want to seek support to recognize the extraordinary power of open communication to restore trust and increase wisdom within a system.

31. **Collaboration:** Even when pressed for time or when trust is low, I aim for engaging with others in mutual influencing to find solutions that work for everyone. If I find myself exercising power over others or abdicating my own power to participate, I aim to seek support to restore my capacity to open to the wisdom, creativity, and renewed energy that are unleashed when power is used effectively with others with the intent of attending to needs, relationships, and shared purpose.
32. **Collective Capacity:** Even when groups I am part of are beset with challenges and divisions, I aim to continue to engage with others to co-create systems that increase our capacity to work towards our shared purpose, in line with our values, and in service to our collective well-being, including mindful use of resources and discerning limits to engagement. If I find myself imposing systems or reluctant to set them up, I aim to seek support to recommit to making conscious agreements, grounded in the vision and values of what we want to create, about who makes which decisions, how resources are generated and shared, how information flows amongst us, how we will provide, receive, and attend to feedback, how we engage with conflict, and how we support each other to maintain our commitments.
33. **Appealing to Others' Humanity:** Even when seeking to create high-stakes change across significant gaps between preferred strategies, I aim to support others to find their creativity, generosity, and integrity rather than attempting to coerce a solution that attends to what's important to me. If I find myself losing faith or patience, I aim to seek support to restore my capacity to act with integrity and to offer loving action as a way to generate shifts in strategies and perspectives.
34. **Collective Action and Strategy:** Even when there is potential cost to me, I aim to participate in nonviolent collective efforts that are either exposing and interfering with the functioning of the dominant culture or creating alternatives to it, so as to transform social structures in service to a world that embraces the needs of all life. If I find myself retreating into the comfort of my personal life, succumbing to hopelessness, or developing hatred towards those whose actions I want to influence, I aim to seek support to bring my intention back to the transformative power of a focused minority working for change while grounded in love and care for the humanity and dignity of everyone.

## **ENGAGING WITH THE COMMITMENTS**

---

This section offers a variety of options for how you can engage with the commitments, whether to deepen your commitment and capacity to embrace the path of nonviolence and/or to integrate these particular commitments as a guide to your own life.

### **A. Embracing the Path of Nonviolence**

1. Engaging with the paradox of the seriousness of commitment without internal demand and with openness to humor and lightness
2. Working to identify and lean on inner strengths and to name, mourn, compensate for, and transcend inner obstacles
3. Finding ways to seek support every step of the way

### **B. Variety of Ways of Working with the Commitments**

1. Using specific commitments as inspiration
2. Using a commitment as the focus of an ongoing path
3. Using one or more commitments as a compass for responding to a situation
4. Moving through the commitments one at a time as daily reflections
5. Engaging the commitments together in a community of practice

## NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

---

Expression		Empathy	
<b>Observation</b>	<i>When I see/hear . . .</i>	[Observation]	<i>[When you see/hear . . .]</i>
<b>Feeling</b>	<i>I feel . . .</i>	<b>Feeling</b>	<i>Are you feeling . . .</i>
<b>Need</b>	<i>. . . because I need . . .</i>	<b>Need</b>	<i>. . . because you need . . .?</i>
<b>Request</b>	<i>Would you be willing...?</i>	[Request]	<i>[Would you like...?]</i>

**Observations:** Description of what is seen or heard without added interpretations. For example, instead of “She’s having a temper tantrum,” you could say “She is lying on the floor crying and kicking.” If referring to what someone said quote as much as possible instead of rephrasing.

**Feelings:** Our emotions rather than our story or thoughts about what others are doing. For example, instead of “I feel manipulated,” which includes an interpretation of another’s behavior, you could say “I feel uncomfortable.” Avoid the following phrasing: “I feel like....” and “I feel that...”—the next words will be thoughts, not feelings.

**Needs:** Feelings are caused by needs, which are universal and ongoing and not dependent on the actions of particular individuals. State your need rather than the other person’s actions as the cause. For example, “I feel annoyed because I need support” rather than “I feel annoyed because you didn’t do the dishes.”

**Requests:** Asking concretely and clearly for what we want (instead of what we don't want). For example, “Would you be willing to come back tonight at the time we’ve agreed?” rather than “Would you make sure not to be late again?” By definition, when we make a request we are open to hearing a “no,” taking it as an opportunity for further dialogue.

**Empathy:** In NVC, we empathize with others by guessing their feelings and needs. Instead of trying to “get it right,” we aim to understand. The observation and request are sometimes dropped. When words are not wanted or are hard to offer, empathy can be offered silently.

**Self-Empathy:** In self-empathy, we listen inwardly to connect with our own feelings and needs. It is that connection which enables us to choose our next step.



# **BASICS OF NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION**

---

## **I. Introduction**

---

Nonviolent Communication (NVC) has been described as a language of compassion, as a tool for positive social change, and as a spiritual practice. NVC gives us the tools and consciousness to understand what triggers us, to take responsibility for our reactions, and to deepen our connection with ourselves and others, thereby transforming our habitual responses to life. Ultimately, it involves a radical change in how we think about life and meaning. NVC is based on a fundamental principle:

Underlying all human actions are needs that people are seeking to meet, and understanding and acknowledging these needs can create a shared basis for connection, cooperation, and more globally – peace.

Understanding each other at the level of our needs creates such connection because, at this deeper human level, the similarities between us outweigh the differences, giving rise to greater compassion. When we focus on needs, without interpreting or conveying criticism, blame, or demands, our deeper creativity flourishes, and solutions arise that were previously blocked from our awareness. At this depth, conflicts and misunderstandings can be resolved with greater ease.

Learning NVC is a process similar to learning a new language or skill: step-by-step learning coupled with ample time for practice lead to growing mastery. While it takes time to develop fluency, any knowledge of a new language makes it more likely that communication can take place. In addition, because NVC invites us to a level of vulnerability and caring that often are not familiar or habitual, full integration of the consciousness underlying this language is likely to require changes in our internal connection to ourselves, and healing of past pain.

The language of NVC includes two parts: honestly expressing ourselves to others, and empathically hearing others. Both are expressed through four components - observations, feelings, needs, and requests – though empathic connection primarily relies on connection at the level of feelings and needs, hence observations and requests may or may not be articulated. Practicing NVC involves distinguishing these components from judgments, interpretations, and demands, and learning to embody the consciousness embedded in these components in order to express ourselves and hear ourselves and others in ways more likely to foster understanding and connection, to support everyone involved in getting their needs met, and to nurture in all of us a joy in giving and in receiving. The practice also includes empathic connection with ourselves - “self-empathy.” The purpose of self-empathy is to support us in maintaining connection with our own needs, choosing our actions and responses based on self-connection and self-acceptance.

NVC was developed by Dr. Marshall B. Rosenberg, who has introduced it to individuals and organizations world-wide. NVC has been used between warring tribes and in war-torn countries; in schools, prisons, and corporations; in health care, social change, and government institutions;

and in intimate personal relationships. Currently, over 300 hundred certified trainers and many more non-certified trainers around the world are sharing NVC in their communities.

## II. Language, Practice, and Intention

---

Although the bulk of this document is about specific practices and concrete steps, the ultimate aim of NVC is to create the conditions – within, with others, in our groups and organizations, and in the world’s systems – that allow the flourishing of all life, where all needs are held with utmost care.

Hundreds of thousands of people have found the specific practices of NVC extremely beneficial to them, to the point of transforming their experience of life and creating relationships and workplaces that are aligned with this larger vision.

In order for these practices to be of support to you and others around you, it may be useful to remember the following:

- Focus on the precision and depth of the practice when you are practicing. In the rest of your life, prioritize authenticity, relying on your heart’s integration of your intentions.
- In particular, if you are entirely new to NVC, you might want to consider practicing only internally for a period of some months before trying out any new forms of expression with others.
- When with others, make sure they are in voluntary agreement to participate with your efforts to integrate a new language and approach to life before you try using specific linguistic forms.

## III. The Components of NVC

---

### A. Observations

Observations are what we see or hear that we identify as the stimulus to our reactions. Our aim is to describe what we are reacting to concretely, specifically and neutrally, much as a video camera might capture the moment. This helps create a shared reality with the other person. The observation gives the context for our expression of feelings and needs, and may not even be needed if both people are clear about the context.

The key to making an observation is to separate our own judgments, evaluations or interpretations from our description of what happened. For example, if we say: “You’re rude,” the other person may disagree, while if we say: “When I saw you walk in and I didn’t hear you say hello to me,” the other person is more likely to recognize the moment that is described.

When we are able to describe what we see or hear in observation language without mixing in evaluation, we raise the likelihood that the person listening to us will hear this first step without immediately wanting to respond and will be more willing to hear our feelings and needs.

Learning to translate judgments and interpretations into observation language moves us away from right/wrong thinking and helps us take responsibility for our reactions by directing our attention to our needs as the source of our feelings rather than to the other person. In this way, observations – paving the way towards greater connection with ourselves and with others – emerge as a crucial building block towards a profound consciousness shift.

## **B. Feelings**

Feelings represent our emotional experience and physical sensations associated with our needs that have been met or that remain unmet (see below). Our aim is to identify, name, and connect with those feelings.

The key to identifying and expressing feelings is to focus on words that describe our inner experience rather than words that describe our interpretations of people's actions. For example: "I feel lonely" describes an inner experience, while "I feel like you don't love me" describes an interpretation of how the other person may be feeling.

When we express our feelings, we continue the process of taking responsibility for our experience, which helps others hear what's important to us with less likelihood of hearing criticism or blame of themselves. This increases the likelihood that they will respond in a way that meets both our needs.

The list of feelings that usually accompanies this handout (see [www.baynvc.org](http://www.baynvc.org) if you don't have a feelings list) is neither exhaustive nor definitive; it is offered as a resource for exploration and discovery of the richness of our emotional life.

## **C. Needs**

Our needs are an expression of our deepest shared humanity. All human beings share key needs for survival: hydration, nourishment, rest, shelter, and connection to name a few. We also share many other needs, though we may experience them to varying degrees and with more or less intensity at various times.

In the context of NVC, needs refer to what is most alive in us: our core values and deepest human longings. Understanding, naming, and connecting with our needs helps us improve our relationship with ourselves, as well as foster understanding with others, so we are all more likely to take actions that attend to everyone's needs.

The key to identifying, expressing, and connecting with needs is to focus on words that describe shared human experience rather than words that describe the particular strategies to meet those needs. Whenever we include a person, a location, an action, a time, or an object in our expression of what we want (remember the acronym PLATO), we are describing a strategy rather than a need.

For example: “I want you to come to my birthday party” may be a particular strategy to meet a need for love and connection. In this case, we have a person, an action, and an implied time and location in the original statement. The internal shift from focusing on a specific strategy to connecting with needs often results in a sense of power and liberation, as we can free ourselves from being attached to one particular strategy by identifying the underlying needs and exploring alternative strategies.

Feelings arise when our needs are met or not met, which happens at every moment of life. Our feelings are related to the stimulus, but they are not caused by the stimulus: their source is our own experience of met or unmet needs. By connecting our feelings with our needs, therefore, we take full responsibility for our feelings, freeing us and others from fault and blame. And by expressing our unique experience in the moment of a shared human reality of needs, we create the most likely opportunity for another person to see our humanity and to experience empathy and understanding for us.

The list of needs that usually accompanies this handout (see [www.baynvc.org](http://www.baynvc.org) if you don't have a needs list) is by no means exhaustive or definitive. It is offered as a resource for identifying and experiencing your own needs and guessing others' needs. The needs on this list appear in their most abstract, general, and universal form. Each person can find inside herself or himself the specific nuance and flavor of these broader categories, which will describe more fully her or his experience.

## D. Requests

In order to meet our needs, we make requests to assess how likely we are to get cooperation for particular strategies we have in mind for meeting our needs, always aiming to do so without cost to others. Our aim is to identify and express a specific action that we believe will serve this purpose, and then check with others involved about their willingness to participate in meeting our needs in this way. In a given moment, it is our connection with another that determines the quality of their response to our request. Therefore often our requests in the moment are “connection requests,” intended to foster connection and understanding and to determine whether we have sufficiently connected to move to a “solution request.” An example of a connection request might be: “Would you tell me if you heard any criticism in what I just said?” An example of a solution request might be “Would you be willing to take your shoes off when you come in the house?”

The spirit of requests relies on our willingness to hear a “no” and to continue to work with ourselves or others to find ways to meet everyone's needs. Whether we are making a request or a demand is often evident by our response when our request is denied. A denied demand will lead to punitive consequences; a denied request most often will lead to further dialogue. We recognize that “no” is an expression of some need that is preventing the other person from saying “yes”. If we trust that through dialogue we can find strategies to meet both of our needs, “no” is simply information to alert us that saying “yes” to our request may be too costly in terms of the other person's needs. We can then continue to seek connection and understanding to allow additional strategies to arise that will work to meet more needs.

To increase the likelihood that our requests would be understood, we attempt to use language that is as concrete and doable as possible, and that is truly a request rather than a demand. For example, “I would like you to always come on time” is unlikely to be doable, while “Are you up for spending 15 minutes with me talking about what may help you arrive at 9 am to our meetings?” is concrete and doable. While a person may assent to the former expression (“Yes, I’ll always come on time”), our deeper needs – for connection, confidence, trust, responsibility, respect, or others – are likely to remain unmet.

If someone agrees to our request out of fear, guilt, shame, obligation, or the desire for reward, this compromises the quality of connection and trust between us. When we are able to express a clear request, we raise the likelihood that the person listening to us will experience choice in their response. As a consequence, while we may not gain immediate assent to our wishes, we are more likely to get our needs met over time because we are building trust that everyone’s needs matter. Within an atmosphere of such trust, goodwill increases, and with it a willingness to support each other in getting our needs met.

Learning to make clear requests and shifting our consciousness to making requests in place of demands are very challenging skills for most people. People often find the request part to be the hardest, because of what we call a “crisis of imagination”: a difficulty in identifying a strategy that could actually meet our needs without being at the expense of other needs. Even before considering the needs of others, the very act of coming up with what we call a positive, doable request is challenging. We are habituated to thinking in terms of what we want people to stop doing (“don’t yell at me”), and how we want them to be (“treat me with respect”) rather than what we want them to do (“Would you be willing to lower your voice or talk later?”). With time, and a deeper connection to our needs, our creativity expands to imagine and embrace more strategies.

This fourth step is critical to our ability to create the life we want. In particular, shifting from demands to requests entails a leap in focus and in faith: we shift from focusing on getting our needs met, to focusing on the quality of connection that will allow both of our needs to truly matter and ultimately also to be met.

## IV. Empathy

---

Expressing our own observations, feelings, needs and requests is one part of NVC. The second part is empathy: the process of connecting with another’s experience, often by guessing their feelings and needs, and many times doing so nonverbally. In times of conflict, communicating to another person in words that we understand their feelings and that their needs matter to us can be a powerful turning point in problem situations. Demonstrating that we have such understanding is not the same as agreeing to act in ways that don’t meet our own needs. In that way, the language of NVC often helps us relate with others.

Connecting empathically with another person is a way to meet our own needs – for understanding, connection, contribution, or others. At the same time, we hope that the empathy would meet the

other person's needs as well, and would aid both of us in finding strategies that would meet our needs.

The heart of empathy is in our ability to compassionately connect with our own and others' humanity. Offering our empathic presence, in this sense, is one strategy (or request) through which we can meet our own needs. It is a gift to another person and to ourselves of our full presence.

When we use NVC to connect empathically, we use the same four components in the form of a question, since we can never know what is going on inside the other. The other person will always be the ultimate authority on what is going on for them. Our empathy may meet other people's needs for understanding, or it may spark their own self-discovery. We may ask something like:

[When you [see, hear, etc...] ....]

Are you feeling .....

Because you need .....

[And would you like .....?]

Most often, in an ongoing process of dialogue, there is no need to mention either the observation (it is usually clear in the context of communication) or the request (since we are already acting on an assumed request for empathy). We might get to guessing a request when we have connected more and we are ready to explore strategies. Also, in many contexts, even the feelings are not necessary, because we can demonstrate our understanding simply by focusing on what the other person wants. In addition, in many contexts, speaking of feelings may invite more vulnerability than the other person might want to display.

In the process of sharing empathy between two people, if both parties are able to connect at the level of feelings and needs, a transformation often happens in which one or both parties experience a shift in intention and attention. This can lead to a shift of needs or generate new reserves of kindness and generosity, or, in seemingly impossible situations, it can open us to remarkable bursts of creative solutions that were unimaginable when clouded by disconnection. Those are moments of deep human connection, satisfaction, and hope.

## V. Self-Empathy

---

Both expression of our own feelings and needs and empathic guesses of others' feelings and needs are grounded in a particular consciousness which is at the heart of NVC. This consciousness is nurtured by the practice of self-empathy.

In self-empathy, we bring the same compassionate attention to ourselves that we give to others when listening to them using NVC. This means listening through any interpretations and judgments we are making to clarify how we are in terms of our feelings and needs. This inner awareness and clarity supports us in choosing our next step: expressing ourselves to others, or

receiving them with empathy. This next step is our request to ourselves about where we want to focus our attention.

The practice of NVC entails an intention to connect compassionately with ourselves and with others, and an ability to keep our attention in the present moment – which includes being aware that sometimes in this present moment we are recalling the past or imagining a future possibility.

Often self-empathy comes easy, as we access our sensations, emotions, and needs to attune to how we are. However, in moments of conflict or reactivity to others, we may find ourselves reluctant to access an intention to connect compassionately, and we may falter in our capacity to attend to the present moment. Self-empathy at times like this has the power to transform our disconnected state of being and return us to our compassionate intention and present-oriented attention. With practice, many people find that self-empathy alone sometimes resolves inner conflicts and conflicts with others as it transforms our experience of life.

At other times, even after self-connection we remain disconnected from the other person. At such times, the process of humanizing the other person by guessing their feelings and needs may provide the missing bridge to full self-connection. This is because our own upset feelings often are related to losing sight of the other person's humanity. In such times, finding a needs-based way to make sense of that person's experience, actions, or words can provide enormous relief and be the final key to opening our hearts to life.

# UNPACKING OFNR (OBSERVATIONS, FEELINGS, NEEDS, REQUESTS)

---

## Observations

---

Many people think of a true observation as something that everyone can agree upon. Some people use the video camera as an example – a true observation is “what a video camera can see and hear.” This perspective perpetuates the myth of the neutral, unbiased observer. Video cameras are placed in a certain location, pointed in a certain direction, with a certain quality of lens, to record a stimulus determined by the operator. There is considerable bias in where the operator places the camera, when they turn it on and off, who it is pointed at, what filters are placed on the camera. What is recorded by the video camera is thus inherently biased. Similarly, it helps to think of observations reported by humans in the same way, to acknowledge the bias that comes in, sometimes systematically, when we take in stimuli and report back what we’ve observed.

We suggest three layers of observations. The iceberg of stimulation below suggests how much each layer may contribute to the intensity of our pain.

### The Iceberg of Stimulation



**External Observation:** The stimulus that is outside a person that other people might also perceive. What can be taken in by our senses. Note that the perception of the external observation is mediated by our attention, expectations, capacity and prior knowledge. It is the stimulus most aligned with the video camera analogy. Additionally, it contributes the least to our pain.

**Internal Observation:** The external layer triggers the internal observation, often automatically without our intentional choice. The internal observation is our perception of what happens inside ourselves. This includes trauma reactions, memories, implicit associations, meanings, and might include our physical sensations. The connection to our past experiences means that we are often experiencing an increase in pain, as not just the present moment pain, but that of the past, is added to the overall stimulation.

**Systemic Observation:** Our understanding of the systems and patterns in our context with which this external observation may or may not align. Even if the external observation is not meant to be representative of these systemic patterns, it may still stimulate the recollection of these



patterns, and thus the immense pain we can experience when we have experienced harm repeatedly. When we experience stimulation at the systemic level, because of the chronic nature of the stimulus, the pain stimulated may be deep, far more intense than that stimulated if it had been the first time we encountered the external stimulus.

Understanding all the layers of observations is key to helping us connect with the depth of the needs stimulated by any given external stimulus to establishing a framework of shared understanding about our individual and collective experiences."

Here is an example: (please note the example references sexual violence against women):

Here is the external observation using classic NVC:

*A female presenting person is sitting at her desk at work with her back to the hallway. A male presenting co-worker walks behind her and puts his hands on her shoulder. She is not aware of his presence.*

*The woman starts shaking and crying and yells at her co-worker - How dare you! I'm so angry. Don't ever touch me that way again! I need safety.*

The male co-worker in the example really wants to understand his colleague. He is aware that past co-workers laughed and said, "You're such a joker" when he had done this in the past. Looking at just the external observation, he does not understand the connection between her feelings and needs and his behavior, represented by the external observation.

The woman explains more about her internal observation:

*When you touched me without my expecting it, I had an immediate flashback to a rape I had experienced one night. I had a huge sense of fear.*

She then adds the systemic observation:

*All the times I and other women have experienced sexual trauma from men, even from coworkers, the CDC statistics saying 20% of women experience an attempted raped in their lifetime, flooded my mind.*

This information helped the coworker understand why his touching the women stimulated that particular set of feelings and needs (anger, need for safety) rather than the ones he had stimulated with other people in the past (amusement, play). The internal and systemic observations, which occurred rapidly for the woman, were part of her stimulus.

Acknowledging the internal and systemic observations do not state he caused them, or that his behavior was "bad." We simply acknowledge that if the intention of naming the observation is to create shared reality about what is stimulating a person's feelings and needs, we often cannot have that shared reality without understanding the internal and systemic observations from the perspective of the person stimulated.

## Feelings

---

Feelings are sign posts that can help us identify that a need is or is not met. Our body sensations are often one of the first guides to our feelings. However, many people have been socialized so that they do not have access to their full range of feelings. In many societies for instance, from a very young age, people who are identified as male at birth are encouraged to be tough, not to cry, to express anger and excitement, but not fear or sadness. Instead of noticing the body sensation of prickling in one's eyes and a lump in one's throat and interpreting it as sadness, men may be conditioned to interpret the same sensations as anger.

Similarly, the societal cost of having certain feelings are different for members of some groups than others. In some societies, expressing anger when one is in a subordinate position can lead to harsh consequences. A manager can express anger to an employee without consequences, but the employee cannot express anger to the manager without risking being fired or ostracized. In the United States, a man of African descent who expresses anger towards the police is more likely to be judged a threat and restrained, if not shot by the police, than a man of European descent. Because of these very real consequences to the expression of anger, people are socialized not to notice, express – indeed, not to feel their emotions. If, because of repeated experiences of censure and punishment when you express certain emotions, you no longer have access to those emotions, notice that, and hold yourself with compassion. With time, energy, support and patience, it is possible to change that conditioning.

Another challenge for people in many societies is that these years of conditioning not to feel, not to acknowledge certain emotions means that we are ill equipped to deal with those emotions once we do feel them (or when others express them). We get flooded and do many things to avoid feeling emotions. Some of our avoidance behaviors are celebrated by society – I can distract myself with reading, compulsive exercises, work 16 hours a day so I have no time or energy to let myself feel anything. Others are judged more harshly by society – I might cut myself whenever feelings get intense, use alcohol or drugs to numb myself, play video games or watch television whenever I have free time. It can be helpful to learn how to open ourselves up to the full range of emotions in ways that are not too costly for us.

A regular practice of connecting to our feelings, exploring what information they have for us, when the feelings are smaller in energy or intensity can ultimately lead to more freedom and skill in handling our emotions. Here are some tips that might help you manage the intensity of what you might experience when you open yourself to your feelings. Try them out and see which one works for you.

### Be Mindful of Your Emotions

- Observe your feeling. What is it? What were you thinking or doing when it started?
- Notice it as a wave – it starts small, peaks, and recedes. Notice the flow of your feelings.
- Don't block or suppress your emotions. Don't hold on to or amplify it. Let it flow in and out.

- Don't act on your emotions immediately. They are information. Pause and contemplate the needs they point to.
- Remember you are not your emotions.
- Don't judge your emotion. Practice loving and radically accepting it.

### Create Space to Access Choice in Responding

- If you are flooded, give yourself permission to let go
- Notice the difference between your internal experience and what's around you
  - Let your senses explore the environment around you. What catches your attention? Gently focus your attention there, noticing what drew you in.
- Notice your breath. Count each breath in and out. If you're breathing quickly, silently say 'I am breathing in' and breathe in as you do so, then say 'I am breathing out' and breathe out as you do so.
- Actively invite other sensations in, increasing the intensity as needed.
  - Hold a water bottle that's 2/3 full. Slowly tilt it from side to side, paying attention to the shifting weight of the water.
  - Run a strong stream of cold water on your wrists or hold a frozen water bottle, ice-pack or some ice-cubes.
  - Starting with your toes and moving up your body, tense and relax each group of muscles (e.g., squeeze your toes together tightly, hold, then release, tense calf muscles, hold it and notice the tension, release).
  - Wear a rubber band around your wrist and snap it.

## Needs

---

The essential shift in consciousness that NVC offers us is inviting our awareness to the understanding that all human beings share the same needs. It is this understanding that allows us to transform judgments of people's behavior, to reach for our shared humanity when people speak or act in ways that are challenging for us. Unfortunately, many people from groups with less structural power in society report that the beauty of the concept of universal human needs has been used to silence and minimize their experiences.

At a retreat, I supported a conversation between two men who had experienced a break in connection. One man of Chinese and European descent – let's call him Chris - shared the pain he experienced growing up in a primarily European community. He shared the taunts he had experienced, having people use slurs and language that insulted people from Chinese backgrounds, that made fun of the shape of their eyes, the tone of their skin. He was sharing this experience with a European-descent man – let's call him Robin - to help Robin understand the needs that were going unmet for Chris around safety by Robin's lack of awareness of the ways identity can affect one's experience, among other needs.

Unfortunately, Robin was not able to empathize with Chris. Instead, Robin spoke angrily about his needs for safety being unmet in the conversation. One way that he described his need being unmet was that Chris had called Robin a “White man.” For Robin, the phrase, “White man,” was a label that did not meet his needs for being seen for his full humanity. Robin’s experience was that his needs for safety in being called a “White man” by Chris during that conversation were as equally unmet as the needs for safety Chris experienced in multiple settings in his childhood and adulthood.

Like Chris, some people have reported that when they try to bring up specific experiences related to their membership in a certain group, the depth of their pain is not acknowledged and the focus instead shifts to the discomfort of the listener hearing their pain.

From a limited NVC perspective, all needs can be seen as equal, with an emphasis on equal space and attention to any unmet needs. However, the consequences of the needs going unmet for Chris in our example, who has experienced beatings in relation to his identity, were vastly different than the consequences for Robin. The idea that all humans share the same needs can be used, tragically, to obscure the reality that some people, based solely on group membership, have certain needs go unmet to a greater extent, for a greater length of time, and with more dire consequences than others.

When we think of ourselves, we can readily realize that although we are human, and thus motivated by a full set of needs, in any given moment, some needs are not even in our consciousness while others are very much alive. If I have not eaten for ten hours while touring a museum, my needs for food and sustenance might be much more salient and urgent for me than my need for beauty. If I find myself near the museum restaurant, with only 30 minutes left before the building closes, I need to choose between meeting my needs for beauty by seeing one last exhibit, or moving into the restaurant and attending to my need for food. In that moment I would prioritize eating food rather than seeing another exhibit.

Ideally, when two people present with differing sets of needs, we can brainstorm and find new strategies that can meet everyone’s needs. But in many situations, constrained resources mean someone’s needs are met over another’s. Members of some groups have had urgent needs go unmet for an unbearably long time, relative to other groups. Just like we would likely prioritize meeting the needs for food when we are very hungry over the need for beauty, we would also prioritize caring for the needs of those whose needs are systematically ignored and unmet over those whose needs have traditionally been met. Here are some thoughts to help you decide how to proceed in such situations:

*Remember: All needs matter, but not all needs are equally met.*

- Strive to find a solution that works for all.
- When time, energy, resources constrain the creative spaciousness that makes such a solution possible:
  - Prioritize the needs that have gone unmet the longest.

- Prioritize the needs of those whose needs have gone unmet for longer, especially when systems are operating that contribute to needs being unmet for some over others.
- Prioritize care and safety for those whose unmet needs have or might result in significant harm.
- Remember that continuing with the status quo, even when it is to allow time for creative solutions to meet all needs, is a choice that continues to prioritize the needs of those whose needs have been traditionally met at the expense of those whose needs have not been met. Consider meeting the needs of those who have not experienced care while new strategies are explored.

Remember, when a systematic imbalance exists in whose needs are attended to, If we insist on equality - treating everyone the same and offering equal support, we are continuing to perpetuate an imbalance.

## Requests

---

Requests in the NVC context are the strategy we employ in our attempts to meet our needs. Many believe that the essence of a true request is met when we can ask for what we need without attachment to getting the need met in the way we're asking. For many, requests are often contrasted with demands – we consider ourselves having full NVC consciousness when we have removed any urgency or insistence on a certain outcome from our requests. This insistence on removing demand energy from our requests has been a challenge for many people from communities that have been targets of oppression and hate.

For so many people, the notion of requests being equated with lack of attachment to getting our needs attended to is aversive. We want to trust that there is a space to advocate for our needs, and to advocate for strategies that might attend to our needs. It is impossible for many of us to imagine being willing to abdicate our power by allowing the person to whom we make a request to have the sole power to decide if that request would be met or not. We want to be clear that NVC allows us to stay firmly attached to our desire for change, especially in situations where systemic imbalances and harm are occurring.

NVC structures already provide a framework for thinking of how to respond when harm is happening. Protective use of force is intended to prevent significant harm from happening when one person is meeting their needs at great cost to another person. The invitation is that one uses the least amount of force in order to prevent harm. We contrast this with punitive use of force, which is not seeking only to limit harm, but also to educate and punish. Each time we use force to prevent harm, we are aware that while needs for safety and care may be met, many needs will go unmet. Those needs might include our needs for choice and autonomy for those against whom we're using force, their needs for choice, autonomy and care, and mutual needs for understanding. When we make a decision to use force to attend to needs, we are essentially demanding an action from someone and attempting to enforce that demand through force.

Instead of thinking of requests and demands as binary opposites, in which we can only use demands when there is great harm, it may be helpful to think of a field of energy that represents the intensity with which we may want something to happen. As the intensity of our need increases, or the potential for harm increases, the energy with which we want to see a change – an outcome – increases. In situations where the intensity is low, we may want to see something happen, but our attachment to that outcome might be low and we stay firmly in the request part of the field. As our need increases, including the need for safety, our attachment to outcome also increases and we move across the field to areas of more intensity. This shift from request to demand happens both when the need increases in intensity, and when the degree of harm increases.



*The Energy that Grounds Our Strategies:  
Navigating the Demand Request -  
Continuum*

One differentiation that's important is that one can be attached to outcome - i.e., have significant demand energy - without having an attachment to a specific strategy. I recently read of a situation at a college in the United States that illustrates this perfectly. A college professor was noted to express on his personal, but public, social media extremely painful views about people from many groups, including women and African-descent students. His postings included statements that women wanted to be controlled by men and did not belong in the workplace, that African-descent people were intellectually inferior to White students. The harm this professor could cause was immense. He had the power to affect students' grades, their beliefs in their ability, their entire futures. There was significant demand energy that the university stop this potential harm. The strong attachment in those making the demand was around the need for safety for all students, especially students from those groups targeted by this professor. The voices would not be silenced until that safety was assured.

Some people also had demand energy around a certain strategy - that the professor be fired. For others, there was an openness to the strategies by which the desired outcome - safety and respect for all students - could be met. In order to be in integrity with their commitment to free speech of all citizens and not punish the professor for using his right to free speech, while also holding a strong commitment to protecting students, the university publicly made known what the professor had written, required the professor to grade blindly any student coursework, or have grades and evaluations monitored by other professors to ensure no bias, and strongly encouraged any students experiencing negative treatment to contact university staff, using clearly defined channels, to begin processes to have the professor removed from his position. The university clearly demonstrated the difference between demand as attachment to outcome - safety for all students, and demand as attachment to strategy - that the professor be fired.

We hold our needs firmly when we have a strong belief in our needs mattering. We hold a specific outcome firmly when we don't have trust that our needs matter or can be met in any other way. It is so important for us to understand that attachment to needs being met can be a wonderful motivator. It is the energy that allows us to keep searching for strategies that honor all our needs,

not just those of one group or person. We want to use that energy to find strategies and create systems that support all people, rather than simply flip who is in power to enable a new group's needs to be met at the expense of another. And, when constraints prevent us from finding those strategies, using the guidelines in the section under needs - paying attention to whose needs we're addressing and the extent of experience with chronically unmet needs, can guide us in determining when protective use of force is necessary.

## OTHER CONVERSATIONAL RESPONSES

---

Each of us has learned a number of different conversational styles or responses that we may tend to use habitually. Some of these are mentioned to the right.

Sometimes, these responses can lead to misunderstanding, hurt feelings, anger, disconnection, loneliness and depression, which is why, in his book, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of the Heart*, Marshall B. Rosenberg suggests using 'NVC' style empathy, suggesting that it *is* possible to have a conversational response that leads to understanding, acceptance, connection and caring.

The below responses are NOT being implied as 'wrong' or 'bad'. Only that being aware of our conversational responses and using them as 'bells of awareness' can remind us that we have choice in how we want to interact with, and the type of responses we can hope, therefore, to receive in return from others.

As a society, we have been trained that the below conversational responses are efforts to connect, which may be why these responses are used so frequently. Knowing this, when you encounter others responding to you using one of these styles, have compassion; they may be trying to give you empathy!

NOTE: Some of these responses, such as educating or strategies, might serve the other person, *if* they are used *after* NVC empathy, and upon asking whether the person would like to hear them.

## Other Conversational Responses:

---

1. ADVISING/STRATEGIES: *"What you should do is..."*
2. ANALYZING/DIAGNOSING: *"You're acting schizophrenic..."*
3. BLAME: *"You made me..."* or *"You hurt me when you..."*
4. CHAMPIONING: *"You can do it..."*
5. CONSOLING: *"It wasn't your fault, you did the best you could..."*  
or TOUCHING the other person *"There, there..."*
6. CORRECTING: *"That is not how it happened. I did not do that..."*
7. DEVIL'S ADVOCATE: *"But they work hard and they really try..."*
8. EDUCATING: *"You know, happened because people..."*
9. EXPLAINING/JUSTIFYING: *"I would have ...(e.g.: called) but..."*
10. GUILTING OR SHAMING: *"How could you do such a thing..."* or *"You are so selfish..."*
11. 'HONESTY'; (JUDGING OR CRITICIZING): *"The trouble with you is..."*
12. Being 'NICE': *"No, I'm not upset, I'm Fine..."*
13. ONE-UPPING: *"That's nothing. What happened to me was..."*
14. QUESTIONING: *"When did this actually happen...?"*
15. REALISTIC: *"That will never work because..."*
16. RELATING: *"Oh I know how you feel **because** I..."*
17. SHUTTING DOWN: *"Cheer up now, you'll get over it..."*
18. SYMPATHIZING: *"Oh, you poor thing..."*  
OR: Using SYMPATHETIC EYES, TONE OF VOICE or BODY POSTURE
19. SARCASTIC HUMOR: *"???"*



## CONVENTIONAL PATTERNS OF COMMUNICATION

---

Adapted from CNVC materials

1. **Diagnosis** – Criticism, Judgment, Analysis, Comparison, Blame: Implying wrongness or badness. e.g. "You are too sensitive."
2. **Demands**: Making requests which implicitly or explicitly threaten some form of blame or punishment if the request is not acted upon. e.g. "Please type up this report. I am going to be very upset if it's not ready in time."
3. **Deserves** – Justification of Reward and Punishment: Implying that certain actions merit reward and certain actions merit punishment. e.g. "He deserves to be punished for what he did."
4. **Denial of Responsibility**: Attributing the cause of our actions or feelings to anything other than our needs:
  - a. **Others' Actions**: "I fired my secretary because she didn't type my reports in time."
  - b. **Dictates of Authority**: "I misrepresented our earnings in our accounting system because my boss told me to."
  - c. **Institutional Policies, Rules, and Regulations**: "If we do it for you, we'd have to do it for everyone," or "We can't break policy."
  - d. **Group Pressure**: "I drink after work because everyone else does."
  - e. **Gender, Social or Age Roles**: "I hate going to work but I do it because I am a father and a husband."
  - f. **Uncontrollable Impulses**: "I couldn't help flirting with her."
  - g. **Diagnosis, Psychological History**: "I yell at my children because I grew up in a dysfunctional family."
  - h. **Vague, Impersonal Forces**: "We have to put people in prison because otherwise nobody would be safe in the streets."

# "FIX-IT" LANGUAGE

Fix-It language (sometimes called "chicken-soup") is advice or help based mainly on one's own ideas of what's good for someone else, rather than tuned to what the person in pain wants. It's advice given without first seeing (A) if it's a form of help the listener wants right then, and (B) before checking if it's being given because the speaker wants to give help, or because the listener actually wants it. (Even if advice is sound or perceptive, fix-it language is rarely healing or helpful if given unsolicited and before empathic connection, because usually a person in pain first needs empathic understanding, and can often build his/her own unique solutions if he or she gets real empathy.)

COMMON FIX-IT LANGUAGE	NEW-AGE FIX-IT LANGUAGE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Something just like that once happened to me; what I found helpful was _____.</li> <li>• You should hang in there. After _____, maybe things will change and improve.</li> <li>• Why don't you just quit! You deserve better than that and shouldn't put up with it.</li> <li>• You could use up your savings to have your car's motor rebuilt, and then apply for welfare.</li> <li>• No pain, no gain.</li> <li>• You're absolutely right, those bureaucrats are impossible; you might as well forget it.</li> <li>• If you would just take your medication, and get a good night's sleep, things will look better later.</li> <li>• That happens to nearly everyone at one time or other.</li> <li>• Well, what can you expect with all those _____s running the place?</li> <li>• Things could be a lot worse.</li> <li>• Look at the bright side, Sue; some people were allergic to your cat anyhow.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I've found that strongly visualizing what I want is very helpful in a situation like yours.</li> <li>• Well, if you would meditate on that I'm sure you would find a solution.</li> <li>• This is just your karma and nothing to be ashamed of.</li> <li>• Oh, you have to learn to let go of your fears.</li> <li>• This is a wonderful opportunity to practice letting go of your judgments.</li> <li>• You need to trust the universe more.</li> <li>• You need to get out of that poverty consciousness.</li> <li>• Look at what you have left, not at what you've lost.</li> <li>• You must have created that for some reason.</li> <li>• Everything you think is so important is all an illusion anyway.</li> </ul>

FIX-IT LANGUAGE COMBINED WITH EVALUATIVE-LANGUAGE	FIX-IT LANGUAGE COMBINED WITH NEW-AGE EVALUATIVE LANGUAGE
<p>What do you expect from him, he's . . .</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a businessman.</li> <li>• a Liberal.</li> <li>• a right wing extremist.</li> <li>• a devotee.</li> <li>• a good family man.</li> <li>• from the wrong side of the tracks.</li> <li>• worrying about his own family.</li> </ul>	<p>What do you expect from her, she's . . .</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a Left-brained person.</li> <li>• a Visual-Learner.</li> <li>• an unenlightened being.</li> <li>• an Adult-Child-of-an-Alcoholic.</li> <li>• a very old soul.</li> <li>• a first-born child and a co-dependent personality-type.</li> <li>• was abused as a child.</li> <li>• suffering from zinc, vitamin-C, and spirulina deficiencies.</li> <li>• only reflecting your own consciousness back to you.</li> </ul>

## CNVC KEY DIFFERENTIATIONS

---

This set of KDs are taken from the CNVC Certification Preparation Packet with slight modifications.

1. "Being Giraffe" vs. "doing Giraffe"
2. Giraffe honesty vs. Jackal honesty
3. Empathy vs. sympathy and other forms of response (fixing, reassuring, storytelling, etc.)
4. Protective vs. punitive use of force
5. Power with vs. power over
6. Appreciation vs. approval, compliments or praise
7. Choice vs. submission or rebellion
8. Observation vs. observation mixed with evaluation
9. Feeling vs. feeling mixed with thoughts
10. Need vs. request (strategy)
11. Request vs. demand
12. Stimulus vs. cause
13. Need-based judgment vs. moralistic judgment
14. Natural vs. habitual
15. Interdependence vs. dependence or independence
16. Life-connected vs. life-alienated
17. Shift vs. compromise
18. Persisting vs. demanding
19. Self-discipline vs. obedience
20. Respect for authority vs. fear of authority
21. Vulnerability vs. weakness
22. Love as a need vs. love as a feeling
23. Self-empathy vs. acting out, repressing, or staying stuck in feelings
24. Idiomatic vs. classical (formal) Giraffe
25. Guessing vs. knowing
26. Empathic sensing vs. intellectual guessing

### **Additional KDs**

These Key Differentiations were added by Inbal Kashtan and Miki Kashtan

27. Attending to needs with care vs. meeting needs
28. Understanding vs. agreement
29. Self-care vs. selfishness
30. Holding everyone's needs with care vs. altruism (or selflessness)
31. Self-compassion vs. abdicating responsibility
32. Self-responsibility and self-reliance vs. self-sufficiency
33. Inner safety vs. safety dependent on others
34. Responsibility to vs. responsibility for (an original from Marshall Rosenberg that isn't included in the list above)
35. Applying NVC vs. teaching NVC
36. Offering feedback vs. wanting to be heard for a trigger
37. Radical change vs. peripheral change (an original from Marshall Rosenberg that isn't included in the list above)
38. Entrustment vs. submission
39. Conscious choice vs. rebellion
40. Conscious response vs. reaction

# INCREASING DIVERSITY IN NVC CIRCLES

---

Roxy Manning

## KEYS:

- a. If you are white in the US and want to increase diversity in NVC spaces and contribute to a community where all feel welcome, safer, and included, then find ways to learn more (outside of NVC settings) about the experiences of people of the Global Majority.
- b. Understand that requests for people of the Global Majority to educate you can be wearisome.
- c. If you have some understanding of the dynamics of racism and oppression, take the risk to speak up when such issues arise, taking care to speak from your needs, not on behalf of members of other groups. This models how these issues affect all of us and simultaneously relieves people of the Global Majority of the burden of continually advocating.
- d. Distinguish between intent and impact when discussing issues of race, power, or privilege. Attend to impact first.
- e. Continue to do your work, make space to talk about racism, and get support from other white folks on your journey.

I have participated in dozens of NVC events around the world. If the gathering is in the United States or in a European country, one fact is apparent: I am often the only visible person of color present. In the US, white people have approached me several times to ask, “How can we get more people of color in the room?” Sadly, people of color also have approached me to tell me why they are not coming back to NVC settings. This essay is to share with the folks – especially white people – who want to increase diversity in the room some of the things they can do to make NVC settings more welcoming to people of the Global Majority.

**An important first step is to get informed.** Are you truly aware of the experiences of people of the Global Majority? Have you looked at the statistics on racial disparities in income, achievement, imprisonment, housing and employment discrimination? Have you considered what these statistics mean for the day-to-day experience of many people of color?

There have been several instances at NVC gatherings, when the subject of race arises, that I have heard someone minimize the experiences of people of color. This can happen in explicit statements or in subtle ways. For instance, after a Latino man shared how cops beat his brother simply for asking why he was pulled over (the genesis of the speaker’s subsequent distrust of the police), a white woman expressed shock that anyone could believe the cops were not helpful. When this happened, many of the people of color became silent in the group. How do they even

begin to connect when direct lived experiences are challenged? How was it possible that statistics on police violence against people of color were not only unknown, but also challenged?

Are you doing your own work outside of these settings, or are you asking these questions of people of color who come to your workshop to learn and share NVC? Get support outside of these events to understand the issues of discrimination and the disparities that result.

At a recent workshop, an African American woman described, with a lot of pain, her utter weariness at her white friends asking that she alert them when they said something racially insensitive. She described being exhausted with trying to cope internally with these issues, as they came up. She was flabbergasted that she was invited to tidily put away any reaction she might have in order to calmly educate the very person who had triggered her. Notice the impact that your requests for education and support can have on others whose experience goes unacknowledged. Choose to *do your work* in ways that are not so costly to the people of color in the room!

**If you already have begun your work and learned the issues, you can do a lot to support NVC communities** when these diversity issues arise. One consequence of the privilege that many white people enjoy is that they, despite the best of intentions, may be completely unaware of the experiences of people of color, or why experiencing certain behaviors would be challenging for a person of color.

I have seen an issue of racial sensitivity arise in a diverse setting, and watched everyone turn to another person of color to intervene. If you are a white person and you're aware of the issue, step in. You can help the community understand and demonstrate that this is not a person of color issue, but a challenge for everyone in the community. You can remove the burden described earlier where, if something triggers me, as a person of color, I need to put aside my trigger and speak up. If *you* have the knowledge and awareness to facilitate, then step in. Help educate those who have yet to step in to address discrimination and system disparities.

**A third step is to distinguish between intention and impact, and attend to impact.** Most people coming to NVC circles have in their hearts an intention to connect and support. Despite your best intentions, sometimes your efforts to connect have an impact different than you intend. What you do when this happens, especially around issues of diversity, affects how welcoming NVC circles are. When you trigger someone, even when it wasn't your intention, you generally know what to do. Many teachings in NVC address this – connection before correction; empathy first. But, what I have seen happen repeatedly when it comes to diversity is the opposite. People become so horrified at the thought of possibly being perceived as racist that they focus on being understood for their intention, often insisting that the person of color who expressed pain at the white person's actions stop expressing pain and acknowledge the white person's intention.

For example, at a recent workshop an African-American woman – who had just explained how painful it was to share her experiences of discrimination – exploded with deep pain and rage when someone’s response was to let her know they wished to know her better and asked the African-American woman to share her experiences of discrimination. The requestor kept interrupting the African-American woman, protesting, “This is not what I meant.”

A young Asian-American woman explained how these kinds of experiences led her to distance herself from NVC circles. She shared that when she tried to address things that happened in NVC settings that she found painful, others insisted that she focus on observations, feelings and needs. Her experience was that, as people attempted to get her to focus only on the current moment and the current speaker’s intention, the pain stimulated in her by the historical context in which these interactions fell, whether or not the speaker intended it, was minimized and dismissed.

As one woman described, “if I walk in the store, and you come from behind the counter to follow me, you may have done so completely by chance. That does not change the impact on me as I experience the pain that arises when this event reminds me of the number of times shopkeepers have followed me, stopped me and asked me to open my purse to prove I wasn’t shoplifting. I don’t know your intention, and the pain stimulated in me is real,” she explained. “Hearing your intention doesn’t diminish the pain that this is my experience, and that it has happened frequently enough to be a pattern that your actions fit.”

In this case, use NVC fully. Either offer empathy to the person in such pain, or go get empathy yourself from another person. Asking a person of color to stop and take care of your pain falls right into another trap that people of color find too familiar: We’re not supposed to “make” white people uncomfortable. So, our pain needs to be private and only shared among ourselves. How can we want to be part of a circle that prides itself on authenticity, when our authenticity is constrained only to what feels comfortable for you?

Continue to do your work. Notice when your pain about how you might be perceived, or about the impact of your actions arises and get support. But, don’t let getting support or working through your pain get in the way of acknowledging the impact of your actions on people of color. Don’t let it prevent you from empathizing with the pain we’ve experienced hearing your words.

**Related to these points is the question of what’s okay to talk about in NVC circles.** I’ve been part of many NVC groups where we discuss intense topics. People will share stories of heartbreaking personal trauma and groups will stop to express care and hold space for them. But, over and over, I’ve seen people of color express pain about racism. Folks get quiet. We change the topic. We begin a debate about the validity of the speaker’s experience or ask the speaker to prove her observation.

America is still so conflicted about racism, so uncertain about how to acknowledge it and talk about it, that even in NVC circles, we don’t know how to talk about it and are afraid to

acknowledge it. It's a subject of such pain – and in some cases, huge risk – engendering such fear for both white people and people of color, that both sides tend to avoid it.

The next step is to accept that you'll make mistakes and that you *will* stimulate pain for someone. This doesn't mean avoid the subject. Talk about it. Address it. Name your fears. If you stimulate someone, then use your NVC skills and deal with it. *Empathize!* If you can't, self-empathize, and help the other person get empathy.

If you stimulate someone and you don't get why, go ask a white friend or someone more knowledgeable (and not triggered) to help you understand. *Engage!* Don't shy away and ignore the elephant in the room. If you're white, you can pretend it's not there and that it will walk out when the person of color leaves. But if you're a person of color, that elephant has its trunk wrapped around your heart, waiting to follow you to the next gathering. Recognize that this is not an issue just for the people of color. We all lose something precious – authentic community – when we don't discuss diversity issues, especially when it results in people leaving and not coming back.

This essay also highlights an aspect of leadership that is especially important when dealing with issues like inclusion, group dynamics and group functioning. You don't have to be the designated leader in a group to take these actions. As the leader, you will have some structural power that will make it easier for your actions to have an impact on others in the group. But, great change can happen when people lead from below, when we take acts of leadership from positions of less structural power.

Regardless of your position in the group, how you respond when faced with these issues can impact how the group functions, and how welcoming the group environment is for everyone. As a white person witnessing some of the painful dynamics described earlier in the article, you can choose to use the privilege you have as a white person to change the often-unconscious patterns that plague well-meaning groups, whether or not you have the structural power that comes with being named the leader. It is a great opportunity to truly live in alignment with your values, to create a more inclusive climate, and to lead by example.

**For further learning, see the article by Dr. Manning,** *Calling In, Calling Out:*  
<https://roxannemanning.com/calling-in-calling-out/>



## EMPATHY GROUPS

---

### A guide to holding your self-led (or led) empathy groups

Empathy groups are designed for empathy and connection, not so much for practice and coaching, though of course, practice happens! During an empathy group, we encourage you to keep the focus on connecting with one individual at a time through giving that person empathy.

We're defining empathy as a quality of connection wherein we are in touch with what's going on with someone this very moment in their heart, or what we refer to in NVC as their needs – life-energy moving through a person. We also use the word empathy to refer to the actions we are taking as we move towards that quality of connection. For example, if I'm wanting to empathize with someone, one action might be that I focus my attention on trying to sense, feel, understand, see, get in touch with, connect with the person's feelings and needs. I might do this verbally or non-verbally, just with the focus of my attention. We believe that non-verbal empathy can be just as (or sometimes more) powerful an action as verbal empathy.

When someone is receiving empathy during an empathy group, sometimes the connection is found most easily if that person is receiving verbal empathy from just one person; other times deep connection occurs when the whole group participates in giving verbal empathy. To support the process, we encourage those not actively speaking at any given time to continue to actively participate through giving non-verbal empathy by focusing your attention on connecting with the speaker's feelings and needs.

To facilitate the flow of empathy, we request that all group members refrain from giving advice or discussing a person's "issue" unless 1) advice or discussion was explicitly requested, AND 2) group members have connected with the needs underlying the request and with how this will contribute to the person. We request that you check these two questions carefully because we believe very strongly that empathy can be very powerful and healing, and, since most of us have had very few, if any, role models of giving, witnessing or receiving empathy, we want to hold with care the possibility for this to happen for each group member at this retreat. While advice, discussion, and sharing one's own experience can often be helpful, we have many more opportunities in life to give and receive these – so we want to hold these Empathy Groups with a strong intention to support the rare and precious experience of receiving empathy.

We encourage you to follow the classical NVC format for giving empathy, especially if you are fairly new to NVC and are still practicing basic skills. However, we recognize that forging a connection is always more important than the format of the empathy. Reminder: the NVC form for empathy includes guessing feelings and needs and may sound something like this:

Are you feeling ...?

Because you need ...?

If you are already familiar and comfortable with connecting through NVC empathy, you may want to explore how to “naturalize” the phrasing to meet more needs for connection. For example, you can review our handout of alternative ways of framing needs (e.g. “it’s really important to you that...”), break the sentence into guessing feelings and needs separately (e.g. “So you’re feeling really lonely? Are you needing companionship?”), use 5-word needs instead of one-word needs (e.g. “Are you needing trust that your needs matter” rather than “Are you needing trust”), and the like. Feel free to consult your feelings and needs lists.

Staying with these simple guidelines is so different from our accustomed ways of speaking and thinking that it may be very hard or uncomfortable to do. Our experience is that there are many layers of depth to be discovered through this very simple tool if we stick with it longer than we could before. While you are here we hope you’ll receive a quality of support for doing so that is not usually found outside of this environment, and we encourage you to use your time at this retreat to do as much “empathy muscle-building” as you find in yourself to do.

In thinking about how to divide time in your group, you may want to consider either dividing time equally each time your group meets, or focusing more attention on one person per meeting. If you choose the latter, we suggest that you still give each person at least a few minutes to check in with what’s alive for them, then proceed with focusing on one person for the remainder of the time. We suggest this because we have confidence it will meet needs for trust, connection and belonging for all group members. However, we also trust that your group can find its way to meeting those needs, whatever format you use.

## TIPS FOR LEADING EMPATHY GROUPS

---

Leading an empathy group whose focus is connection and empathy rather than practice requires both participating in the empathy and maintaining awareness of whether the process is supporting the person receiving the empathy. This is not a time for direct coaching, which might include expressions such as this: “Instead of focusing on the story and repeating it, focus on her feelings and needs.” Rather, it is a time for leading by example by focusing on empathy, for gentle suggestions, and for trusting one’s sense of the effect of the process on the receiver.

Here are a few guidelines we hope will support you in this role:

- a) If you sense the empathy guess is taking the person out of her or his heart and into her or his thoughts or judgments, check in by asking: “Is this connecting for you?” If not, encourage the person and the group to re-focus on the present moment with guesses of feelings and needs.
- b) If the group goes into analysis of the person’s “issue” or into advice-giving when it has not been requested, you might also redirect the flow by saying, “I really want us to stay with Sarah’s heart now,” then follow with an empathy guess that focuses clearly on the need: “Sarah, are you longing for more joy in relating to your son?”
- c) If you sense that a role-play might contribute to healing or movement, suggest that to the person receiving empathy. If one is wanted, ask whether they’d like to choose someone for the role-play, or ask others if they’d like to participate if no preference is expressed. If you have a sense your participation would be the most supportive, you could volunteer by saying, “Would you like to try a role play with me?” We encourage you to try role-plays if you feel confident about how to lead and participate in them; otherwise, stay with empathy.
- d) If the group is reticent to make guesses, you might initiate the empathy with two or three guesses, then consciously leave space for others to join the process. You can also explicitly request others to join in from the beginning so a pattern is not set where the group expects you to offer most of the empathy. However, the focus is still primarily on the person receiving, so if people are reluctant and the person receiving is struggling to stay connected without more active connection, step in to offer more connection.
- e) If the person receiving empathy touches on deeper self-connection (including crying) and others in the group continue to make guesses, this sometimes shifts the person out of self-connection. If this happens, gently offer a sign or gesture that indicates “not yet,” such as holding up a hand, or verbally express your feelings, needs and request to hold back on verbal empathy but stay in non-verbal empathy. You might check in with the person you

interrupted after the empathy time ends to see how the interruption affected her or him and connect about both your needs.

- f) At all times, be prepared to be authentic about your experience and to dialogue with people in real time about needs met and unmet. It is not uncommon for empathy groups to experience some challenge around how to connect and meet everyone's needs. If you can model and practice your "living NVC" skills, you are most likely to find the experience nourishing.
- g) If you're struggling with leading, you can ask group members for empathy. If you're still struggling, you can also ask an assistant for support, and bring your challenges to the empathy group leaders' meeting.

# EMPATHY BUDDY HELP SHEET

---

This document offers an outline for how an “Empathy Buddy” call or meet-up might go. We recommend following it closely at first until you discover your own rhythm.

If you feel confused by any of these instructions, if you have questions or comments, please let us know. Your feedback will help to improve the clarity of the instructions. Please notice in your empathy call if any ideas come up that you or your partner are “not doing it right.” These are very valuable thoughts to explore in our sessions.

## Set-Up / Logistics / Timing

- First decide how many minutes you’d like to spend on the call, in total.
- Decide who will be first Speaker and who will be first Listener.
- Give half of the remaining time to the first Speaker.

## Self-Empathy / Intention

What needs are you hoping to meet on the call? We recommend making CONNECTION one of the primary needs you’re wanting to meet.

## Empathy Giving

*Speaker:* Talk about something that’s troubling you, something you really enjoyed, or if all else fails, something neutral (e.g. what you had for breakfast).

*Speaker:* As often as you’d like, and at any point, you can say “Would you be willing to reflect back what you’ve heard so far (especially any feelings and needs)?” If the Listener reflects anything that you didn’t intend, take the opportunity to clarify. I like to find a way to say this which does not imply any “wrongness” on the part of the Listener. E.g. “Your reflection about X was what I intended you to hear. Your reflection about Y was not quite what I meant, let me say it again....”

*Listener:* listen for what is important to the Speaker. Why are they telling you this? What were their feelings and needs/motivations in the story they’re telling. At any point, and as often as you’d like, you can break in (“interrupt”) and say “Could I reflect back what I heard you say so far?” Doing this may help you stay connected if you suspect your memory is starting to fill, or if you want to get clarity. I like to present reflections in the form “This is what I heard... [observations...feelings...needs]. Is that what you intended me to hear?”

*Listener:* Allow your ADVICE, SUGGESTIONS, STORIES, IDEAS etc. to float away. See what happens when you attempt to stick with just reflecting what the other person is saying, especially their feelings and needs. If you feel an overwhelming urge to say/ask something other than empathy guesses, check in with the speaker that they’re open to it.

E.g. “I have some advice – would you be open to it?” or “I want to tell you what I’m thinking/feeling about this situation, would you be open to hearing that?”

## FEEDBACK

Leave a few minutes during the first Speaker's time for feedback. I believe this is a very important part of the call, if the call is to support learning.

*Speaker:* Tell the listener what you enjoyed about their empathic listening. Try to put it in terms of observations of what they said or reflected, how you felt at that point, and what needs were met.

For example: "You listened really well" is feedback, but it is not very specific in terms of telling the other person what you really most enjoyed.

Compare that with "When you reflected back that you were hearing my need for respect, I felt a sense of relief in my body, and it really gave me a sense of clarity which I'd not had previously." In this case, you're pointing out a specific moment which you enjoyed, which will give the listener a clearer idea what worked for you and why.

Please don't give the listener suggestions on what they could have done differently without checking in with them first e.g. "I have some suggestions about things you could have done differently that I might have enjoyed more, would you be open to hearing them right now?"

*Listener:* This is your chance to hear how it was for the other person to experience your empathic listening. I recommend that the speaker tells you first what they enjoyed, but if you also want to hear about what they did not enjoy so much you can go ahead and request that from them.

When the first Speaker has used their time, switch roles.

## RECEIVING EMPATHY SKILLS

---

People tend to think of empathy time that is focused on us as time to “receive.” Yet many people don’t feel completely satisfied with the empathy they “receive.” These notes aim to support you to explore how to lead your empathy time so it will be most likely to contribute to you.

1. At any moment, be ready to shift to focusing on the quality of connection between you and the other person, rather than on the content of what you’re trying to work on.
2. Consider this time as another opportunity to live NVC: within yourself, and with another person. This means exercising your self-connection and your honesty muscles.
  - a. Focus on self-connection:
    - i. How am I feeling? What am I needing? (check heart and body)
    - ii. Am I connecting with what is offered to me?
    - iii. Is there anything in my way to connecting with this person right at this moment?
    - iv. What can I do to open my heart more fully to receiving the guesses and “allow” myself to be affected by them?
  - b. Focus on honesty:
    - i. Express how the empathy (or anything else) is landing with you (feelings/needs)
    - ii. Ask for what you want:
      - more empathy guesses
      - fewer empathy guesses
      - physical proximity/distance
      - different person to offer empathy
      - silent empathy
      - different style
      - shift focus/topic (if something else is more alive, including present moment)
      - anything else?
3. Preparation for empathy time:

What feelings and needs arise in you when you consider expressing honestly when your needs are not met when you’re receiving empathy?

  - a. What needs might be met by doing this?
  - b. What needs might not be met by doing this?

- c. What strategies might support you in being able to shift to living NVC more fully during your empathy time?
4. During empathy time:
- Check in with yourself periodically and reconsider your level of authenticity and presence to “receive” empathy.



## DEEPENING EMPATHY SKILLS

---

In this document, every 🔔 (bell) is an invitation to pause and take time to fully connect with your feelings and needs. Instead of just answering the questions at a cognitive level, take the opportunity to connect with yourself so you can fully develop and enjoy your self-connection and experience the fullest potential for learning, growth and healing.

### I. Understanding Empathy

---

#### A. What is Empathy? Being vs. Doing

Empathy is an energy rather than a particular form of speech. We define empathy as a quality of connection wherein we reach to touch what is alive in someone's heart of hearts at the present moment, the life energy moving through them.

We also use the word "empathy" to refer to the actions we take as we move toward that quality of connection: focusing our attention on sensing, understanding, and connecting with the person's feelings and/or needs. We might do this verbally or non-verbally, just with the focus of our attention.

Empathy is a need, but the verbal form of empathy we employ in NVC is a strategy. We contribute to meeting the need for empathy by focusing our hearts' intention on being present and receptive to another human being, and secondarily with how we express this intention in words.

In fact, employing the verbal strategies of NVC when our hearts are not connected can contribute to disconnection and mistrust; it's a form of *doing* instead of *being*. At the same time, starting with the verbal strategies even if our hearts are not completely open can serve to move our hearts to where we want to be; the *doing* can serve the *being*. Being explicit about this choice can help the other person trust our genuine intention even when our words are faltering.

#### Journal – What is Empathy

---

What is your understanding of NVC empathy?

1. 🔔 As you reflect on your understanding, do any feelings arise? What needs are these feelings connected to?
2. 🔔 Is there a difference between your understanding and what is written above? If yes, any feelings and needs arising in relation to this difference?

## **B. Modes of Empathy**

The gift of our empathy can be conveyed to another in several ways, some with words and some without. We choose the level based on what is available to us as well as our assessment of what is most likely to contribute to the quality of connection and understanding we are aiming for and the context within which we operate.

1. **Empathic presence:** Empathic presence is the basic foundation of empathy, the mere intention to be present with another's experience.
2. **Empathic understanding:** Empathic understanding is an internal experience of attunement to another's experience, offering our intuitive sense of understanding, not necessarily with words.
3. **Empathic reflection:** Empathic reflection takes the form of putting into words our understanding of the other person's experience and checking with them if our understanding matches their experience. (See section C below for more details)
4. **Empathic expression:** Empathic expression is a way of presenting our empathic understanding to a person through sharing the effect their experience has had on us. (More on empathic expression below within the section on empathy for support and healing.)
5. **Empathic Action:** At times, when we are able to take action in support of another person's needs, empathy can be most fully conveyed through taking an action that indicates an understanding of and care about the other person's needs and wishes.

### **Journal – Modes of Empathy**

1. Choose a situation where someone shared something that was challenging for you to hear. What did the person say?
2. Imagine yourself offering your empathic presence or nonverbal understanding. How do you imagine the other person may be affected?
3. If you wanted to choose empathic reflection, what would you say? What do you imagine would be the effect?
4. If you wanted to choose empathic expression, what would you say? What do you imagine would be the effect?
5. Is there any action aside from speaking that you can imagine taking that would reflect your empathy? What do you imagine would be the effect?
6. In view of the above, which response would you choose and why?

### ***C. Repeating, Understanding, Translating into Feelings and Needs, and Empathy***

1. Repeating what was heard - may include the person's story, analysis and thoughts; often referred to as mirroring.
2. Expressing understanding of what was heard - summarizing or paraphrasing the content of what was heard in a way that expresses one's own understanding.
3. Translation into feelings and/or needs - checking our understanding of the feelings and/or needs behind what was said. This is the form that NVC's empathy practice most commonly takes.

Although NVC's empathy practice usually takes the form of guessing feelings and needs, empathy is the experience of presence and heart opening to the other person's humanity. Empathic connection can happen through any of these forms of hearing since they are all strategies for understanding and connection, even when we don't make explicit guesses about feelings and needs.

#### **Journal – Repeating, Understanding and Translating**

1. Choose a situation where someone shared something that was challenging for you to hear. What did the person say?
2. Write a line of response using each of the options above:
  - a. Repeating:
  - b. Understanding:
  - c. Translating into feelings and needs:
3. 📌 How do you feel about each of these lines? What needs are or are not met?

### ***D. The Verbal Form of Empathy in NVC***

NVC offers a form for verbally guessing feelings and needs that may sound something like this (see other documents for information about feelings and needs):

Are you feeling ...? Because you need ...?

It is not necessary to use this format; in fact, with more experience we usually find that the format becomes flexible and may be used only when we do not have the resources for connection without a supportive structure.

Whether we use this exact format or not, it's helpful to understand what this format is trying to accomplish:

1. It focuses our attention on connecting with feelings and needs rather than stories, thoughts, and strategies

2. It helps us keep our focus on the other person rather than sharing advice, stories, or other habitual forms of response.
3. It links people’s feelings to their own needs (met or unmet), rather than to us or to some other trigger around them. By linking the feelings directly to the person’s own needs we help both of us to remain clear about the source of the person’s feelings. If the person’s feelings are related to us, this format also gives us more room to hear those feelings with less likelihood that we will shift the focus to explaining or “defending” ourselves.
4. It reminds us and the other person that we are checking our guess with them rather than telling them what their feelings are.
5. It reminds us that we don’t know what they are feeling unless they tell us.

### ***E. Naturalizing the Language of Empathy***

To contribute to connection with people who are not involved with NVC or who don’t feel comfortable with NVC language, as well as for a sense of authenticity and fluidity in our language, it often helps to guess feelings and needs without saying the words “feeling” and “need” themselves, especially the word “need,” as these words are themselves triggers in our society. Awareness of this possibility and practice can make a more “natural-sounding” language more accessible in times of conflict and when we want to support people around us.

#### **Example:**

With: “Are you *feeling* frustrated because you *need* to be heard?”

Without: “Are you frustrated because you *want* to be heard?”

The reason to use the words “feeling” and “need” is to contribute to our own and others’ consciousness transformation and to help us to focus our attention on these powerful elements for self-connection and connection with others. If we choose to forgo these words, we can do so when we are confident that we can maintain our consciousness on the feelings and needs and no longer need the support of the formula.

#### **Here are additional options for identifying needs without using the word “need”:**

You love....	.... is fun for you
You thrive on....	.... matters to you / is meaningful to you
You really enjoy....	.... makes your life feel worthwhile
You’d be nourished by....	.... helps you feel well/good/whole/happy
You value....	.... is so important to you
You want....	
You long for....	

While naturalizing the form of empathy can serve to meet needs, we want to maintain awareness that the language of empathy and of NVC more broadly is not “un-natural.” It is simply not our habit. It is completely natural for human beings to be connected to feelings and needs. The key is the degree to which we have integrated the consciousness transformation which would then allow us to remain focused on feelings and/or needs without using the words. If the consciousness is not fully integrated, then we may come across as inauthentic when we use the NVC language.

### **Journal – Naturalizing the Language of Empathy**

Write a statement from someone in your life that would be challenging for you to hear.

1. What would be a “classical empathy” guess?
2. How would you “naturalize” the guess? Try to create at least 3 different empathy guesses that do not use the words “feeling” and “need,” yet still connect with feelings and needs.
3. 🛎 What feelings and needs arise as you do this? Choose a situation where someone shared something that was challenging for you to hear. What did the person say?

### **F. Non-Verbal Empathy**

Non-verbal empathy can be just as powerful as verbal expressions of empathy for fostering connection, and a critical aspect of the practice of empathy when words do not serve connection. Words may not serve connection for a variety of reasons: Our own level of comfort or skill with NVC, the other person’s comfort with the style of the words, the level of trust between us, their level of understanding of language based on age, etc.

Although we might not trust it at first, our non-verbal cues – our body language, the look in our eyes, the tone of our voice – reveal the empathy in our hearts and can have a profound effect on us and on the person we are connecting with.

### **Journal – Non-Verbal Empathy**

1. Have you experienced being with someone in non-verbal empathy?
  - a. 🛎 If yes, what feelings and needs arose in you?
  - b. 🛎 If not, what feelings and needs arise when you imagine focusing on staying present without the words of empathy? What would be a “classical empathy” guess?

## G. Giving and Receiving

In NVC, we often use the term “giving empathy” or “receiving empathy.” These are place-holders for understanding which person is currently the focus of the empathic attention. In “giving” empathy, however, we aim to focus our hearts on empathically connecting rather than on any sense of giving something to another. As Marshall Rosenberg says, when the giving is fully from the heart, there is no telling who is the giver and who the receiver. Rather, together, we enter into “empathic space.”

### Journal – Giving and Receiving

1. What happens in you when you focus empathically on another person (explore observations, feelings, needs):
  - a. 🛎 With an empathy buddy or another practice situation?
  - b. 🛎 In a real-life situation when someone is triggered?
  - c. Do you have any requests of yourself that may support you in opening your heart to being fully present with another person?
2. What happens in you when someone else is focusing empathically on you (explore observations, feelings, needs):
  - a. 🛎 With an empathy buddy or another practice situation?
  - b. 🛎 In a real-life situation when someone is triggered?
  - c. Do you have any requests of yourself that may support you in opening your heart to having someone else be present with you?
3. 🛎 Reflecting on your experience with this journal, what feelings and needs do you connect with? Do you have any insights or learnings that you want to document or explore further?
4. Do you have any requests of yourself in connection with this experience?

## H. The Purposes of Empathy

The essential purpose of empathy – and of NVC more generally – is to nurture empathic connection within oneself and between people. Empathy also can be used to meet a variety of other needs, for ourselves and for others, including:

For the person “receiving”:

- Being heard/understood
- Compassion
- Growth, deeper self-understanding
- Healing
- Clarity of purpose
- Trust in mattering

For the person “giving”:

- Clarity (by checking our understanding)
- Being present (especially if triggered or disconnected and wanting to reconnect)
- Compassion (opening our heart fully)
- Choice (about how to respond, instead of responding from our habits)
- Interdependence (in particular, spaciousness for conscious choice about how to hold our own and others’ needs through an empathic dialogue)
- Movement towards purpose (by understanding another’s needs, can align better)

### Journal – Purposes of Empathy

Think of a recent situation in which you spontaneously and open-heartedly offered someone an empathic guess about their feelings and needs (vs. in a planned empathy session).

1. What was the situation?
2. What led you to make an empathy guess?
3. Were you aware at the time of your feelings and needs?
4. If not, can you trace them now?
5. 🗨️ What needs did offering empathy contribute to in you?
6. 🗨️ Any unmet needs?
7. Do you have a sense of what needs may have been met for the other person?
8. 🗨️ Reflecting on your experience with this journal, what feelings and needs do you connect with? Do you have any insights or learnings that you want to document or explore further?
9. Do you have any requests of yourself in connection with this experience?

## II. BASIC CONCEPTS OF THE EMPATHY PROCESS

---

### A. *Empathy vs. Sympathy and Identification*

We distinguish between *empathy*, which is focused on the other person, and *sympathy* and *identification*, which shift the focus back to us.

When in **sympathy**, we are focused on our feelings about what is going on with the other person (even if those feelings are ones of care and concern).

When in **identification**, we are focused on our similar experiences, feelings, or needs.

Neither sympathy nor identification are wrong; we are simply distinguishing between them and what we're referring to as empathy in NVC. Both sympathy and identification can serve to open our hearts, but are unlikely to serve the same depth of connection and healing that empathic connection serves.

### **Journal –Empathy vs. Sympathy and Identification**

1. Can you identify a time when you offered sympathy or were identifying, instead of empathizing?
2. 🛎 Explore – what was going on in you? What were your feelings and needs?
3. Were you meeting your need for contribution? If yes, what needs were met for the other person?
4. What might have been a few lines of empathy that you might have offered in the situation?
5. 🛎 Reflecting on your experience with this journal, what feelings and needs do you connect with? Do you have any insights or learnings that you want to document or explore further?

### ***B. Guessing vs. Knowing – Letting Go***

The focus in empathy is on presence and connection, not on accuracy. The risk of guessing instead of thinking that we *know* what might be alive in the other person exposes us to the possibility of being told that our guess was wrong. This vulnerability invites the other person into dialogue much more than an assumption of *knowing* their feelings and needs.

If our guess doesn't connect for the other person, they might tell us so directly. Sometimes, however, the person tries to "make the guess fit." This might be out of discomfort, wanting to contribute to our well being; it might simply be confusion that arises from their desire for clarity and connection. In either case, it's rarely a contribution to the person to wrestle with our empathy guess. If the guess doesn't connect, encourage the person to let it go and check what else is alive in the moment.



## Journal – Guessing vs. Knowing - Letting Go

Recall a time when you made an empathy guess and either your sense was that it didn't "fit," or the person told you it wasn't it.

1. 🛎 How did you feel? What needs came up for you?
2. 🛎 If you imagine making an "incorrect" guess, what comes up for you? Connect sufficiently with your needs to have an understanding of what might come up for you in these situations.
3. 🛎 Reflecting on your experience with this journal, what feelings and needs do you connect with? Do you have any insights or learnings that you want to document or explore further?
4. Do you have any requests of yourself in connection with this experience?

### C. *Empathic Sensing vs. Intellectual Guessing*

While people work to integrate NVC's feelings and needs vocabulary, they might notice some mental effort to identify and name their own and others' feelings and needs. This learning process can sometimes create the impression that NVC is a cognitive process.

At its heart, however, NVC invites us to shift our focus from intellectual understanding alone, and focus more directly on trusting our felt-sense of what might go on for another person (or for ourselves). This is also a learning process, and it comes either spontaneously or with some practice. When we hear many stories and connect with the feelings and needs of the human beings experiencing them, we grow in our ability to tune into feelings and needs with ease, from our hearts. This usually happens as a result of our own experience of the richness of human needs as well as from noticing the repeated threads that run through many human experiences.

Sometimes the most direct path to empathic sensing is through identification. We can ask ourselves: how might I feel if I were going through this? What might I need? In other situations, identification can confuse our understanding, especially when people's life experiences and temperaments differ.

Another supportive practice for developing an empathic sense is to ask ourselves: how *might* this person feel? What could *possibly* be the human need here? These types of questions can tap into our life experiences and support us in thinking less and imagining more. The space of imagination can contribute to intuition and connection where the thought process might not.

Entering true empathic space often rests on bringing together our mind, heart, body, and imagination. Whichever of these is most spontaneously available, the others can still be cultivated.

## Journal – Empathic Sensing vs. Intellectual Guessing

Choose a situation where you have struggled to understand someone’s feelings and needs but have not managed to connect.

1. 🛎 How do you feel about the fact that you have not understood the person’s feelings and needs? What needs come up for you?
2. Is there any way that you think you “should” guess correctly or understand how someone else is feeling or what they need?
3. 🛎 If yes, consider your feelings and needs underneath the “shoulds.” Connect sufficiently so that the “should” is not disconnecting you from empathic connection.
4. What might be the person’s feelings and needs? Explore all possibilities, even if they seem unlikely. For each one, check with any sensations in your body that might give you clues to your internal “yes” or “no” to that guess. If you don’t find internal clues, consider:
  5. 🛎 How might you feel and what might you need in this situation?
  6. What *might* this person feel? What *might* this person need? Expand the range of your guesses.
  7. 🛎 Reflecting on your experience with this journal, what feelings and needs do you connect with? Do you have any insights or learnings that you want to document or explore further?
  8. Do you have any requests of yourself in connection with this experience?

### D. Following vs. Leading

With empathy, we aim to follow the other person’s lead in terms of the focus of what they are talking about, the depth they wish to go to, and the degree of self-revelation or even self-awareness. 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. This choice comes from trust in every human being’s capacity for self-connection, and in the quality of healing that happens when people learn to trust themselves. It also reflects the fact that we do not present ourselves as experts, but rather simply offer our presence.

We may, of course, make such suggestions in our own expression (checking first if that is wanted), but we maintain clarity that these offerings are not in the spirit of empathic connection, even if they serve healing and growth.

Sometimes, however, when a clear leadership agreement exists between both parties to the empathic connection (such as in a student-teacher relationship or when offering empathy for the purpose of healing), some amount of leading is explicitly or implicitly sought. During such times, we may find ourselves wanting to offer tips and suggestions to invite greater self-connection, guess deeper needs or feelings than are directly expressed, share our perspective, or offer other strategies to support the healing process. We can note when we are no longer offering solely our

empathic presence and are instead actively guiding the healing process, and continue to check with the other person periodically whether our guidance is still wanted.

### **Journal – Following vs. Leading**

When you offer empathy to another person, do you notice a challenge in following without leading?

1. 🛎 What feelings and needs are connected with this challenge?
2. Any insights about this?
3. Do you have any requests of yourself about how you might face this situation in the future?

### **E. Staying with the Present vs. Analyzing**

Our need for contribution sometimes interferes with our ability to stay in empathic connection with another person. Many of us have developed habits for how to respond when people share their inner lives with us. One of them is to analyze what we hear or to analyze the people involved. Analyzing can take many different forms, including diagnosing, labeling, making connections, drawing conclusions, etc.

NVC empathy invites us to stay in the present moment and trust in what can emerge from this focus. Focusing on the last thing the person said and on connecting with the feelings and needs in relation to this last thing can support us in staying with the present moment. If we notice ourselves being drawn to something that was said earlier, we have the choice to do so, but this will likely be a departure from empathy.

By focusing our attention on the present, we demonstrate our trust in the person and in his or her ability to self-connect, to learn, to grow, and ultimately, to heal.

### **Journal – Staying with the Present vs. Analyzing**

1. When you offer empathy to another person, do you notice a challenge in staying with the present moment rather than analyzing?
2. 🛎 What feelings and needs are connected with this challenge?
3. Any insights about this?
4. Any requests of yourself?

### **F. Question vs. Statement Phrasing**

In NVC, we usually phrase empathy guesses as questions. However, sometimes the repetition of asking questions doesn't contribute to a sense of connection and flow in the dialogue, perhaps

because the questions invite the person to reply each time, and this may be distracting for some people who would prefer to just take in the empathy and not reply.

We can forgo the question format when we have a fair degree of confidence that the other person experiences freedom to express if he or she doesn't connect with our guess, and we find that the statement contributes more to connection.

Even if we don't phrase our empathy guess as a question, we can stay aware that we are *asking*, not *telling*, and *guessing*, not *knowing*. This will be more challenging to convey without the question format, so it will become more about our consciousness and willingness to let go of any attachment to being "right" than about how we phrase the statement. Sometimes the tone of voice with which we express the statement can carry the guessing rather than knowing quality.

### Example:

Question format: "Is it that you're grieving, so much longing for partnership?"

Statement format: "So you're really grieving and longing for partnership..."

#### **Journal – Question vs. Statement Phrasing**

1. When you offer empathy to another person, is there any way that you are telling yourself that you *know* what is alive in them, their feelings and needs?
2. 🛎 If yes, explore your feelings and needs sufficiently to connect with openness to the other person's experience of what is alive for them.
3. Do you tend to frame your guesses as questions or statements? Whichever you tend to do, consider asking for feedback from your empathy buddy (or someone else) about how they receive the question or statement format, to see whether there is something for you to reflect on or learn here.
4. 🛎 Reflecting on your experience with this journal, what feelings and needs do you connect with? Do you have any insights or learnings that you want to document or explore further?
5. Do you have any requests of yourself in connection with this experience?

### **G. Connecting with Strategies and "Stories"**

Sometimes, focusing the empathy on strategies or even interpretations rather than needs (such as in "mirroring") can establish trust and a sense of being heard when guessing needs might be confusing or disconnecting.

### Example:

A: I ask her where she's been and she keeps lying to me! Why can't she just tell me the truth?

B: I'm wondering if you're frustrated because you're longing for trust?

A: No! I told you, I just want her to tell me the truth!

B: So, you really want her to tell you the truth!

When we connect with the story, as in this example, we can still refrain from linking the feeling to the strategy/interpretation as much as we can, so as not to create a causal link between them. (A causal link might sound like this: "So you are frustrated because she is lying to you.") We can simply express our understanding of the power of how the person is experiencing the situation.

### H. *Content vs. Quality of Connection*

To contribute to authentic connection with what is alive in the moment, it is crucial to distinguish between the feelings and needs which are about the *content* of what the other person is talking about, and those feelings and needs which are about the *process* of connecting that is going on between us and the other person.

### Example:

#### *Dialogue begins:*

A: Yesterday this guy cut me off on the freeway. We almost collided! I can't believe how insanely people drive these days....

B: Were you frustrated and scared because you want to be safe?

A: Of course, but that's not the point! You really don't understand me! It's so simple!

#### *B's options:*

B: (Staying with CONTENT): Oh, was it that you want people to be aware of the impact of their actions?

B: (Shifting to PROCESS): I'm wondering if you're frustrated right now? Is it that you want to be understood with more ease?

Recognizing that sometimes we try to connect with the content when there is really a break in the quality of connection can contribute enormously to our ability to find each other again when we have lost connection. It invites us to more authenticity and being present in the moment. It helps us shift from thinking we're *doing* something, to being *fully present* as a human being with another human being, open to life.

## Journal – Content vs. Quality of Connection

In relation to the following statement:

“We agreed that you would do the dishes 3 times a week and I can’t even recall the last time that you did them!”

1. What could be a content empathy guess?
2. What could be a process empathy guess?
3. 🗨️ How do you feel and what needs arise when you connect with each empathy guess above?
4. Any insights about the difference between the two directions of empathy?

### *1. Balancing Brevity and Connection*

Most people who are new to learning NVC, and even experienced NVC practitioners, find NVC language awkward and tend to want to elaborate on the need guess. For example, they might say: “Are you disappointed because you need trust, and what your partner did really didn’t meet this need by not remembering your agreement?”

While we prefer not to elaborate by going further into story, we recognize that making one-word need guesses often doesn’t connect for people. What is missing is the sense of vibrancy and relevance of the particular need to the particular situation.

Empathy guesses can stay focused on needs and connect with the person’s experience by moving from “one-word needs” to “full-phrase needs,” while still staying clear of linking the feelings and needs to a particular person or strategy.

#### **Examples:**

1-word need: “Are you disappointed because you need trust?”

Full-phrase need: “Are you disappointed because you need trust that your needs matter?”

1-word need: “You’re frustrated and longing for support?”

Full-phrase need: “You’re frustrated and so much longing for support in getting the work done around the house?”

Every need guess can be elaborated by recognizing the particular nuance of the need that is alive at this moment.

### Journal – Balancing Brevity and Connection

1. Identify a challenging statement for you to empathize with, and explore 1-word need empathy and sentence need empathy.
2. 🗨️ How do the different guesses feel to you? What needs are met or unmet?
3. Any requests of yourself?

## III. EMPATHY FOR SUPPORT AND HEALING

### A. Relief, Healing, and Transformation

When a person approaches us for support with a challenging situation, the mere experience of being understood can provide relief in the moment. This is because any experience of distress carries within it two parts: the experience itself, and the sense of being alone with it. When we can offer basic understanding, there is no longer aloneness, and that provides relief. Sometimes, relief is all that's needed.

Relief, however, is rarely long lasting, especially if what is at stake is a longstanding issue, a deep struggle, or an enemy image. Healing is more related to the connection of a person with themselves, especially being able to engage fully with the emotions and connect with the needs.

Both relief and healing can be achieved through empathy alone. Full transformation of a painful experience (especially when associated with a strong judgment or enemy image) often requires going beyond empathy to finding a way to provide a shift in perspective to the person we are with, most often through humanizing the person in relation to whom they have had the painful experience. For this, a full process (see *Healing and Reconciliation* in a separate handout) is available. This process includes within it an expression – either as ourselves offering a different perspective, or in a role play as the other person.

Desired Outcome	Focus of Process
Relief	Empathic presence, empathic understanding, or empathic reflection with a focus on mirroring or paraphrasing are enough
Healing	Empathic reflection and empathic expression, with a focus on supporting full emotional self-connection
Transformation	Sustained empathic presence followed by expression to humanize whoever's actions may have contributed to the painful experience in the first place

## ***B. Connecting with the Body***

Connection with our bodies can serve as a healing process for both the person seeking support and for the person offering support:

1. For the person offering support to notice agitation or reactions to the other person and help engage our full presence. Being relaxed and calm in our bodies can help the other person experience our empathic presence.
2. For the person seeking healing, to use information from the body, such as sensations and impulses, to connect more deeply with feelings and/or needs and facilitate discovery and deeper healing.

We can support other people's connection with their bodies in two basic ways:

1. Asking explicit questions of the other person, such as: "Is there any place in your body where you notice your feelings or needs?"
2. Providing concrete instructions that would support this connection without asking the person directly about their body. E.g. "Would you take a few full breaths before continuing?"

Many people are not habituated to connecting with their own bodies, and a direct emphasis on the body may be distracting, at times even uncomfortable enough to interfere with rather than aid the process of healing. It may be helpful to make clear why we are making these suggestions and how we hope they will be helpful.

## ***C. Meeting Intensity***

When we are with someone who is experiencing or expressing some form of emotional intensity, many of us feel some discomfort. Our habit is usually to want to get the other person out of the intensity, and/or to focus on getting the person to "feel better." Yet, more often than not, what is most helpful to someone in distress is simply the spacious presence of another.

You may have experienced this yourself. What do you long for when you have intense feelings? Have you ever longed to be met with spacious presence? To have the opportunity to fully express the intensity, without trying to "feel better" or suppress any of the intensity? Few of us have had the experience of being welcomed in the fullness of our emotions when growing up, or even as adults.

Accordingly, the most significant aspect of meeting intensity is the capacity to remain present and calm, so we can shift into a stance of simply witnessing the humanity of the other's expression. In addition to cultivating presence, we may want to work on our capacity for matching the energy (section I below, p. 64) and on the balance between verbal and non-verbal empathy.



## Journal – Meeting Intensity

1. Remember or imagine a time when you have experienced challenge or discomfort about being in empathic space with a person expressing intensity.
2. What thoughts or other reactions contributed to your challenge or discomfort?
3. 🛎 What are the feelings and needs expressed in your reaction? Take a moment to connect in full with the needs that lead you away from presence.
4. 🛎 Are there needs that would be met by increasing your presence with this person? What feelings arise when you imagine staying present?
5. Any requests of yourself?

### *D. Sustained Empathy*

We can stay present with someone to support a deeper growth or healing by moving from brief empathic connection to sustained empathic connection. Sustained empathy invites us to use all the skills described above, while opening our hearts to spacious presence with the life in another.

This requires us, in particular, to be attentive to nuance so we can hear the more subtle differences between different expressions of similar ideas. It is very rare for anyone to truly repeat themselves exactly. Most often, the repetition is simply a clue for where deeper exploration may take place.

### *E. Connecting with Needs*

The NVC language of empathy often invites people to focus their attention on their unmet (or occasionally met) needs. We form habits of expression and guessing: “I feel disappointment because my need for trust is not met.” This focus can be very rich, helping us connect with and be more open to experiencing the full range of human emotions.

At the same time, the focus on whether or not a need is met does not always serve our ability to move into self-connection and peace, particularly when it reinforces a particular feeling or if it cements a particular story about ourselves or others, or about life. In effect, knowing whether or not our needs are met involves an interpretation of what is happening.

We can shift our relationship to our unmet needs by shifting our focus from the unmet quality of the need to connecting with the nature and energy of the need itself. This shift sometimes seems like a semantic difference to people, yet in fact it offers a potentially profound shift in our relationship with ourselves and our sense of what our purpose with NVC might be. We can shift from focusing on trying to meet our needs in order to experience peace, to living in peace internally whether or not our needs are met.

While this work has the most profound impact on self-empathy and our relationship with ourselves, it can also support our ability to connect empathically with others and in particular contribute to healing. We can shift our language to reflect this consciousness.

## Example:

Focus on the unmet quality of the need: “Do you feel disappointment? Is it because your need for trust is not met?”

Focus on the need itself: “Do you feel disappointment? Is it because you need trust?”

### Journal – Connecting with Needs

1. Complete the *Needs: Facets of Self-Connection* and *Needs: Layers of Self Connection* journals (separate handouts).

## F. Pacing and Silence

There is no “rule” about how many empathy guesses to make and with what frequency. By starting from opening our heart and focusing on the present moment, we can develop sensitivity to what is wanted by a particular person at a particular moment.

When we focus on the quality of connection in the present moment, we might find that we often don’t need to make many verbal empathy guesses. We can offer our full presence, and make verbal guesses if and when they contribute to connection. With other people we might find that the verbal guesses greatly contribute to a sense of connection and support, and that the person gets lost without the verbal connection. Verbal guesses are particularly useful when a person doesn’t trust that they are being understood.

When the other person is actually connecting with emotions, we can notice whether verbal empathy becomes distracting from self-connection or contributes to it, and adjust our pacing accordingly. In particular, if we notice that we are uncomfortable with silence, we can consider exploring this discomfort during our own empathy time so we can be more fully present when we offer empathy to others. Getting comfortable with silence can greatly contribute to our quality of presence and connection.

### Journal – Silence

Think of a time when you have offered empathy and the person was silent in response.

1. 🛎 What feelings arose in you? What needs were these feelings connected to?
2. If you experienced discomfort, consider:
  - a. Do you have any judgments about the silence (or the person)?
  - b. 🛎 If yes, what are the feelings and needs behind these judgments? Explore these until you have a sense of what might be going on for you leading to the discomfort.
3. Do you have any requests of yourself about how you might face this situation in the future?

### G. Working with "Repetitive" Statements

Sometimes, in response to our empathic guesses, the person we are connecting with seems to repeat what he or she is saying. Sometimes it's challenging to know how to empathize again without repeating ourselves.

It can be helpful to remember that repetition usually means that something the person is trying to say has not been heard to their satisfaction. We can look for anything that is different from what was said before, and try to connect with what that difference signifies in terms of feelings and/or needs that are implicit in the expression; even small changes in words or sequence of what is being said can be clues to what's important. We can also try to hear another need in what was said instead of the one we already guessed.

#### Journal – Working with "Repetitive" Statements

Identify a situation where you struggled with repetitive statements.

1. Create a mock dialogue in which the statements are quite similar (based on your recollection of the experience), and look for clues to feed your empathy guesses.
2. 📌 Reflecting on your experience with this journal, what feelings and needs do you connect with? Do you have any insights or learnings that you want to document or explore further?
3. Do you have any requests of yourself in connection with this experience?

### H. Fine-Tuning Depth

Sometimes our empathy guesses don't resonate for a person because we have really not connected with their feelings or needs. At other times, we may have connected with their feelings and needs but at a level that is either deeper or lighter than the person's own experience. The guess may then not ring true because it is not alive in the moment.

For example, we might guess the feeling of frustration when someone is feeling enraged; though frustration might be part of rage, it has a different energy and so may not resonate. Similarly, we might guess rage based on what we're hearing, but the person is only accessing frustration.

When we make a guess and are surprised when it doesn't resonate, we might consider changing the depth of our guess. The person's response will often give us a clue as to whether we're more likely to meet them with a deeper guess or with a lighter one. This fine-tuning is ongoing, because each time the person responds we can re-assess and find the level of depth we want to go to next.

Another factor that may affect the level of depth is the person's comfort with vulnerability, either because of a personal preference or because of a cultural context (e.g. workplace norms). If we remember that the purpose of empathy is to support connection rather than learn how to connect deeply with their own needs, we may find more ease in tuning into the level that is most likely to resonate with the person we're with.

### Journal – Fine-tuning Depth

In relation to the following statement:

“Nobody likes me. Every group I try to join I just feel like an outsider. I don’t belong anywhere.”

1. What might be your initial empathy guess?
2. What might be an empathy guess that reaches for a lighter layer of needs for this person?
3. What might be an empathy guess that reaches for a deeper layer of needs for this person?
4. 📌 Reflecting on your experience with this journal, what feelings and needs do you connect with? Do you have any insights or learnings that you want to document or explore further?

Do you have any requests of yourself in connection with this experience?

### I. Matching Energy

At times, though our identification of feelings and/or needs may accurately capture someone’s experience, our empathy guess nonetheless does not click for that person. This may be because the energy of our guess is not matching the person’s experience.

Tone of voice and body language can be crucial in supporting the other person’s sense of fully being heard and understood. Another way of matching energy is to intensify our own expression by using modifying terms such as "... because you really want ..." or "... because you long for ... so for ... so much".

### Journal – Matching Energy

In relation to the following statement:

“I hate it when people don’t show up authentically!”

1. What might be your initial empathy guess?
2. If the person expresses with a lot of intensity, how might you match the intensity with modifying terms?
3. How might you use tone of voice or body language to match intensity?
4. 📌 Reflecting on your experience with this journal, what feelings and needs do you connect with? Do you have any insights or learnings that you want to document or explore further?
5. Do you have any requests of yourself in connection with this experience?

### *J. Self-Expression During Empathy*

It's crucial to offer our own honesty when we focus on empathic connection with another in order to maintain authenticity and connection. Occasionally, we might find ourselves wanting to express what is alive in us and to make a request that will help us return to connection with the other person. This might happen for a variety of reasons, including:

1. We're confused and need more clarity than what we're able to achieve through making empathic guesses.
2. We are "stuck" in some way about how to proceed and want to stay present and authentic about where we are.
3. We're triggered by something we're hearing and are not able to stay authentically focused on empathy.
4. We have something we want to contribute that is not empathy, and we want to check if the person is interested in hearing it.

We can return our focus to the other person as soon as we can. We may even find a way to stay focused on our intention for empathic connection with the other person even as we speak about ourselves.

#### **Journal – Self-Expression During Empathy**

Think of a situation in which you were focused empathically on another person, and one of the above challenges was alive for you – yet you did not choose to express.

1. What is the situation?
2. What was going on for you from the four options above – or something else?
3. How might you have expressed this to the other person?
4. 🛎 What needs were you trying to meet by staying with empathy without expression?
5. 🛎 What needs were not met by staying with empathy without expression?
6. 🛎 Consider expressing to the other person. What feelings and needs arise?
7. Any strategies you might consider for tending to both sets of needs –those that would lead you to express your desire for transition of focus, and those that would lead you not to?
8. 🛎 Reflecting on your experience with this journal, what feelings and needs do you connect with? Do you have any insights or learnings that you want to document or explore further?
9. Do you have any requests of yourself in connection with this experience?

### ***K. Empathic Expression***

Sometimes the other person does not connect with the form of empathy. Since empathic guessing is simply a strategy for connection, we might want to try empathic expression. We can still stay focused on the other person and on our desire to connect with her or him rather than on the myriad other things that may be alive for us at that time. In fact, we can express empathically by sharing how we are moved by what we're hearing.

In certain situations or contexts, empathic expression may be easier for the other person to receive than empathic reflection. When relevant, we would still check for the accuracy of our understanding.

#### **Example:**

"When I hear you say that, I feel so moved. I'm really connecting with the depth of anguish you've experienced. I'm wondering whether you'd like to tell me more about your experience?"

### ***L. Transitioning Out of Empathic Focus on One Person***

Sometimes empathic connection happens for just a few moments. It may only involve one line of guesses, or a simple glance, without any need for more communication.

Other times we sustain an empathic focus on one person for a while. Then, for a variety of reasons, the focus shifts. The shift may happen because both people sense that the person is complete with what they wanted to talk about, the time agreed upon for an empathy session is complete, or because the person offering their presence wants to shift their attention to themselves or to something else.

When we focus on one person for a while, making the transition out of this focus can sometimes be confusing, awkward or even distressing for one or both people. At such times, making a conscious transition and dialoguing through the transition can greatly contribute to a sense of care and closure for both people.

We can stay conscious and at choice: just because we are empathically present at this moment for another person does not mean that we have to continue to offer our empathy guesses. We can choose both when to enter and when to exit empathic space.

### Journal – Transitioning Out of Empathic Focus on One Person

---

Think of a situation in which you were focused empathically on another person and wanted to shift your focus, but were struggling with how to make the shift. (For this journal we suggest you choose a situation that does not involve an agreement with a client.)

1. What is the situation?
2. What led you to want to shift focus? What were your feelings and needs?
3. What made it challenging to make the shift? What feelings and needs were alive for you?
4. How might you have expressed this to the other person?
5. 🕒 What needs might be met by expressing in the future?
6. Any strategies you might consider for tending to both sets of needs –those that would lead you to express your desire for transition of focus, and those that would lead you not to?
7. 🕒 Reflecting on your experience with this journal, what feelings and needs do you connect with? Do you have any insights or learnings that you want to document or explore further?
8. Do you have any requests of yourself in connection with this experience?

## IV. EMPATHY IN DAILY LIFE

---

The process of empathic connection can contribute to deepening our experience of connection with people in our daily lives. At times, responding with empathy as a first step, especially when in conflict, provides an opportunity to connect with ourselves and the other person before responding, thereby reducing the likelihood of reacting habitually in ways that don't meet our needs. Connecting empathically also gives us the opportunity to connect with what the other person is actually experiencing rather than our initial idea of what is going on with her or him. Beyond connection to specific individuals, practicing empathy also can support us in opening our hearts to all human beings and to shifting our heart's focus to connection and interdependence.

At the same time, empathic responses also present some challenges, which we explore below.

### A. *Advice and Strategies*

We may struggle to respond empathically because our habits of response get in our way. Some of these were explored above (sympathy, identification). Another habit we may be drawn to is giving advice. While advice may be wanted, welcome and supportive in many situations, we may want to grow our capacity to discern when those times are and to check whether our advice is truly welcome before offering it. The desire for strategies sometimes arises spontaneously after

empathy. Other times, as the original distress shifts, the person’s perspective on the situation shifts and strategies are no longer wanted.

### **B. Reacting to the Other Person’s Story**

We can get absorbed in the “story,” whether through agreement or disagreement, and it can be challenging to stay focused on empathic connection with needs. Surprisingly, it can be more challenging to focus empathically when we are in agreement and the story seems “true,” than when we are disagreeing with someone’s statements and recognizing that the story is a story. This is because the disagreement serves as a “wake-up call” that reminds us that connection is what we are seeking, whereas agreement may appear like connection.

### **C. Needing Acceptance**

Many people experience considerable vulnerability in making empathy guesses, largely having to do with fear about how the guess may be received. This fear can block the simplicity of our offer of presence in the service of connection.

Though people often welcome empathic guesses about their feelings and needs, sometimes people do respond in unexpected way. Some of these responses may be very challenging for us to receive, as they trigger some unmet needs for us. The need for acceptance is likely to be one of the core needs that arise in those times.

All human beings have a need for acceptance. As human-primates, we belong with groups, whether of family, community, or society more broadly, and in large measure we are interdependent with these groups. Our survival depends on belonging. It’s not surprising that acceptance would present itself as a powerful need for most human beings.

We can reach to grow into greater self-acceptance and to free ourselves from experiencing the need for acceptance as a bond, a “have to” that determines our actions. However, this process of growth can take place while experiencing great compassion for this need – for our humanity in

#### **Journal – Needing Acceptance**

Think of a time when you have offered empathy and recognize that the person’s response triggered your need for acceptance.

1. 🛎 What feelings arose in you? What needs were these feelings connected to? Use the *Facets of Self-Connection* journal to explore the needs underlying your need for acceptance.
2. 🛎 Do you notice any judgments of yourself about needing acceptance? If so, explore your feelings and needs behind them.
3. 🛎 Consider how you want to face this situation, balancing your needs for acceptance and for growth. What feelings and needs arise as you consider this?
4. Do you have any requests of yourself about how you might face this situation in the future?



having it. Part of our growth entails finding the balance between accepting where we are and growing where we want to grow.

#### ***D. Intensifying Emotions***

Sometimes people respond to empathy with more intense emotions. This does not mean that the empathy is “not working.” The goal of empathy is not to help people calm down; the goal is the quality of connection. Sometimes, with more connection, people will be more deeply in touch with the depth of their feelings. With more experience, we can increase our capacity to stay present with people at the level of intensity that they reach and maintain our own inner peace; meanwhile, we can stay honest about what we are able to hear with equanimity and check with the person we’re empathizing with about whether they are comfortable with the level of intensity if we’re not confident about it.

A different form of emotional intensity can arise when people don’t enjoy the empathy offered to them, and may express intense anger or frustration directed at us for making empathic guesses. We’ll look at this reaction under “judgments” below.

#### **Journal – People’s Responses to Empathy – More Intense Emotions**

Think of a time when you have offered empathy and the person’s emotions seemed to intensify.

1. 🛎 What feelings arose in you? What needs were these feelings connected to?
2. If you experienced discomfort, consider:
  - a. Do you have any judgments about strong emotions?
  - b. 🛎 If yes, what are the feelings and needs behind these judgments? Explore these until you have a sense of what might be going on for you leading to the discomfort.
3. Do you have any requests of yourself about how you might face this situation in the future?

#### ***E. Silence in Response to Empathy***

People often take a few moments in silence to reflect or connect with what arises in them in response to empathic guesses. However, in daily life, silence is often a form of “no.” Like any “no,” it can be seen as the beginning of a dialogue. What might be the needs behind the silence? How might we contribute to these needs? Do we want to reach out through the silence to make more connection? Maintaining clarity that empathy does not need to be expressed verbally can be a great support here. One way to meet silence is with non-verbal empathy.

#### ***F. Facing Judgments and the Needs behind Them***

Judgments of us in relation to our empathy guesses can be particularly confusing. We may need to take time for self-empathy to connect with our needs and transform any self-judgments that arise. It’s also important for us to reach for understanding of the needs behind the judgments.

When someone responds to our empathy guesses with judgments, it could be that his or her needs for trust, authenticity, vulnerability and/or mutuality are not being met, among others. Shifting from empathy with the content of the original material to connecting with the needs behind the judgments brings us to the present moment and the possibility of greater connection and authenticity.

One set of needs that are often alive behind judgments of our empathy are the needs for trust and authenticity. These might arise when we use the language of empathy in an attempt to calm the other person down, to get them to hear us, or to get them to do what we want. Because many of us do not experience sufficient trust that our needs matter and are hungry to be heard, we are likely to use empathy in this way sometimes. This is not “wrong”; it’s human. Yet it also contributes to mistrust about the use of empathy and so is something to explore and work with.

Another set of needs that often arise for people are for mutuality and safety. It’s important to be aware that offering an empathic guess invites the other person to greater vulnerability. Sometimes we focus empathically on another person when we are afraid to reveal our own vulnerability, or while we hold judgments of them. The person “receiving” might sense this and balk at the invitation to vulnerability, wanting to hear what’s alive in us before she or he comes forth with the life in them. Once again, it’s human for us to seek safety; yet it’s another place to explore and grow in our willingness to show up with full honesty and vulnerability ourselves.

### **Journal – Facing Judgments and the Needs Behind Them**

Think of a time when you have offered empathy and the person responded with judgments about your offer of empathy.

1. 📌 What feelings arose in you? What needs were these feelings connected to?
2. Consider:
  - a. Was there any way that you were “using” empathy for one of the purposes outlined above under “trust”?
  - b. 📌 If yes, what were your feelings and needs? Connect sufficiently to have clarity about what led you to this action.
  - c. Do you have any requests of yourself about how you might face this situation in the future?
3. Consider:
  - a. Was there any way that you were offering empathy instead of your own vulnerability?
  - b. 📌 If yes, what were your feelings and needs? Connect sufficiently to have clarity about what led you to this action.
  - c. Do you have any requests of yourself about how you might face this situation in the future?
4. 📌 Reflecting on your experience with this journal, what feelings and needs do you connect with? Do you have any insights or learnings that you want to document or explore further?
5. Do you have any requests of yourself in connection with this experience?

## ***G. Choice vs. Demand***

We may experience the option of empathic connection as an inner demand. When we do, we may then experience a reaction to this inner demand that will make it quite difficult to experience the choice to move toward empathic connection as a full choice.

Staying self-connected through self-empathy, and repeatedly reminding ourselves that empathy is a choice, not a demand, can be tremendously important in these situations. Many of the other sections in this document also support our ability to move toward opening our hearts in the midst of conflict.

### **Journal – Choice vs. Demand**

Think of a situation in which you offered an empathic guess out of a sense of “have to.”

1. 🛎 What feelings arose in you? What needs were these feelings connected to?
2. Consider:
  - a. Was there any way that you were “using” empathy for one of the purposes outlined above under “trust”?
  - b. 🛎 If yes, what were your feelings and needs? Connect sufficiently to have clarity about what led you to this action.
  - c. Do you have any requests of yourself about how you might face this situation in the future?

## ***H. Option vs. Habit***

NVC practitioners sometimes believe that we are supposed to respond with empathic words in all situations. We may find ourselves (or other NVC practitioners) developing a habit of reflexively responding with an empathic guess, whether or not empathy was requested, and sometimes also whether or not we experience empathy in our hearts. We do this to meet needs, of course. However, without a live desire for connection with a particular person at a particular time, habitual empathy may not always serve connection.

By staying connected with the needs that lead us to make an empathy guess, we can contribute to trust, authenticity, and presence with the range of human possibilities for connection.

## ***I. Words vs. Heart***

There are myriad ways in which NVC practitioners can develop “right/wrong” ideas about NVC. One of them has to do with the idea that it is “wrong” to use the words of empathy if our hearts are not open. Indeed, when we make an empathy guess while our hearts are closed, many needs can go unmet for us as well as for the other person. Ideally, we would experience a consistent development in our ability to open our hearts no matter the trigger around us. At the same time,

it's important to reflect on what human needs we might be trying to meet by the strategy of empathic guessing despite a closed heart.

For example, the choice of using empathy even when we are not in full empathy can sometimes serve as a strategy to open our hearts, with the hope that our hearts will follow the intention behind our words. The way empathic words can affect our hearts is one of the most astounding gifts of NVC, and that impact can manifest not only in the other person but also in us.

### **Journal – Words vs. Heart**

Think of a situation in which you offered someone an empathic guess about their feelings and needs but your heart was not aligned with your words.

1. What was the situation?
1. What led you to make an empathy guess?
2. Were you aware at the time of your feelings and needs?
3. If not, can you trace them now?
  - a. 🛎 Were the needs you were hoping to meet actually met?
  - b. 🛎 Were there any unmet needs for you?
4. Do you have a sense of what needs may have been met or unmet for the other person?
5. Do you have any judgments of yourself arising as you explore your choices?
  - a. 🛎 If yes, explore the feelings and needs behind these judgments.
6. 🛎 Reflecting on your experience with this journal, what feelings and needs do you connect with? Do you have any insights or learnings that you want to document or explore further?
7. Do you have any requests of yourself in connection with this experience?

## **V. EMPATHY IN CONFLICT**

When we are in the midst of conflict, many things can get in the way of our ability to remember empathy as a choice, or to willingly choose it. Great compassion toward ourselves is essential for facing this challenge, particularly when the skills we have developed through practice may or may not be accessible to us. This section explores some of the particular challenges that may arise during conflict.

### ***A. Unwillingness to Consider the Person's Strategies***

When we are directly involved in a conflict with another person, we might confuse the person's strategies with their needs, or focus on needs that appear to us to be in conflict with our own. This

confusion, and our pain about our own unmet needs, can lead us to resist, resent, or altogether not be willing to connect with them empathically.

Making empathy guesses that we can stand behind can be of great support to our ability to stay in empathic connection with others, instead of making guesses about things that we have a reaction to or that we don't want for the other person (or for ourselves). If we guess a need that we would want for the other person, our heart is more likely to be open to them.

**Example:**

Person A wants person B to wash the dishes before leaving the house. Person B struggles to make empathy guesses because person B doesn't want person A's strategy to take place. Person B then chooses not to connect empathically.

Person B could choose instead to connect with person A's needs underlying the strategies, such as needs for support, order, ease, partnership, trust, etc. By guessing the needs, both people's hearts can open and strategies can be explored to meet both people's needs.

**B. Needing Empathy Ourselves**

In a moment when conflict arises we're likely to feel intense emotions ourselves, including intense attachment to our own strategies. We may think that we want the other person to empathize first, either because we are needing empathy, or because we want trust and mutuality.

Recognizing that our need for empathy can be met in multiple ways and at various times can release some of the urgency of having to receive empathic understanding from the other person at this moment, and free us to choose where we want to put our attention.

**C. "Enemy Images"**

Sometimes, we may resent the idea of empathizing with the other person altogether. This is likely to arise when we have any ideas of "right," "wrong" and "deserve" connected with the person. We may experience tremendous "righteousness" on our part, leading to great disconnection from ourselves and from the other person. Opening our hearts fully – transforming our "enemy images" – can take significant dedication and work on our part. Yet this leads to the fuller, authentic experience of freedom and to the state of heart we yearn for. This effect on us is independent of the effect on the other person.

**Journal – Enemy Images**

Complete the *Transforming Judgments and Enemy Images* journal (a separate handout).

#### ***D. Concern About Seeming to Agree***

We may be concerned about making empathy guesses because we fear they may be interpreted as agreement, and we want clarity and authenticity about our experience.

It's important to stay connected to the distinction between empathy and agreement, and to stay with empathy guesses that connect with needs rather than with stories we may agree or disagree with.

#### **Example:**

Person A: "This is just like you. You never want to do what I want, you always argue with me."

Person B can get "stuck" on disagreement, remembering times when they agreed to do something out of care for person A. From that perspective, person B would resist empathizing with person A. If, however, person B can focus, instead, on the needs person A is expressing, it may be easier to empathize without concern for appearing to agree. This could look like:

Person B: "Is it really important to you that what you want be considered when we choose what to do?"

#### **Journal – Empathy in the Midst of Conflict**

Consider the variety of blocks in our way to connecting empathically with others.

1. How do you tend to get stuck? If your way is not on the list, add it.
2. Choose one situation and explore in-depth your feelings and needs in relation to offering empathy in that situation.
  - a. 🛎 Check back with the list of blocks to surface any places where you get stuck. Connect sufficiently to have clarity about where you get stuck and the needs behind your experience.
  - b. 🛎 If you notice any self-judgments surfacing, focus on connecting with the needs behind the self-judgments. (You can use the Self-Judgments: Mourning and Self-Compassion handout (p. 119.)
  - c. How might you express what's alive in you to the person involved using OFNR (Observation, Feeling, Need, Request)?
3. 🛎 Reflecting on your experience with this journal, what feelings and needs do you connect with? Do you have any insights or learnings that you want to document or explore further?
4. Do you have any requests of yourself in connection with this experience?

#### ***E. Needing Authenticity***

If we experience authenticity only when we express the full range of our feelings and intensity, we might experience empathy as standing in our way to full authenticity. It may take some time to

explore how to stay authentic while also choosing where we're focusing our attention for the moment.

### ***F. Trauma Response to Conflict***

When we face a situation of conflict (or any stressful situation), we may be triggered into a “trauma response,” and may not in fact experience much access to conscious choice about how to react. We are likely to experience the level of trigger in our bodies – our rate of breathing, heartbeat, sweating, pressure in our chests or head, etc. We may recognize later that we were triggered; in the moment we may be on “automatic pilot,” acting from the fight/flight/freeze reactions that facilitate survival during danger, even though the situation at hand may not involve actual danger at all.

If we find ourselves in this situation, we can use it as an indication of where we may need more healing for ourselves even while we work to develop our capacity for meeting more conflict and intensity with open hearts.

#### **Journal – Trauma Response to Conflict**

Think of a situation in which you responded to conflict in a way that was far from what you are yearning for, and in which you did not experience access to choice to act differently. For example, finding yourself raising your voice with high intensity at your spouse, parent, or child.

1. Describe the situation.
2. 📌 Recall any physical sensations you experienced at that time and write them down.
3. 📌 What feelings and needs do you connect with that were alive in you at that moment? (You can use either what you were thinking or your physical sensations as clues.)
4. 📌 What feelings and needs are alive in you at this moment as you reconnect with the situation?
5. 📌 What feelings and needs do you connect with that were alive in you at that moment? (You can use either what you were thinking or your physical sensations as clues.)
6. 📌 Do you notice any self-judgments surfacing?
  - a. 📌 If yes, describe what self-judgments have been triggered and connect as much as you can with your feelings and needs behind them. (You can use the Transforming Self-Judgments journal.)
7. 📌 Reflecting on your experience with this journal, what feelings and needs do you connect with? Do you have any insights or learnings that you want to document or explore further?
8. Do you have any requests of yourself in connection with this experience? In particular, would you consider making time with an empathy buddy to explore further this trigger and what is behind it, making space for any release, insight and/or healing that might arise?

### ***G. Letting Ourselves Be Moved***

Taking in what we're hearing from people instead of just making verbal guesses is critical in order to have the empathic guess move us toward empathic connection. This is especially so when we try to connect empathically during conflict.

We can take a breath before making another guess (or expressing), check in with how we feel in response to what we hear, and ask ourselves: "Can I really take in what this person is feeling and needing? Am I holding it dear?"

When we fully take in another person's humanity, we are affected by it. That's when empathy leads to the deepest breakthroughs within us and with one another. Precisely because of this, sometimes we fear full empathic connection. It's as if part of us is concerned that if we let ourselves be moved, we would not be able to hold our own needs dear. NVC invites us to hold ourselves and let ourselves be moved by another, breaking down any sense that we are separate and that there is not enough for us all.



## Journal – Letting Ourselves Be Moved

Think of a situation in which you are having a difficult time fully opening your heart to another person even when you are trying to empathize with them.

1. What is the situation?
2. What are you telling yourself about why it's hard for you to open your heart?
3. Are you having any judgments of yourself about having a challenge opening your heart? If yes, what are they?
4. 🛎 Explore the feelings and needs that are alive behind these self-judgments. Explore this sufficiently to hold the fact of your having self-judgments with compassion. You might also discover the self-judgments shifting. (You can work with the self-judgments Journal for more structure.)
5. Are you having any judgments of the other person, or ideas/stories about what's going on in them or their actions? If yes, what are they?
6. 🛎 Explore the feelings and needs that are alive behind these judgments or ideas.
7. Check with yourself: is there any shift in the judgments/ideas about the person? If not, continue with the next steps.
8. Is there something you're wanting the other person to hear about you, before you would be open to hearing them?
  - a. If yes, what is it?
  - b. Imagine sharing it with the person and being heard.
9. Explore this sufficiently to experience what it might be like to be heard.
  - a. 🛎 Check with yourself: is there any shift in your willingness to open your heart?
10. Imagine the other person standing next to you. Imagine stepping into their body so that you now have their perspective on the situation, with full access to their experience.
  - a. 🛎 In relation to the experience that you're having a hard time opening your heart to, what feelings and needs do you connect with that this person might be having?
  - b. 🛎 Returning to your body, notice how you feel and what needs you're connecting to. How is your heart?
11. Reflecting on your experience with this journal, what feelings and needs do you connect with? Do you have any insights or learnings that you want to document or explore further?
12. Do you have any requests of yourself in connection with this experience?

## VI. EMPATHY IN THE WORKPLACE

---

### A. *Attending to Cultural Norms*

In many workplaces, it is not customary to focus on emotional expression. At the same time, people, wherever they are, have the same feelings and needs as anywhere else. This gap between what people *experience* and what they may be comfortable to *express* presents a challenge when we attempt to empathize with a co-worker.

In such a context, attention to the specific choice of words by adapting the range of feelings or needs that we use to the norms of the context in which we operate as well as by choosing to empathize at a lighter level (see the earlier section on fine-tuning depth) may facilitate flow and ease for all concerned.

### B. *Focusing on the Purpose at Hand*

Most of us learn NVC within the context of workshops, practice groups, or healing sessions, where the primary purpose is to establish a healing presence and connect on a deep level. In the workplace, however, as well as many other similar contexts (e.g. an action group), the primary purpose at hand is to accomplish tasks.

While NVC still invites us to focus on establishing connection, especially in times of stress, disagreement, confusion, or conflict, the focus on connection in such context is more transitory. All we need to do is create sufficient connection to return the focus to the primary purpose of the occasion.

One particular skill that is essential for this ability to calibrate the level and amount of connection is to notice momentary resting places in the process of empathy. When we are focused on healing, such pauses would be a time to invite the person to share more of their experience; within the context of a task-oriented purpose, we may ask in such moments: “Is this enough for the moment, or is there something else you want to share *before we return to the focus of our meeting?*” The reminder of the purpose supports everyone present in bringing choice to the moment.

At times, the disconnection in the moment is sufficiently strong that we may need to choose to shift our focus or purpose. This would be a conscious choice, then, rather than a default response based on a habit of viewing empathy primarily as a tool for healing.

### C. *Power Differences*

In many workplaces, power differences are associated with fear and mistrust. In such contexts, offering empathy across power differences can be particularly challenging.

In particular, people with less power may feel disinclined to open their hearts to the full humanity of someone with power. This is an opportunity to explore dealing with enemy images (see above under empathy in conflict). In addition, people are afraid that their empathy would lead to awkwardness, or even retaliation. In such cases, offering empathic expression, or using more

naturalized forms of NVC empathy (see earlier in this document) can support us in breaking barriers and creating a human connection with a person in power.

Conversely, people with more power are often reluctant to offer empathy for fear of being seen as weak and struggling to assert their authority, especially in times of conflict. The section above about empathy vs. agreement may be particularly helpful in such situations. It also helps to remember that one of the most common experiences of people with less power in the workplace is an unmet need for mattering, and that empathy from a person in power can go a long way toward establishing that kind of trust.

#### ***D. Empathy for Decision-Making***

Since decision-making becomes more efficient and robust when we shift focus from negotiating to shared holding of needs and letting strategies arise from the needs, any process of decision-making, whether between individuals or within a group, can benefit from a particular form of empathy that is designed to identify the relevant needs for that decision.

In this case the purpose of empathy is simply for everyone to reach a level of shared ownership of all the needs. The relevant skill is discussed earlier under “Balancing Brevity and Connection:” finding a full phrase that describes the need *in context*. This both allows the person to have a more nuanced sense of being understood, as well as provides more guidelines for identifying strategies later.

#### ***E. Empathy while Running Meetings***

During meetings, people express opinions, suggestions, and other ideas. They do this in response to items that are on the agenda, in response to what others say, or because something is important to them and has not been added to the agenda.

Empathy in this context allows for a smoother flow within a meeting. As each person speaks, a short reflection of the essence of what they want while relating it to the meeting’s purpose or to the current discussion can achieve the following purposes:

1. Giving the person a sense of being heard and allowing them to trust that they matter and therefore to settle
2. Continually focusing on the overall meaning of the meeting and making everyone’s contributions relevant to that meaning
3. Making it easier for others to hear what was said and reducing the chances of others reacting to what was said, thereby minimizing conversations that diverge from the core purpose or that are less helpful to achieving goals, including connection
4. Managing flow and allowing the group as a whole to move forward together more easily

## VII. EMPATHY WHEN LEADING NVC GROUPS

---

While responding empathically, especially with verbal empathy, is always a choice, it is particularly important to recognize this as a choice when we lead NVC groups. Recognizing that it's a choice includes both understanding the needs that may lead us to choose to respond empathically or not, as well as the potential consequences of using or not using empathy in these contexts.

Often enough, people trained in NVC develop a belief that when we lead NVC groups it's our "job" to *always* meet people with verbal empathy. Depending on context, the group, the NVC leader, and other factors, such a choice may work and attend to many needs for many people. At the same time, the same choice in some other contexts, with other groups, by a different NVC leader, may result in many unmet needs. It is precisely because of both possibilities that we need to make clear choices based on understanding the purpose for responding empathically.

Two specific purposes for choosing empathy when leading groups include:

### 1. *Attending to Challenges in a Group*

Verbal empathy can be part of a strategy for attending to challenges in a group and supporting connection.

A challenge within a group can be the result of having a person who is challenging for us, or a person who is a trigger for others even if not for us, or when there are issues about agreements, a charged topic, tension in the group, difficulty about choosing how to proceed in any given moment, and a host of other situations.

For each such situation, NVC leadership calls on us to assess how various forms of empathy and various forms of expression might serve to support the group.

### 2. *Offering Inspiration and Modeling*

When we are able to live what we are teaching, our actions can serve as inspiration for people in the group. There is no direct *teaching* of a particular skill; rather, the inspiration is about the *possibility* of choosing an empathic response while leading.

For more information about the various considerations to attend to while leading groups, see the document *Group Leadership Using NVC*.

## FOUR EARS<sup>®</sup> GRAPHIC

When what they're saying is hard to hear, can we get clear on which ears to wear?

### A difficult-to-hear message:

"How can you call yourself my friend when you sneaked in and read my journal without permission!"



### Practice your 4 ears with these difficult-to-hear messages:

1. "You are always talking."
2. "Just ship those immigrants back where they came from!"
3. "If you were a good parent, your kids wouldn't be like that."
4. "It's useless talking to you."
5. "It's boring to be with you."
6. "What you said just now was really hurtful to me."
7. "How come you're always making things up?"
8. "You should drop out of our team if you can't keep up."
9. "You're such a know-it-all."
10. "It's not your business."

(1) With **Jackal ears turned outward**, we hear blame or criticism – and disagree with it.

*"Look who's talking! What kind of a friend would write the things she did about me in her journal!"*



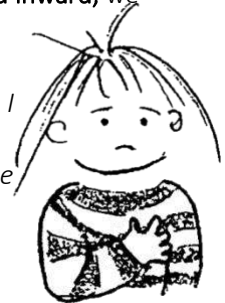
(2) With **Jackal ears turned inward**, we hear blame or criticism – and we agree with it.

*"She's right. It was terrible, what I did. I guess I just don't deserve her friendship."*



(3) With **Giraffe ears turned inward**, we hear our own feelings and needs.

*"When I hear her say that, I feel hurt, because I need some recognition for all the times I've been there to offer friendship and support."*



(4) With **Giraffe ears turned outward**, we hear the other person's feelings and needs.

*"I wonder, when she recalls my reading her journal without permission, whether she feels upset because she needs to trust that her privacy will be respected."*



## TRANSLATING HABITUAL RESPONSES

---

Imagine each of the following examples is something someone says to you. Write down what you might say habitually. Then write your feelings and needs which give rise to this response. Then guess and write down the feelings and needs in the other person that might lead them to say what they are saying. The last example is left blank so you can fill in your own situation.

- a. Your child says to you: "You can't tell me what to do."

Habitual response:

Self empathy: I feel... because I need...

Empathy Guess: Are you feeling ... because you need... ?

- b. Your partner says to you: "You just don't care about what I want."

Habitual response:

Self empathy: I feel... because I need...

Empathy Guess: Are you feeling ... because you need... ?

- c. A stranger pulls into your lane closer to your car than you like.

Habitual response:

Self empathy: I feel... because I need...

Empathy Guess: Are you feeling ... because you need... ?

- d. A friend tells you: "I don't want to be your friend any more."

Habitual response:

Self empathy: I feel... because I need...

Empathy Guess: Are you feeling ... because you need... ?

- e. \_\_\_\_\_ says to you: \_\_\_\_\_

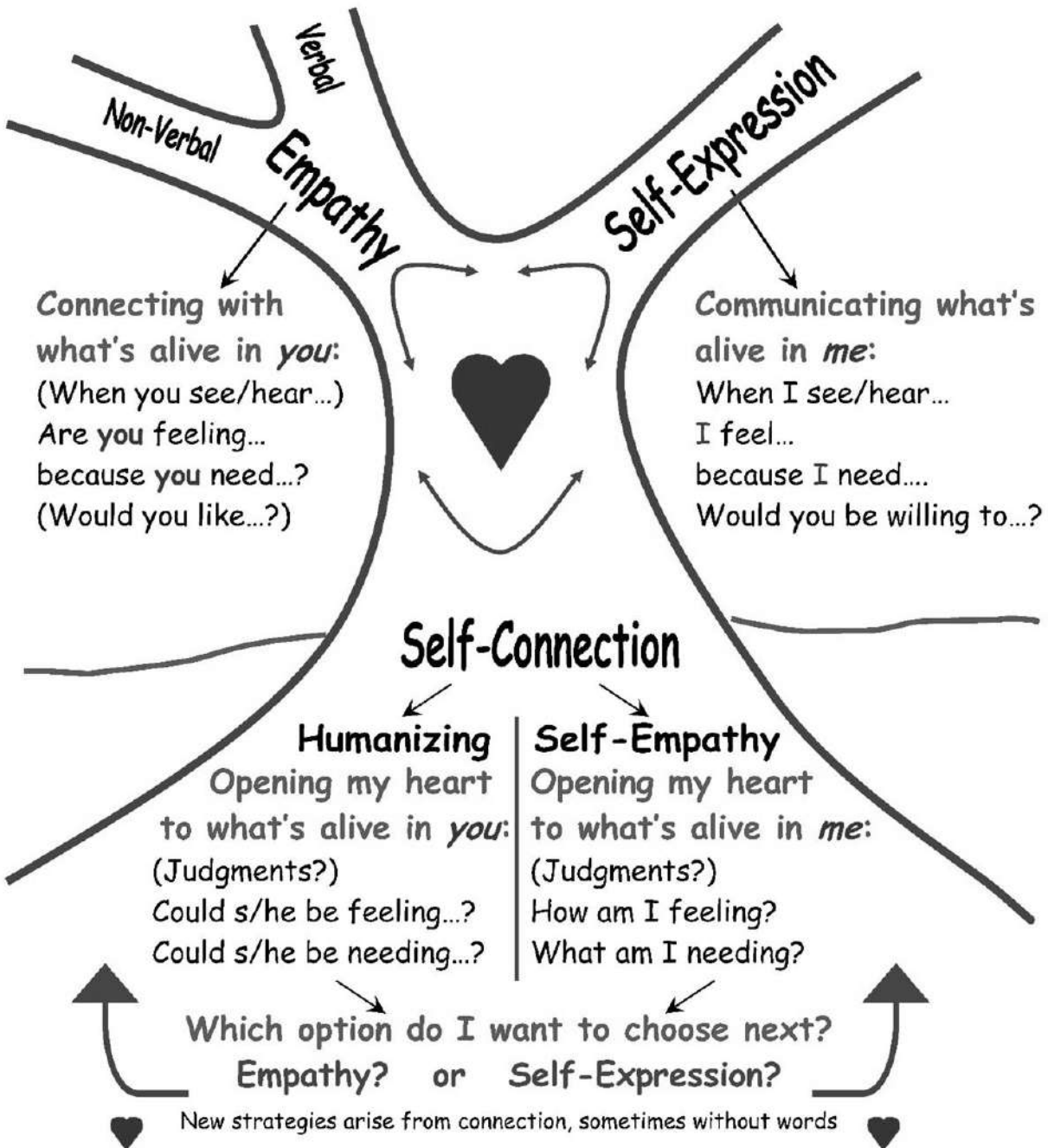
Habitual response:

Self empathy: I feel... because I need...

Empathy Guess: Are you feeling ... because you need... ?

# The NVC Tree of Life

## Three Focus Options for Connection



# NVC TREE OF LIFE: 3 FOCUS OPTIONS FOR CONNECTION

---

Written Practice in Conjunction with the NVC Tree of Life

## A. Trigger

Someone says/does:

---

---

---

## B. Self-Connection

**Self-Empathy:**

*Judgments? Thoughts?* (Write them down if that's what comes up first, to help you connect with feelings and needs.)

---

---

*I feel* \_\_\_\_\_

*because I need* \_\_\_\_\_

*What I would like to do next is* \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

**Humanizing the Other Person** (guess, and try to connect with a real human experience):

*What could s/he be feeling?* \_\_\_\_\_

*What could s/he be needing?* \_\_\_\_\_

---

---



*C. Self-Expression*

When I see/hear \_\_\_\_\_

I feel \_\_\_\_\_

Because I need \_\_\_\_\_

Would you be willing to: \_\_\_\_\_

?

*D. Empathy*

Are you feeling \_\_\_\_\_

?

Because you need \_\_\_\_\_

?

(If/when ready for strategy, might also include:)

Would you like \_\_\_\_\_

## EVALUATIONS MASQUERADING AS FEELINGS

When you say:	what might you be feeling?	what might you be needing?
abused	angry, frustrated, frightened, vulnerable	caring, nurturing, support emotional or physical well-being, consideration, need for all living things to thrive
attacked	scared, angry, vulnerable	safety
belittled	angry, frustrated, tense, distressed	respect, autonomy, to be seen, acknowledgement, appreciation
betrayed	angry, hurt, disappointed, enraged	trust, dependability, honesty, honor, commitment, clarity
blamed	angry, scared, confused, antagonistic, hostile, bewildered, hurt	accountability, causality, fairness, justice
coerced	angry, frustrated, frightened, thwarted, scared	choice, autonomy, freedom, act freely, choose freely
criticized	in pain, scared, anxious, frustrated, humiliated, angry, embarrassed	understanding, acknowledgement, recognition, accountability, acceptance
harassed	angry, frustrated, frightened	respect, space, consideration, peace
ignored	lonely, scared, hurt, sad, embarrassed	connection, belonging, inclusion, community, participation
insulted	angry, embarrassed	respect, consideration, acknowledgement, recognition
intimidated	scared, anxious, vulnerable	safety, equality, empowerment
invisible	sad, angry, lonely, scared	to be seen and heard, inclusion, belonging, community
isolated	lonely, afraid, scared	community, inclusion, belonging, contribution
left out	sad, lonely, anxious	inclusion, belonging, community, connection
let down	sad, disappointed, frightened	consistency, trust, dependability, predictability
manipulated	angry scared, powerless, thwarted, frustrated	autonomy, empowerment, trust, equality, freedom, free choice, connection, genuineness

When you say:	what might you be feeling?	what might you be needing?
misunderstood	upset, angry, frustrated	to be heard, to be understood, clarity
neglected	lonely, scared	connection, inclusion, participation, community, care, to matter, consideration
patronized	angry, frustrated, resentful	recognition, equality, respect, mutuality
pressured	anxious, resentful, overwhelmed	relaxation, clarity, space, consideration
put down	angry, sad, embarrassed	respect, acknowledgement, understanding
rejected	hurt, scared, angry, defiant, vulnerable	belonging, inclusion, closeness, to be seen, acknowledgement, connection
taken for granted	sad, angry, hurt disappointed	appreciation, acknowledgement, recognition, consideration
threatened	scared, frightened, alarmed, angry, agitated, defiant, vulnerable	safety, autonomy
unloved	sad, bewildered, frustrated	love, appreciation, empathy, connection, community
unsupported	sad, hurt, resentful	support, to be understood
unwanted	sad, anxious, frustrated	belonging, inclusion, caring, to be cherished
used	sad, angry, resentful	autonomy, equality, consideration, mutuality
victimized	frightened, helpless, vulnerable	empowerment, mutuality, safety, justice

## COLLOQUIAL GIRAFFE OPTIONS

---

### KEYS:

- a. Fluency in our use of NVC rests on the foundation of connecting with compassion for self and other, and with a deep authenticity within us, and allowing the words we choose to arise from this connection. This means prioritizing the principles over the form.
- b. Our goal in switching to colloquial giraffe is the same goal we have whenever we use NVC: to support the flow of connection.
- c. The main question to explore in choosing our words: what is likely to be connecting for this person to hear, especially if they are not trained in NVC?
- d. As much as we want to support a natural flow, our second intention is to ensure that we maintain focus on NVC principles instead of slipping into speech that is so “natural” sounding that it reinforces the assumptions and stories we are working to transform.

### OPTIONS:

1. Eliminating the words “feeling” and “need” from our speech even while maintaining a close focus on feelings and needs. This shift, for many people, results in being able to hear what we say without thinking that we are being “touchy-feely.”

E.g. instead of saying: *“Are you feeling frustrated because you need respect?”* we might say: *“Are you frustrated because you want respect?”*

2. Shifting from the “one-word” needs to the “full-phrase” needs. This shift supports a greater sense of flow and provides a more specific context to what we are saying while still maintaining the distinction between need and strategy.

E.g. in the previous example, we might expand the “one-word” need respect into the “full-phrase” need as follows: *“Are you frustrated because you want to be respected for your point of view even when there is disagreement?”*

3. Eliminating the explicit link between feelings and needs through the use of the word “because” in the classical template construction. In this case it’s a conceptual barrier, not simply a linguistic one. The understanding that feelings arise from needs is not widespread, and the use of this language often renders the speech awkward and confusing to others. A solution could either be dividing the expression into two sentences, or dropping the focus on feelings altogether and focusing only on the needs.

E.g. in the previous example, we might drop the word “because” as follows: *“[Are you frustrated?] Do you want to be respected for your point of view even when there is disagreement?”*

4. Narrowing the list of needs, and especially feelings, to suit the cultural norms of the environment in which we are operating. Certain feelings words may invite others to a level of vulnerability, or presence with our own vulnerability, that is beyond what they are willing to experience in that context even if they would be open to it in another context.

E.g. in many work settings it would work better and likely contribute to more trust to say: *“Are you concerned about John leaving the office?”* instead of saying: *“Are you scared about John leaving the office?”*

5. Increasing flow with requests language by having additional phrases aside from “would you be willing to...”

E.g. *“Would you mind ...”* or *“Are you comfortable with ...”* or *“Would it work for you...”* or others depending on context and ease.

6. Increasing flexibility with regards to connection requests by expanding the range of connection requests beyond habitual ones and by providing the reason for the request, especially in contexts where connection is not an obvious priority.

E.g. *“I would like to make sure I really got what you are saying. Would it work for you if I reflected what you just said?”*

7. Creating more ease and flow by making empathic expressions rather than empathic reflections/guesses. This increases our own vulnerability because we are exposing our own heart. It’s also a more familiar form of speech for those not versed in NVC. While technically this is not empathy, it is an expression that’s infused with empathy and thus tends to convey empathy implicitly to the other person without challenging their comfort around conversation style.

E.g. *“I am really struck by the depth of care I am hearing in your words.”* Or *“I truly get just how much you want our family to flourish.”* Or *“I am touched hearing of your commitment to protect our department and your willingness to take risks for that.”*

## COLLOQUIAL EXPRESSION OF NEEDS

---

The phrases below are some suggestions for how you can expand the range of options available to you for expressing your needs and for guessing those of others (instead of always using the word “need”). On the dotted line you can insert any word from the needs inventory. All of these phrases can be used as long as the consciousness we bring to them is that of needs. Otherwise we run the risk of blurring the distinction between needs and strategies.

I love.....	.... is fun for me
I thrive on....	.... matters to me
I really enjoy....	.... is meaningful to me
I would be nourished by....	.... is so important to me
I value....	.... makes my life feel worthwhile
I want....	..... helps me feel well/good/whole/happy
I long for ....	

## NEEDS: FACETS OF SELF-CONNECTION

---

### Purpose:

This guided reflection is intended to support you in experiencing a variety of ways to connect with your needs, which you can use at any time in your daily life. People resonate differently with these different ways. You may want to explore each of these to see which support you in gaining more self-connection and inner freedom. You can use these reflections as a series or separately from each other.

1. Focus your attention on a need that is not met to your satisfaction in your life. Put your focus specifically on the unmet quality of this need. You can say to yourself: “My need for \_\_\_\_ is not met,” and repeat this phrase until you are fully connected with the experience of the unmet need. (You might want to close your eyes and focus inwardly while you do this.) What sensations do you notice in your body? What feelings arise?
2. Now shift your attention to the need itself. Not to the idea of having the need met, but to the need itself; to the fact of having a need. You can say to yourself: “I have a need for \_\_\_\_\_,” and repeat this phrase until you are fully connected with the experience of having the need. (You might want to close your eyes and focus inwardly while you do this.) What sensations do you notice in your body? What feelings arise?

3. Now shift your attention to the met quality of the need. What is it like for you when this need is met? You can imagine this need met, and say to yourself: “My need for \_\_\_\_\_ is met,” and repeat this phrase until you are fully connected with the experience of having this need met. (You might want to close your eyes and focus inwardly while you do this.) What sensations do you notice in your body? What feelings arise?
4. Lastly, shift your attention to the need as a presence you want to encounter (another meaning of “meet”). This is similar to focusing on the need without it being met or unmet, but may be experienced differently. Focus on what it is like to meet this need in the sense of encountering it fully. You might say to yourself: “Hello \_\_\_\_\_. Welcome,” and repeat this phrase until you are fully connected with the experience of having encountered this need. (You might want to close your eyes and focus inwardly while you do this.) What sensations do you notice in your body? What feelings arise?
5. Note any insight from the shift in focus, and or any needs met by the experience.
6. Consider: when would you want to engage with each of these different focuses on your needs? How might each serve you? What needs would you want to meet through this focus?
7. Do you have any requests of yourself?

## NEEDS: LAYERS OF SELF-CONNECTION

---

Give yourself between 5-20 minutes for this process, ideally in a location where you will have privacy and quiet. Find a comfortable place to sit. You can either journal through this process, or look at each step, close your eyes, and see what arises for you in response to the questions. If you're working with a partner, one of you can guide the other through all the questions, then switch roles. Read the full instructions first to get familiar with what you'll be doing, so you can just relax into the experience.

1. **Identify an unmet need:** Think of a need that is often not met to your satisfaction, or think of a situation in which you have an unmet need and you feel some intensity about it. Name this need.
2. **Connect with this need:** Take a few moments to fully connect with this need. To help you fully connect, notice any sensations in your body as you name this need. Notice any emotions that arise, and allow yourself to fully experience them. If you notice any resistance to experiencing this need, remind yourself that all human beings have this need – it is an expression of your humanity that you have this need, too.
3. **Identify the need beneath the need:** Ask yourself one of the following questions, whichever one supports you to move into a deeper layer of needs. Take time for a response to emerge for you, for another need to come forward into your awareness. If the first question you ask yourself does not surface a new need, try a different question, but as soon as a new need arises, stop asking the questions and go back to step
  - a. If this need were met, what need would that meet?
  - b. What's important to me about having this need met?
  - c. How would it contribute to me if this need were met?
  - d. What would it be like for me to have this need met?
4. **Connect with the deepest layer of your needs:** Repeat steps 2 and 3, descending through the layers of needs, until you experience a sense of full connection with yourself, or some inner release. You have now reached the deepest layer you can touch at this moment about this particular cluster of needs.
5. How do you feel now? Do you have any insights from doing this practice?



## SELF-APPRECIATION IN NVC

---

### KEYS:

- a. Understanding what needs of ours are met by our own actions is one way to develop a sweet quality of self-connection.
- b. Marshall suggested writing 3 self-appreciations each day as a way of nourishing ourselves so we have the energy to tackle the hard work of meeting others and ourselves with compassion. He calls this, “giraffe fuel for life.”
- c. When our self-appreciation is rooted in needs met, we shift from ‘boasting’ or seeking approval from others, to celebrating how our actions are in alignment with our own deepest-held values

1. What do you appreciate about yourself and why?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. If it is a quality in yourself you appreciate, are you able to recall something specific you did or said that illustrates that quality?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What values or needs of yours are met by the behavior or quality you’ve identified?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. As you recognize this aspect of yourself which you appreciate, what feelings do you notice?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. How do you feel about having appreciated yourself and expressing it? Needs met or unmet?

## SELF-EMPATHY JOURNAL

---

This journal invites you to explore self-empathy, a process for self-discovery and self-connection. At the heart of this process is full connection to your own feelings and needs. Take your time with each question so you really have a sense of having made contact with your heart. You may want to close your eyes and actually ask yourself the questions, giving the answer space to emerge, to help you shift from focusing on thoughts to focusing on deeper, emergent insight. The journal explores a particular challenge, as well as reflecting on the process of self-empathy itself.

1. Think of a challenge you are experiencing that you'd like to connect with yourself about. Write down briefly what the challenge is.
2. Are there any thoughts or judgments that arise in response to this situation? If so, note them. We find it helpful and important to acknowledge thoughts and judgments, as they are part of our experience and often give us clues to the feelings and needs behind them.
3. How are you feeling in relation to this challenge? The words of the feelings might arise immediately. If so, go beyond just naming the feeling and invite yourself to actually experience the feeling fully. If the words do not come, ask yourself: What might I be feeling? Open your heart to sense the answer. You might even put your hand on your heart, or anywhere on your body where you experience a strong sensation. The sensation can be your clue toward connecting with the feeling. You can name both sensations and feelings here.
4. What needs are these feelings pointing to? What are you longing for, what is most important to you in this situation? Again, the words for the needs might arise immediately, or might be hard to find. Use the same processes as with discovering the feelings above to explore your needs.
5. Are there any additional feelings and needs you'd like to connect with about this situation? If so, repeat the process of exploring your feelings and needs.

6. When you have a sense of connection with your feelings and needs about this particular challenge, consider: How are you feeling at this moment, after making contact with these feelings and needs?
7. At this point, are you content and ready to shift focus to something else, or do you want to explore making a request of yourself? Making a request can be a part of self-empathy, or self-empathy can take place without this part. If you want to make a request of yourself, proceed to the next question. Otherwise, go to the last question.
8. What request of yourself would like to make right now? Check with yourself whether it is clear to you what you would do if you said yes to this request. Don't address yet whether or not you will actually agree to this request, just make the request to yourself.
9. Now check: are you willing to say yes to this request? Don't push yourself. Be honest. If you're not willing to say yes, what needs are in the way?
10. If you said no to your own request, check: is there another request you would like to make of yourself? Then check again to see whether you have a yes. You can try different requests until one of them resonates as one you'd like to say yes to.
11. How are you feeling at this time? What needs have you attended to by exploring this process of self-empathy? Are there needs unmet as well? Do you have any insights from doing this journal that you would like to write down? Anything you've learned? Any requests of yourself about this process (not the content of the challenge)?

## TRANSFORMING SELF-JUDGMENTS

---

### KEYS:

- a. Any action that we judge ourselves about is, like all actions, an attempt to meet our needs. The judgment alerts us to the fact that some of our needs are not met.
- b. The action of judging ourselves is itself an attempt to meet needs.
- c. Connecting fully with all our needs enables us to meet needs for self-acceptance, understanding and connection, even before we find new strategies that may meet more of our needs.

1. Write down a judgment you have of yourself that you would like to explore. This may be something you think about yourself that you completely believe is true.
2. Think of a time or situation when you are likely to have this self-judgment come up, and write an observation of what you are actually doing at that time.
3. What needs of yours are not met through these actions? (The judgment alerts you to the fact that some of your needs are not met by this action.)
4. Focus your attention on those needs instead of the judgment. How are you feeling when you focus on the needs?
5. All our actions are attempts to meet needs. Which needs of yours are you trying to meet in the action you are judging? Are you successfully meeting those needs?
6. Read through all of the needs you have identified and connected with. Are there any needs of yours that are met by spending this time connecting with your needs? Is there any internal shift in your energy about the judgment?



## SELF-JUDGMENTS: LEARNING FROM “MISTAKES”

---

### KEYS:

- a. Any action that we judge ourselves about is, like all actions, an attempt to meet our needs. The judgment alerts us to the fact that some of our needs are not met.
- b. The action of judging ourselves is itself an attempt to meet needs.
- c. Connecting fully with all our needs enables us to meet needs for self-acceptance, understanding and connection, even before we find new strategies that may meet more of our needs.

1. Think of a time or situation when you did something you evaluated as a “mistake,” or an action that you judged in some way. Write an observation of what you are actually doing at that time.
  
2. What needs of yours were not met when you took the action you just described? (The judgment alerts you to the fact that some of your needs were not met by this action.) What feeling arises in relation to those needs?
  
3. All our actions are attempts to meet needs. Review the action you took that you are judging yourself about (the observation from #1 above). Which needs of yours were you trying to meet by taking this action? And what feelings do you have in relation to this set of needs?
  
4. Reflect: are you actually succeeding in meeting these needs by taking these actions? (Whether your answer is yes or no, this is important information to have as you consider your options for how to act in the future.)

5. Read through all of the needs you have identified and connected with so far. Are there any needs of yours that are met by connecting with your needs right now? Is there any internal shift in your energy about the judgment? Any learning for you?
  
6. If the judgment still seems as alive to you, consider the following question: Which needs of yours are you trying to meet by holding on to the judgment you have of yourself? How do you feel when you connect with these needs?
  
7. Reflect on your feelings, needs, and any requests you have of yourself in this moment. If your attention is going to potential strategies to meet your needs, write down any ideas you have that you can imagine may meet more of your needs than you were able to meet previously.

## MOMENT OF CHOICE: KEY POINTS

---

1. One aspect of NVC is that it can be seen/used/lived as a spiritual practice. A basic part of NVC as a spiritual practice is recognizing our choice.
2. NVC is a strategy, not a need. It's one choice among many options for how to respond to life.
3. There are three "stages" (not in any particular order) that most people wrestle with in using NVC. Each has its own challenges. Different people find different stages more or less challenging.
  - a) Recognizing that they have choice to use NVC,
  - b) Having the skills to make an NVC choice, and
  - c) Choosing to use NVC (or making a conscious choice not to in order to meet other needs).
4. In practicing and living NVC, it's sometimes hard to remember NVC as a choice. Yet most of us come to a point when we integrate NVC consciousness sufficiently to recognize NVC as an option at a given moment of challenge.
5. When we recognize the option, we have a choice of whether or not to use it. It remains a choice, rather than a new "should" or "have to" or "right thing to do."
6. If we choose not to use NVC, we can still choose to use NVC to empathize with ourselves and meet ourselves with compassion, and to be at peace about the choice we made.
7. If we come to view NVC as a new "right" or "should," we may find that our needs for autonomy or authenticity or other needs may not be met. It's important therefore to keep reminding ourselves that we are at choice about whether or not to use NVC.
8. We may want to note whether there are patterns in our behavior – situations or specific challenges in relation to which we find it difficult to choose to use NVC. If we note a pattern, recognizing our needs in the moment can be enormously fruitful for understanding our behavior with compassion and empathy, thereby increasing our ability to make conscious choices.
9. We are choosing at every moment, but we are not always at conscious choice. Choosing based on consciously trying to meet our needs is what we're working toward, rather than reflexively choosing to use NVC language.
10. The process of remembering that NVC is an option is akin to "waking up." We can look for key practices or other reminders that will help to awaken us.



## MOMENT OF CHOICE: PRACTICE

---

1. Think of a situation in which you wished to use NVC but found yourself choosing not to use it. Choose a situation in which you recognized that you had a choice, vs. one in which you didn't remember that NVC is an option.
2. How do you feel about the situation and what needs of yours were not met?
3. Connect with the particular moment in which you recognized the option to use NVC. Are you having any judgments about your choice? Are you holding any "should," "have to," "right thing to do" or similar ideas about it? If yes, write them down, then translate the judgments into the feelings and needs that arise in you. If no, write down the feelings and needs you notice about that moment.
4. When you chose not to use NVC, what were your feelings and what needs were you trying to meet? (What were you saying "yes" to by saying "no" to NVC?)
5. Are there needs not met by the choice you made? What are they, and what are your feelings related to those needs?
6. What needs might you meet by choosing to use NVC in this situation? What are your feelings related to those needs?
7. How are you feeling and what needs do you notice at this moment?

# SELF-CONNECTION, AUTHENTICITY AND VULNERABILITY

---

For writing, reflection, buddy conversations or real life

## 1) Exploring the choice not to share full honesty.

- a) Write down something you wish you could say to someone in your life, but for whatever reason you've chosen not to say it. Try not to edit it into "NVC language" or in any other way. Just write exactly what comes to mind or heart.
- b) What needs are you trying to meet by not sharing this with the person?
- c) What needs are you not meeting by not sharing this? Or in other words, what needs might be met by sharing it?
- d) Now imagine sharing this with the person (in NVC). Notice what feelings come up, and what needs those feelings are connected to that you imagine would be met or unmet.
- e) How do you feel and what needs arise after exploring these questions? Do you want to continue with the choice you have made or choose differently? (If any self-judgments arise, go into self-empathy for both the needs met and unmet with your choices.)

## 2) Giraffe "lies"

Think of a situation in which you chose to use NVC but the words didn't match your internal experience. In writing or with a partner (could be an empathy buddy if you have one), role play the situation and get more authentic, still taking full responsibility for your feelings and needs, but choose more honesty than you did previously.

## 3) Jackal honesty vs. giraffe honesty

Think of a situation in which you have been honest with someone about something difficult, but you shared more of your evaluations/judgments than your feelings and needs. In writing or with a partner (could be an empathy buddy if you have one), get more vulnerable/honest about the feelings and needs behind whatever honesty you shared, and consider what requests you might have that may support more connection and honesty in this situation.

## TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR FEELINGS

---

### KEYS:

- a. Every feeling we experience is related to a need that we have. Identifying those needs is key to taking responsibility for our feelings.
- b. Just stating the observation is not sufficient to acknowledge responsibility, because it still implies that what happened caused the feelings. Instead, we look for the meaning we assign to the action as a clue to the underlying need that is alive in us.
- c. When we cannot identify our needs that are causing the feeling, we can still take responsibility by recognizing, owning and articulating the thoughts or images that lead to the feeling. This includes, in particular, acknowledging to ourselves that it is an interpretation and not the “truth” about this person.
- d. We can take full responsibility by shifting both the way we think and the way we express ourselves.

1. Think of a situation in which you have attributed your reaction to what the other person did (“She made me angry” or “It’s not safe for me to be around this person” or something else to that effect.) The rest of this journal is about working with this situation.
2. Write down a pure description of what it is that this person did. Move away from generalizations and characterizations into just stating exactly what the person said or did in a way that a video camera could record.
3. Write down as fully as possible all the thoughts and reactions that you have to this person’s actions or words.
4. As you contemplate these thoughts, what feelings arise in you? If you are not habituated to connecting with your feelings, consider which of the following four most matches your experience: sad, glad, mad, scared. Most common feelings are some variation on one of these four themes.

5. Take one of these reactions and use it to complete one of the following sentences. They are all equivalent, only providing different paths to the deepening into yourself that this journal is aimed for:
  - a. I have the reaction I have because I care deeply about \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. I have the reaction above because \_\_\_\_\_ matters to me
  - c. I have the reaction above because I have a longing for \_\_\_\_\_

If you anticipate that some other sentence that gets to this level would work better for you, by all means use it.

6. When you focus your attention on what you identified above, what feeling most closely comes to awareness? (often people experience shifting from “mad” to “sad” or “scared” – a move from blame to self-connection)
7. Shift your attention back and forth between the initial thought and the new awareness of your deeper needs that give rise to it. Watch and see if your feelings shift back and forth, too.
8. Now aim to find an entirely different way of making sense of what the other person did or said, one in which their actions make sense to them based on what their needs are, needs that are no different from your own. See if you can identify possible needs or values in a manner similar to what you did for yourself in question #4. Take a moment to rest internally with this possibility, so as to open your heart to this person’s humanity.

Note: if you are imagining needs that you are not resonating with, you haven’t gone deeply enough. Then ask yourself what could be a deeper need that would underlie the need you are not “approving” of. Continue in this vein until you can open your heart.

9. Now return to your own feelings. Has anything shifted as a result of focusing on other interpretations of the other person’s action?
10. Take a moment to write down any insights, learning, ideas, feelings and needs that arise in response to this process.

## **TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR FEELINGS - PRACTICE**

---

In each of the following statements, does the speaker acknowledge responsibility for their feelings? Do they express a feeling and a need? If not, do they express the thoughts that lead to the feeling? If, in your assessment, the speaker is not acknowledging responsibility for their feelings, re-write the statement so that responsibility for feelings is acknowledged.

1. You irritate me when you leave your clothes on the floor of your room.
2. I feel angry when you say that because I take it as an insult.
3. I feel scared when you raise your voice.
4. I am very moved by your kindness.
5. I feel frustrated when people don't call me back because I need consideration.
6. I'm so impressed by how smart you are!
7. When you used that tone of voice I felt happy because my need for gentleness was met.
8. I feel grief because people are dying for no good reason.
9. I'm sad that you won't be coming for dinner because I was hoping we could spend the evening together.
10. I feel disappointed because you said you would do it and you didn't.
11. I feel horrified because these people are being treated unjustly.

## TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR ACTIONS

---

### KEYS:

- a. Like every other action, actions which we take because we think we "have to" are also attempts to meet needs.
- b. Recognizing the needs that lead us to choose to take those actions can free us to decide how we want to act, and at the very least to recognize that we have a choice in all our actions.
- c. Taking responsibility for our actions supports our movement toward self-empowerment and having relationships free from blame and guilt.

12. Write down an action that you are telling yourself you have to do or that you think have no choice about.
13. What are the consequences you are trying to avoid by taking this action?
14. What are the needs you are trying to meet by taking this action? Take a moment to connect in full with each need you discover before proceeding to another need. In particular, separate each need from the specific strategy of avoiding consequences, and from whether or not the need is ultimately met by the action you are taking. Simply connect with each need you are attempting to meet.
15. What needs are not met by taking this action? Again, take a moment to connect in full with each need you discover before proceeding to another need, and separate it from the action you are taking. You may discover some of the same needs as in question 3, since the attempt to meet some needs may not be successful.
16. Bring your awareness to all the needs you identified in the previous two questions, independently of whether or not they are met. How are you feeling when you focus on all the needs? Stay with this until you reach full connection with yourself in relation to all the needs you identified.
17. Check in with yourself: do you want to choose to keep taking the original action? If yes, write down what needs you would be attending to by continuing to take the action. If no, do you have other strategies that you believe might meet your needs better?
18. How are you feeling at this moment and what needs are you aware of?

## TRANSFORMING JUDGMENTS AND ENEMY IMAGES

---

### KEYS:

- a. Judging someone is an indication that a need of ours is not met. The first step in transforming judgments is to recognize and connect with our unmet needs.
- b. The action we're judging is itself an attempt to meet needs. The second step is connecting with the needs of the person we're judging so we can open our hearts with compassion.
- c. When we experience challenge in transforming our judgments, we can reflect on what needs we might be trying to meet by holding on to our judgments. Connecting with this set of needs may be essential to enable the previous two steps to proceed.

1. Write down a judgment you have of someone else that you would like to explore. This may be something you think about that person that you completely believe is true. You may pick someone in your personal life, or someone who is in some position of political or economic power whose actions affect you.
2. Think of a time or situation when you are likely to have this judgment come up, and write an observation of what this person is actually doing at that time.
3. What needs of yours are not met in relation to that person's action? How do you feel when these needs are not met? Explore this sufficiently to experience the relief of self-connection.
4. Explore the possibility of opening your heart to this other person. What needs do you imagine this person might be trying to meet by taking this action? How might this person be feeling? Explore this sufficiently to experience the relief of compassion.
5. Check in with yourself about your original judgment. Is it still alive? If yes, return to connecting with your own needs or with the other person's needs – wherever you're experiencing a "charge." If the judgment is still alive after that, consider: What needs might you be trying to meet by holding on to this judgment? What feelings arise in relation to this? Again, connect with yourself sufficiently about these needs to experience some relief.
6. Check in with yourself again about the judgment. If it's still alive, consider the following questions:

- a. Is there any way in which you believe the judgment to be “the truth”? If so, explore what needs might be met by this belief, and what needs might be met by letting go of this belief.
- b. Are you afraid to express this judgment? If yes, what needs are you afraid would not be met by sharing it, and what needs might be met?
- c. Are you judging yourself for having this judgment? If yes, explore any way in which you’re telling yourself that you should not have this judgment. Connect with your choice about whether or not to work any further on transforming this judgment, and explore any needs that might be met by continuing to work on transforming the judgment, or letting go of working on it. (You may also want to work with the “Self-Judgments: Mourning and Self-Compassion” worksheet.)
- d. Reflect on your feelings, needs, and any requests you have of yourself or of the other person in this moment.



## WORKING WITH ANGER

---

### KEYS:

- a. Anger usually involves some judgment, and noticing the judgment can help us see where we are blaming others for our feelings instead of taking responsibility for them.
- b. Thoughts that often lead to anger include “should,” “right/wrong,” “fault,” etc. These thoughts are the actual cause of the anger.
- c. Fully connecting with the deeper need underlying the anger can enable us to transform the anger and to experience release without requiring the other person to do anything about it.
- d. We can express our anger fully and with intensity while still taking responsibility for our feelings by expressing the depth of our feelings and needs, instead of remaining at the level of judgments.
- e. Once connected with the depth of our own experience, we can reach for an understanding of the other person’s experience, the feelings and needs underlying the actions or words that were the stimulus of our anger. This enables us to re-establish connection with our own and the other person’s humanity.

1. Think of something that you are angry about and write down the situation the way you would describe it to an understanding friend.
  
2. Now look at what you wrote, and write down in pure observation language what the other person did. (identifying the stimulus for anger)
  
3. What are you telling yourself are the reasons for your anger? (recognizing thoughts and judgments as the cause of anger)
  
4. What needs of yours are not being met in that situation? (connecting with the root of anger)
  
5. When you focus your attention on those needs, what other feelings come up? (Noticing complexity of emotions underneath anger)

6. Imagine what feelings and needs the other person is expressing in the action or words that were the stimulus for your anger, and write them down. (Empathy)
7. Focus your attention on your needs, and the needs of the other person. Notice how you are feeling at this moment. Are you still angry? If so, repeat this process starting at step 3.
8. If you have gone back more than once, ask yourself what need(s) of yours you are trying to meet by “choosing” to respond with anger. In other words, “anger” is also a strategy to meeting needs – what needs might be met by the anger itself?
9. Now focus again on all the needs you have identified in yourself, including in particular this last one, and check again what your feelings are.
10. Take a moment to write down any insights, learning, ideas, feelings and needs that arise in response to this process.

## SELF-CONNECTION: INTERRUPTING SKILLS

---

Questions for discussion, dyads or journaling:

1. What happens inside you when you continue to listen beyond when you want to? What feelings are you aware of? What needs are alive?
2. What leads you to “non-generous listening?” What needs are you trying to meet with that strategy?
3. What is it like for you to interrupt someone when they’re speaking? What needs might be met? What needs might not?
4. What is it like for you to be interrupted when you’re speaking? What needs are not met? What needs are?
5. What can you imagine might help you to maintain or restore connection with someone who is speaking in ways that are hard for you to connect with?
6. What might stop you from interrupting? What needs are you trying to meet? Take time for self-empathy so you experience more choice.

## INTERDEPENDENCE: EXPRESSION FOR CONNECTION

---

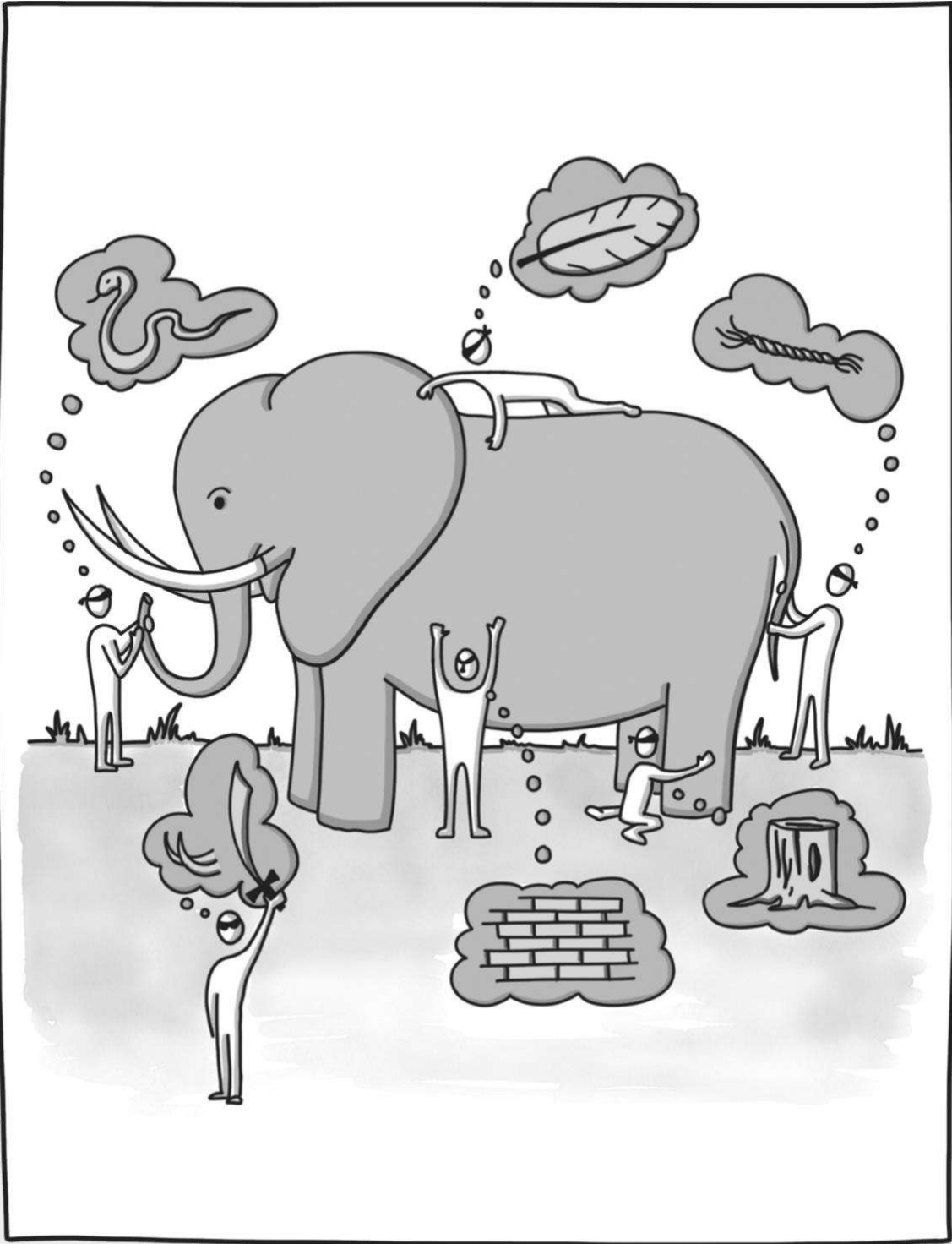
### Purpose:

To find a way to shift the intention of expression from being heard and/or getting relief to offering the expression as a way to support connection with another.

Think of a moment when you were unhappy with someone's actions, and reflect on the following questions:

1. If you absolutely didn't censor yourself, what would be your reaction?
2. What can you learn from that reaction about yourself? What are the key needs you identified? Take a moment to connect fully with each of the needs you identify before moving to additional needs.
3. What is your best guess of the other person's needs in the behavior that isn't meeting your needs?
4. What would you like to request of this person that you imagine might also meet her/his needs?
5. What of your experience and what you discovered about yourself would you want to express to this person for the purpose of creating connection? Consider if you notice any right/wrong thinking still present in your expression. If so, return to step 2 and redo this exercise until you find a way of expressing your needs and requests without any judgment.

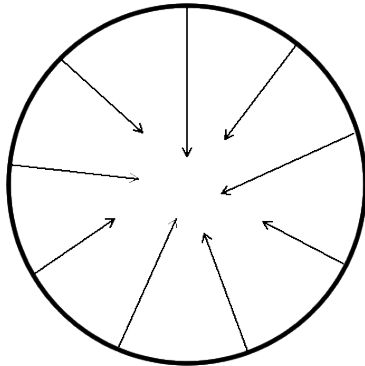
**PERSPECTIVE MATTERS**



Graphic by Mireille Van Bremen Concept based on "Tittha Sutta: Sectarians (1)" (Ud 6.4), translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. Access to Insight (BCBS Edition), 3 September 2012

## THE CIRCLE OF EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS

---



### Some Working Assumptions

**1. We each view the world based on our personal “location”.**

Among other things, location is determined by the combination of our culture and language, our socioeconomic position relative to the dominant culture, our informal and formal education, our family structure, our birth order, our gender, our race/ethnicity, our physical abilities, our sexual orientation, etc., and the assumptions and beliefs with which we were raised, through which

all of our personal experiences are and have been filtered.

**2. Objectivity of perception is a myth.**

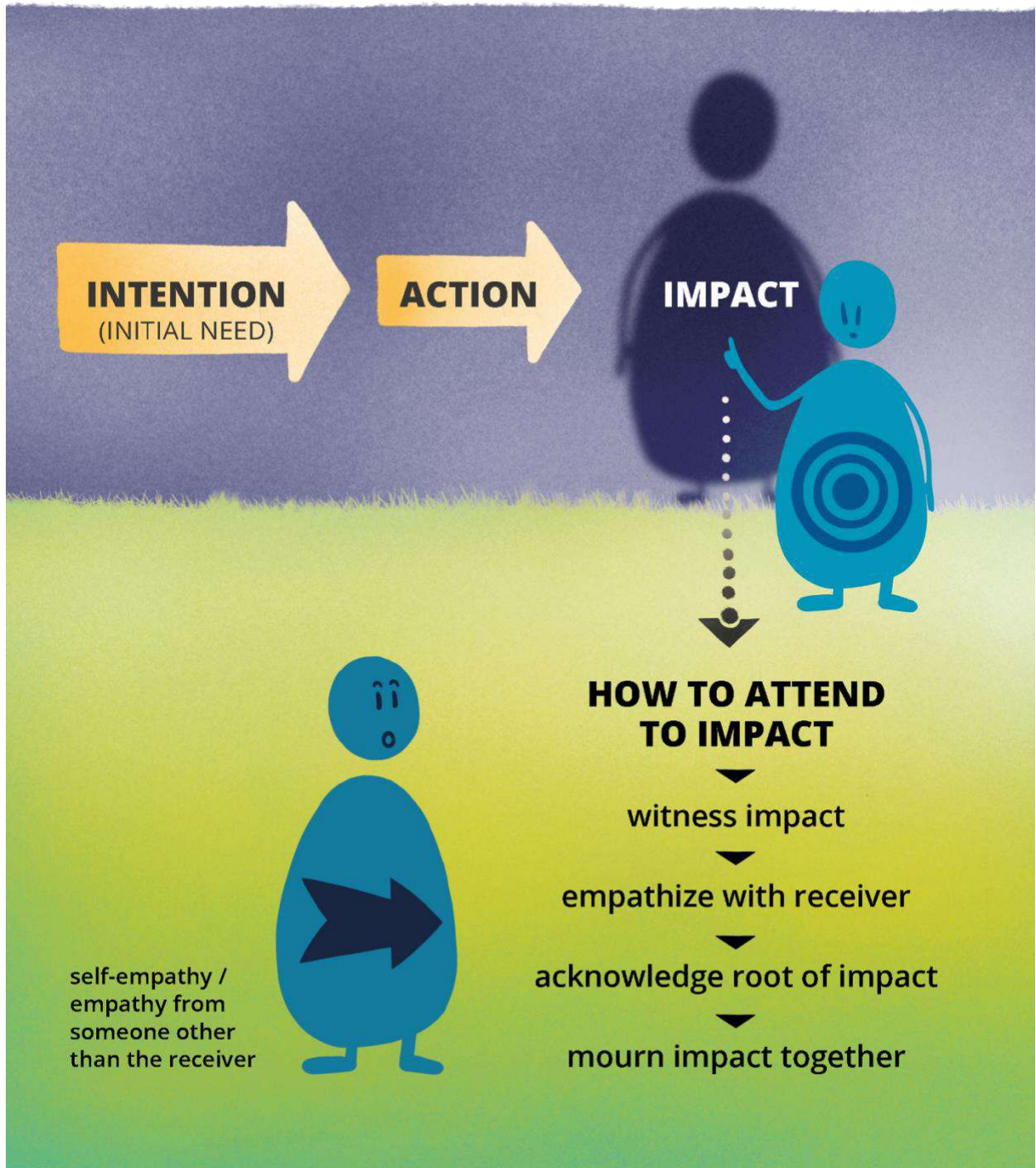
To assume that we are objective in our perceptions sets the stage for conflict. In contrast, to assume that we each have a unique and valid view of the world, and, that we have something to learn from each other’s perspectives, establishes the basis for mutual respect and appreciation. This helps us move beyond either/or thinking and opens us to an attitude of inquiry and learning about how others experience the world.

**3. We all have the capacity to become less subjective and broaden our capacity for empathy and understanding.** We can begin this by:

- Acknowledging—*without guilt*—that we *are* subjective and that this is part of being human. This frees us to be open to moving along the “circle of perceptions”.
- Actively seeking to understand the experiences of others that have given rise to their views of the world.
- Creating *standards, structures, and processes* for fostering relationships that assume there is a mutual need to learn from and about each other. As examples:
  - a) Consistently *asking questions with the aim of understanding* how a person came to see the world in their particular way (*behavioral standard*),
  - b) Creating a regular time and space for sustained dialogue (*structure*), and,
  - c) Using *processes* that encourage collaboration and participation and include all stakeholders (e.g., inviting people to speak to what is most “alive”, vs. just the agenda).

Employing all of these elements consistently provides the basis for developing respectful, trusting relationships. Such relationships are essential for engaging in caring, honest communication needed to empathize with and learn from each other, especially across differences.

# INTENTION VS IMPACT GRAPHIC



## INTENTION VS. IMPACT REFLECTION

---

As the author of an act, sometimes we do something that, as far as we are concerned, is completely innocuous and perhaps well-intentioned. The receiver of the action might nonetheless experience a significant painful impact.

1. The person impacted might come to the author with pain. Many times, the author wants to be seen for their intention and is not able to acknowledge or be with the impact of the receiver's pain. We often hear from author, *"If you knew my intention, you would not be in pain."* Or *"But I meant this\_\_\_\_\_, so you shouldn't feel pain."*
  - a. The pain of the impact is generally marginally related to the intention of the speaker. It is connected to a larger, often repeated, experience.
2. Choose as the author to be with the receiver and support them in being heard for the impact of the action. *"I'm going to make myself available to be there for the impact because I get it that this is larger than me."*
3. If you're the author, remember being seen for your intention is your work. You can ask others (not the receiver of the act) to meet that need.
  - a. Weigh what's more important in the moment, the pain of the impact being healed, or the intention of the speaker being seen while the person impacted is not attended to?
  - b. If you can focus on the impact, then there may be enough connection built to say, after the receiver is fully heard, *"Would you like to hear what came up for me?"* And, if the receiver does not have space to hear you, honor that no and go to your community for support.



## POWER, RESOURCES, AND CHOICE

---

Our mission is to contribute to a world where everyone's needs matter and people have the skills for making peace. We choose to explore issues of power, resources, and choice because they address two passionate commitments we have: first, to including *all* people both in mattering and in peacemaking skills development, and second, to working toward social transformation in a way that embodies the values we seek to create. (These values are delineated in a separate document called *NVC Assumptions and Intentions*.) In particular, we aim for transformation that does not create new enemies.

We invite you to explore the definitions at the heart of this document as a way to engage your mind and heart with some of the most challenging issues facing people at this time: How do we communicate when we have different life experiences or different interpretations of what we see around us? Are there ways to foster connection and trust even across the biggest divisions in our cultures? And to begin with, how do we make sense of power and choice, and how can we speak about them without getting lost in judgments of ourselves or of others?

Note: since Inbal's death in 2014, this document is being developed with ongoing consultation with Uma Lo and with Roxy Manning.

### Power

---

The capacity to mobilize resources to attend to needs.

**Note:** While attending to needs in the attempt to meet them may or may not result in actually meeting them, having resources and being able to mobilize them increases the likelihood of needs being met.

### Exercise I:

---

Check in with yourself about this definition of power.

1. What feelings and needs arise in you?
2. Are there any observations or thoughts connected to these feelings and needs?
3. Do you have a different definition that addresses your observations, feelings and needs more fully?

## Resources

---

Strategies, ideas, behaviors, things – anything that can be used to meet needs.

### *External Resources*

Aspects of life that are available to access such as money (or any other medium for obtaining physical resources, services, space, time, etc.), social support for our decision-making power (e.g. laws and social customs), information, education, time, physical strength, health, connections (e.g. mentors and social networks), access to nature, social or organizational structures that prioritize some people's needs over others (e.g. lending practices that favor or deny certain groups), etc.

A sub-section of external resources are **relational resources**, including *other* people's habits, choices and values, such as habits of compliance or deference (more resources for us) and rebellion (fewer resources for us), value for meeting everyone's needs (more resources for us), etc.

### *Internal Resources*

Aspects of our inner experience and capacities such as knowledge, cultural capital (behavior in accordance with cultural norms and values), beliefs about our entitlement to resources, level of self-connection, access to compassion, awareness of choice, capacity to make choices that meet our own and others' needs, flexibility about how we interpret life (e.g. developing stories and belief systems about life that may be different from our upbringing), critical thinking, our constitutional, learned, and nurtured resources, etc.

### NOTES:

1. The degree to which we have access to internal resources is greatly influenced by our life circumstances (i.e. the external resources that we've had access to) but it is not determined by them.

**Example a:** Children who arrive in school having been raised in families with access to certain cultural resources are more likely to be familiar with school norms and expectations, and thus more likely to do well.

**Example b:** Meditation and NVC practice tend to increase internal resources such as inner peace and the capacity for presence. People with more access to external resources are more likely to have access to such options.

**Example c:** People who advocate for themselves with the medical system are more likely to receive the care they are seeking. The capacity to advocate for oneself is influenced by one's access to education and to a sense of entitlement.

2. Some internal resources contribute to the ability to function and thrive in the system we are born into or live in. And some contribute to greater capacity for flexibility, adaptability, and

transformation whether or not we are aligned with the values and norms, and regardless of our actual access to external resources.

**Example:** Prisoners who have access to NVC classes often find themselves able to negotiate better with parole officers and with their families despite continuing to have no access to physical autonomy.

### **Exercise II a:**

---

Check in with yourself about these definitions of resources and internal and external resources.

1. What feelings and needs arise in you?
2. Are there any observations or thoughts connected to these feelings and needs?
3. Do you have different definitions that address your observations, feelings, and needs more fully?

### **Exercise II b:**

---

Consider the following questions in relation to one area of your life; your responses might be different in relation to different areas. Choose a role you have (e.g. parent, employment status) or a particular relationship, ideally one where you believe you and another person have different access to resources. If the first area doesn't yield responses that you find satisfying, try another area. You may then want to complete the questions about other areas of your life as well.

In relation to \_\_\_\_\_

1. What external resources can you identify that you have?
2. What external resources can you identify that you do not have?
3. What internal resources can you identify that you have?
4. What internal resources can you identify that you do not have?
5. Identify 1-3 internal resources that you would like to develop. For each one, note how NVC might support you in developing these resources.

### Exercise II c:

---

In relation to the same area of your life that you chose in IIb, check in with yourself about the other person's (or people's) access to resources.

1. What external resources can you identify that the other person has?
2. What external resources can you identify that the other person does not have?
3. What internal resources can you identify that the other person has?
4. What internal resources can you identify that the other person does not have?
5. Identify 1-3 internal resources that you would like to support this person to develop. For each one, note how NVC might support you in supporting the other person in this area.

### Exercise II d:

---

Take a few moments to connect with your responses to the questions above. What feelings and needs arise? Any reflections?

## Power-over and Power-with

---

### *Power-over:*

**Focus:** Attending to one's own needs, possibly including the need for contribution to the person or people over whom we are using our power.

**Action:** Mobilizing resources to attend to our needs whether or not others' needs will be attended to. In particular, even if some needs may be met for another person, the need for full choice would not be met for that person. The choice to use our power over others can be unconscious or conscious.

**Unconscious power-over** includes all the ways in which we use our greater access to resources habitually, without awareness and conscious choice about this fact. This use of power-over may contribute to meeting a variety of needs, but has a high cost in terms of relationship, trust, synergy, well-being of the people affected and their ultimate freedom.

**Conscious power-over** can take the form of protective force or of unilateral, functional force.

**Protective force** includes all the ways in which we use our greater access to resources with the motivation of protecting life or safety (without intention to punish).

Protective force would be used for the minimum amount of time necessary to achieve safety and return to exercising power with others.

**Unilateral, functional force** includes all the ways in which we use our greater access to resources to effect the outcome we want without including other people's autonomous choice, simply because we do not have the internal (e.g. imagination, spaciousness) or external resources (e.g. time flexibility) to make the choice to share power. The motivation is to meet needs such as movement, ease, resolution, etc., and does not entail any punitive intention. Recognizing that this type of force is not truly protective is a first step to taking responsibility for our choice to use power over. Over time, we may develop greater internal resources and therefore choose to use our power with others in more circumstances.

**Example:** Parents may set bedtime routines or going to school routines and handle daily conflicts around them with rewards and consequences because they simply don't recognize other options for how to meet everyone's needs. Their intention is not punitive; their intention is to survive and manage daily life.

***Power-with:***

**Focus:** Supporting autonomous choice for both people and attending to both people's needs.

**Action:** Holding everyone's needs fully precious, without assigning more value for one's own or for others' needs; mobilizing resources to create sufficient connection for everyone to trust that their needs matter.

**NOTE:** In writing these definitions we are attempting to be descriptive, not implying in any way that we anticipate that a time could come when everyone, all the time, would be attending to everyone's needs and attempting to make sure everything works for everyone. The issue is more about what happens when we become aware of new information, such as the effect of our actions on others. Do we then open up to dialogue and the willingness to change our strategies and approach in order to include the needs we were not aware of before? What needs would we include or not? When might unilateral force meet more needs for more people than dialogue?

**Exercise III a:**

---

Check in with yourself about these definitions.

1. What feelings and needs arise in you?
2. Are there any observations or thoughts connected to these feelings and needs?
3. Do you have different definitions that address your observations, feelings, and needs more fully?

### Exercise III b:

---

Identify a situation in which you have more power (access to more resources) than someone else.

1. Are there any ways in which you are using power over this other person to get what you want? Include observations for each kind of power over that you are aware of:
  - a. Conscious – protective force:
  - b. Conscious – unilateral, functional force:
  - c. Unconscious (This may be difficult to identify and bring to awareness.)
2. For each of these types of power-over, what needs are you trying to meet in using this kind of power? Are those needs met? What feelings arise in relation to these needs?
3. For each of these types of power-over, are there additional needs that are met that are different from the needs you are trying to meet? What feelings arise in relation to these needs?
4. For each of these types of power-over, what needs are not met? What feelings arise in relation to these needs?
5. Do any insights arise for you as you consider your responses so far?
6. Do you have any requests of yourself in relation to what you've discovered so far?
7. If you consider shifting to power-with, what needs do you notice arising that may be met? What feelings arise in relation to these needs?
8. What needs arise that may be unmet? What feelings arise in relation to these needs?
9. Connecting with your responses to considering shifting to power-with, what feelings and needs emerge for you? Take a few moments to connect with yourself.
10. Consider: Do you want to transform your use of power? You may want to connect to needs that would lead you to say yes and needs that would lead you to say no.
11. If you do want to transform your use of power, what might you do differently? Identify resources you might need within yourself or from outside yourself that would help support this choice. If you want, create a concrete plan to support you in making this transformation.

## The Two Axes of Power

It may be helpful to note that there are two different factors that can get confused in regards to use of power. One is care: does the person with power care about the needs of the person with less power? The other is autonomy: does the person with power engage with the autonomy of the person with less power? Does the person with less power participate in the decisions?

Below is a table that might help shed light on this complexity. One of the results of not separating out these two factors is that people who care about others can be unaware of using power over them and believe themselves to be in collaboration just because they care even though they don't involve the other person in the decisions that affect them.

Note, as you look at the table below, that it is possible to create systems and relationships in which collaboration (full sharing of power) does not depend on caring, and is only about how decisions are made.

	Engaging Autonomy	Not Engaging Autonomy
Actively Exercising Caring	Full power-with: e.g. collaborating on making decisions that affect everyone	Benign power-over: e.g. parents designing and enforcing what they trust is best for their children
Not (Necessarily) Actively Exercising Caring	Embedded power-with: e.g. systems such as holacracy that are designed to invite people into decision-making regardless of whether people in power personally seek it	Authoritarian power-over: e.g. traditional command-and-control structures in corporations, designed to maximize profits without attention to employee well-being and meaningful participation

## Structural Power

---

Having sufficient external resources within a system (e.g. workplace, government, family, court) that carry social, cultural, or legal power or legitimacy, usually by assignation of role or job title but sometimes by membership in a group.

**Example a:** Police officer, judge, manager, etc.

**Example b:** All fathers and husbands (in many cultures) before women had the right to own property.

When we have structural power, the choice about what will happen ultimately resides with us. We may choose to use our power *with* others or *over* others, but the choice is ours.

Structural power includes the power to restrict others' access to resources, the power to limit others' options, and the power to create and deliver consequences for others' actions.

Whether or not we use our power over others when we have structural power, the fact that we have access to structural power may affect the people who do not have that structural power, including the beliefs they may have about themselves, about people who have that structural power, or about others who do not have that structural power.

**Example a:** We lead an annual Leadership Program. As leaders of the program, we ultimately get to choose who gets into the program, even if we choose to have the decision be participatory.

**Example b:** Parents have legal and social support to determine most of their children's choices around type of schooling, activities, friendships within the home, food in the home, access to money and other resources, parenting style and "discipline" strategies, and more.

**Note:** We find it useful to make a distinction between *having* power and choice of *using* power. We see this as significant for two reasons. One is that when we recognize that it is entirely possible to have structural power and use it *with* others, we can release some of the fear of power that we have, and more people with an awareness of power sharing might end up being willing to step into leadership. The other is a point of humility: recognizing that the habit of using power over others is deeply ingrained in our social conditioning, and therefore shifting our social structures entails also transforming habits of how power is used.

#### **Exercise IV a:**

---

Check in with yourself about this definition.

1. What feelings and needs arise in you?
2. Are there any observations or thoughts connected to these feelings and needs?
3. Do you have a different definition that addresses your observations, feelings and needs more fully?

#### **Exercise IV b:**

---

1. Write down at least 2 examples where you have acknowledged structural power in your life:
  - a. What choices do you make in relation to having this structural power? Do you use this power? In what ways?
  - b. How do you feel as you notice where you have structural power? What needs arise for you?



2. Write down at least 2 examples where you don't have structural power in your life, or have actual structural barriers:
  - a. What choices do you make in relation to not having this structural power?
  - b. How do you feel as you notice where you do not have structural power? What needs arise for you?

## Structural Privilege (Social-Structural Power)

---

### *Invisible structural privilege*

Forms of access to resources that result from legal or social norms having to do with membership in a group, without any particular action, inaction, or even awareness on the part of the people who have that access of the existence of the disparity, the potential benefits to them, or the costs to others.

Structural privilege is societally given, not chosen, and is independent of attitude or belief system; believing in equality between the races in the US, for example, does not cancel the privilege of a white person. At the same time, having structural privilege often leads to certain behaviors through socialization, normative models, and the tendency to justify privilege that has existed in human societies since social stratification started around the time of agriculture.

Structural power such as boss in relation to employee exists when individuals are within a particular relationship, and ends when they are not. Within that relationship, the person in power has the ability to exercise their power over the other person (see the beginning of section D). Structural privilege is different in that the power difference is inherent in the societal social structures. It exists independently of the relationship between the two people. As a result, structural privilege is often invisible to the people who have it. It often appears often as the "norm" rather than a disparity. A boss knows that they can make decisions that others cannot, and that this difference is inherent in the structure of the organization. White people in the US, on the other hand, can easily see their privilege as simply "being fortunate" without even being aware that it is not available to others, or that there is a relationship between their "fortune" and another's "misfortune."

It is not the specific resource that makes it a privilege. Rather, it is the fact that only some groups of people have it and others don't.

**Example:** In the existing health care system in the US, many people don't have adequate access to health care. That makes adequate access to health care a privilege, because it is only available to some.

**Note:** The assumption that the difference in access to resources has to do with membership in a group is highly interpretive, even though it is also supported by many observations and studies. The task of representing privilege within a framework of power, resources, and choice that relies on making observations rather than interpretations remains an ongoing challenge. Being able to express ideas about privilege in language that is as close to observational as possible is one strategy for connecting across all differences.

**Example a:** Most schools are structured around verbal and written work and the ability to sit quietly and attend to classroom instruction. Homeless children are more likely to have moderate to severe acute and chronic health problems, hyperactivity/inattention, behavior problems, anxiety, and depression. This can affect emotional and cognitive development, as they are thus more than twice as likely as other children to repeat a grade, be suspended or expelled, or drop out of high school. In this sense, children with stable homes in which their physical and emotional needs can be met have a structural privilege that makes it more likely they will meet the expected behavioral norms in the classroom.

**Example b:** When white people in the US walk into a store to buy something, they are rarely if ever followed around by security guards to ensure they don't steal. Black people, on the other hand, and especially young Black men, are routinely followed around like that.

### *Levels of Privilege*

Although privilege is structural in its origin, it operates in a variety of ways at the cultural, interpersonal, and personal levels as well as structurally. Overall, being able to go through daily life without experiencing, seeing, or even being aware of the day-to-day effects of privilege on others is itself a form of privilege.

**Structural example:** Being more likely to receive better medical care in an emergency room; lower sentences for criminal behavior; being protected by the police rather than harmed by them; etc.

**Cultural example:** Being able to buy food, clothing, or hair products at any store, rather than needing to spend time and money to drive further to go to the "ethnic" shops, is a form of privilege available to most European-Americans.

**Interpersonal example:** Being able to speak and rely on being taken seriously is a form of privilege that accrues to white middle- and upper-class men in particular.

**Personal example:** Seeing one's own physical form as consistent with beauty norms is far more available to white women than to women of any other race or ethnicity.

### *Effects of Privilege*

The cumulative effects at the structural, cultural, interpersonal, and personal levels of experiencing others' privileged access to resources and our own lack of access to the same resources, over time, is the closest definition we can come up with, for now, to the term "oppression."

**Structural example:** Being significantly more likely to be stopped by police, arrested, harmed, or killed; receiving higher sentences in the criminal justice system; being denied mortgage application more often; and so forth.

**Cultural example:** Rarely seeing one's group members represented in meaningful, positive ways in mainstream media; being a closeted homosexual, and adjusting language, volume, mode of dress, or expression in order to avoid ridicule or violence.

**Interpersonal example:** Being interpreted as "overreacting" when expressing intensity during a cross-race conflict; being ignored or unacknowledged when expressing opinions.

**Personal example:** Internalizing messages about being underqualified, unreliable, etc.

### **Exercise V a:**

---

Check in with yourself about these definitions (not the examples).

1. What feelings and needs arise in you?
2. Are there any observations or thoughts connected to these feelings and needs?
3. Do you have different definitions that address your observations, feelings, and needs more fully?

### **Exercise V b:**

---

Check in with yourself about the examples that accompanied the definitions.

1. What feelings and needs arise in you?
2. Are there any observations or thoughts connected to these feelings and needs?
3. Do you have different examples that address your observations, feelings, and needs more fully?

### **Exercise V c:**

---

1. Write down at least 2 examples where you have invisible structural privilege in your life. Include observations:
  - a. What choices do you make in relation to having this structural privilege? Do you use this privilege? In what ways?

- b. How do you feel as you notice where you have structural privilege? What needs arise for you?
2. Write down at least 2 examples where you don't have structural privilege in your life. Include observations:
  - a. What choices do you make in relation to not having this structural privilege?
  - b. How do you feel as you notice where you do not have structural privilege? What needs arise for you?

### **Exercise V d:**

---

1. As you reflect on your responses to all the questions above, do any insights arise?
2. Do you have any requests of yourself or of others in relation to these issues?
3. Are there any strategies you would like to consider for increasing your awareness about structural power or privilege that you have? Anything you'd like to do differently?

### **Choices about Responding to Structural Power Differences**

---

#### *External choice*

Limited by our willingness to live with certain consequences of our choices. We don't always have access to resources to exercise our preferred strategies. Some of our options are constrained by our unwillingness to live with certain consequences of the choices we would rather make.

**Example:** You want to bring your children to an NVC event. The leaders have decided not to offer a children's program. You have choice about how to respond, but you don't have the option of bringing your children and have a program set up for them. You may not have the option of staying on the premises if you bring your children without prior agreement with the leaders. If you choose to stay when you are being asked to leave, you may not have the option of staying if a police officer comes to escort your family off the premises. You may not have the option of not going to jail if you refuse.

## Exercise VI a:

---

Think of an area where you're experiencing limited external choice (you perceive someone else as having structural power).

1. What is the situation?
2. What are the consequences you don't want to live with that are leading you to make the choices you're making? In other words, what needs are you trying to meet in these choices?
3. What are the consequences of making these choices? In other words, in what ways are they not aligned with your preferred strategies and what needs are not met therefore?
4. Given full awareness of the consequences you're choosing to live with – and not live with (needs met and unmet) in your current choice, would you like to stay with this choice, or make a different choice? Articulate what is leading you to stay with/change this choice and connect with yourself to a place where you are at peace about this choice.

### *Internal choice*

Limited only by our internal resources. In principle, we always have internal choice about how to respond, even if our external options remain limited. There are several types of internal resources within us that support internal choice.

**Inner peace:** the more we can live in peace with our unmet needs and emotional challenge, the more we can maintain a sense of choice in how to respond rather than be reactive.

**Courage:** the more willingness we have to face consequences that might arise if we exercise choice in ways that those in positions of structural power may not like, the more options we could consider in how to respond, including in particular standing up for what's true for us even if it means losing a job, or even our life.

**Capacities:** the more internal capacities we have such as empathy and dialogue skills to create connection with the people in power or the capacity to inspire and motivate others to create communities of strength, the wider the range of responses we can muster.

Ultimately, our response to power will depend on the needs we are trying to attend to, including attempting to transform the very conditions of power that affect us in the first place.

**NOTE:** If we are structurally in a position of having less access to external resources and less structural power, we will need more internal resources to be able to shape the course of our lives. At the same time, the lived experience of ongoing limited access to external resources often leaves us with less access to internal resources and to choice, both because cultivating internal resources often requires external resources (e.g. money and leisure), and because

reduced access to external resources often results in trauma and ongoing stress, both of which reduce our access to internal choice.

### **Exercise VI b:**

---

In relation to the situation from exercise VI a:

1. What is your internal choice about how to respond? (Notice in particular any habits of submission or rebellion)
2. What needs does this choice meet? What needs are not met? Are you experiencing any self-judgments in relation to your internal choice? If so, connect with yourself sufficiently to have clarity about your underlying needs. You may want to use other journals to fully transform these judgments.
3. If there is a specific person with structural power involved, are you struggling to meet this person with compassion? If so, what prevents you from creating a full human connection with this person? (If there is not, create a “representative person” to work with. E.g., don’t work with a “government” but with person x who is in role y within a government.)
4. What needs are you aware this person is trying to meet?
5. What might make it hard for them to use power with - what needs might not be met if they use power with?
6. As you connect with awareness of your own and the other person’s needs, what feelings and needs arise within you?
7. Do any insights arise for you?
8. Are there any new internal choices that you can imagine making? What might support you in expanding the range of your internal choices?

### **NVC in Relation to Power, Resources, and Choice**

---

Since our full power reflects both our access to external resources and our access to internal resources, the less access to external resources we have (the less structural power), the more internal resources we need in order to have sufficient power to affect the course of our lives.

Hence, NVC can make a significant contribution to increasing our power by increasing our internal resources and therefore our capacity for authentic, empowered choice.

If we have less structural power, NVC supports us in increasing our internal resources. Specifically, NVC supports us in transcending the impulse to submit or rebel, and choosing instead the kind of response we want to have to people with more power based on seeing everyone's humanity, our own as well as theirs. With that, we can aim to forge the quality of connection, through dialogue, that can create shifts in people with more structural power. When dialogue is not available, NVC supports us in having the courage and the love necessary for engaging in other actions, including nonviolent resistance and civil disobedience, while maintaining a fully open heart. NVC also supports us in having full self-acceptance when we choose, in order to attend to some needs, to continue to accept conditions that don't meet some other needs, or even to numb out in order to survive at all.

If we have more structural power, NVC supports us in having internal resources for choosing and knowing how to share our power. For example, it may mean encouraging people to say "no" to us instead of saying "yes" out of fear of consequences, in order to achieve a quality of trust that everyone's needs matter.

Finally, NVC can also provide us with tools and vision to support people who have less access to external resources by supporting them to increase their internal resources and, through that, their capacity for creating the life and world they want to live in.

### **Exercise VII:**

---

1. How has NVC contributed to more internal resources for you?
2. How might you focus more attention on developing internal resources with NVC?
3. What choices might you make differently if you keep NVC in mind as an option for transforming power relations?
4. Are any other reflections arising for you in response to this segment?

### **Systemic Considerations Regarding Structural Power**

---

Our vision is a world where everyone's needs matter and people have the skills for making peace. To move toward such a vision entails exploring the possibility of a full partnership system with no structural power. We see a difference between systems that have a commitment to a benevolent use of structural power and systems which are set up not to have structural power. The former rely on people with structural power to use their power *with* others, and are thus vulnerable to change of personnel. The latter are set up in such a way that no one can exercise

power over others. For one example of a thorough investigation, with examples, of self-managing organizations, look at the book *Reinventing Organizations* by Frederic Laloux.

Our current observation of the world is that systems that fully institutionalize shared power are the rare exception. Examples are the company Semco in Brazil, and, to some extent, B-corporations, a new legal form of incorporating in the US, which has more options for power sharing than other forms. We are actively interested in examples of such systems. Additional examples are described in Frederic Laloux's book.

### **Exercise VIII:**

---

1. Are you aware of any systems, small or large, that operate on the basis of shared power?
2. Reflect on the variety of definitions in this document to check: is this shared structural power or benevolent use of structural power?
3. What feelings and needs arise as you consider these questions?
4. Do you have any vision or insight into how to institutionalize shared power?
5. Do you have any requests of yourself or others that you'd like to explore toward this vision?



# SAFETY, CHOICE AND ENTRUSTMENT

---

## Working with “safety”

---

1. Distinguishing between the need for safety and possible strategies that people use to meet that need (e.g. confidentiality, no cross talk, rules for participation; we don't create such strategies unless they are requested and agreed upon by the group)
2. Distinguishing internal safety from external safety, and focusing on increasing people's internal sense of safety irrespective of external circumstances
3. Supporting people who perceive safety as a strong need, especially if they're newer to NVC, through empathic connection rather than arguing, teaching, or trying to “make things safe” for them
4. Unpacking the chain of needs underneath safety
5. Slowing things down and receiving everyone with empathy to contribute to meeting needs for trust, compassion, and choice about how much pain to handle
6. Balancing trying to meet the need for safety (or the perception of it) with authenticity as individuals and within a group, aiming to address safety without compromising authenticity
7. Staying with challenges as they arise and working through them so as to contribute to a deeper level of trust and connection over time, instead of backing off out of fear that people's need for safety won't be met

## Choice in the face of potential consequences

---

1. Recognizing and acting upon our autonomy regardless of whether our need for respect of our autonomy is met (i.e. willingness to say “yes” when hearing a demand)
  - a. Our need for autonomy is met through an internal process of conscious choice; it is not something others can meet for us.
  - b. Others can contribute by meeting our need for respect for our autonomy.
  - c. When we hear a demand, we may interpret it as lack of respect for our autonomy and we may react to this interpretation.
2. Accessing choice regardless of how a request is presented
  - a. No matter how the other person expresses their request, ultimately the choice to hear it as a demand or as a request resides within us.
  - b. When we connect with our own needs and the needs of the person expressing a demand or threatening consequences, we have more access to choice, and we can choose to say “yes” or “no” based on needs.

- c. When we react to a perceived demand by either saying “yes” out of fear or by saying “no” to protect our sense of autonomy, we are constraining the range of choices available to us.
- d. We increase our experience of choice when we recognize that submission is based on fear of consequences and rebellion is reactive to submission and to fear and still operated within the terms set by another. We can shift, instead, to living from our authentic autonomy and being grounded in interdependence.
- e. We increase our experience of choice by distinguishing between submission, which is about letting go of our independent sense of choice, and entrustment, which is exercising the choice to follow based on overall trust.

	Yes	No
<b>Reaction</b>	Submission – fear of consequences; choice without full choice	Rebellion – reaction to perceived demand or power-over; choice without full choice
<b>Conscious choice / Attending to needs</b>	Entrustment – Trust in leader’s guidance even if I don’t see the needs a “yes” would meet	Lack of entrustment – Don’t trust in leader’s guidance and don’t see the needs a “yes” would meet

## Expanding our sense of choice

---

1. Distinguishing between autonomy as doing whatever we feel like, and autonomy as making choices with clear understanding of what needs we want to meet
2. Exercising choice in where to put our attention, including recognizing the distinction between the life in the moment (what is happening around us, what draws our attention) and the life in our long-term plans, goals, intentions and agreements, and being able consciously to choose which to follow
3. Nurturing the experience of choicefulness (truly experiencing conscious choice)

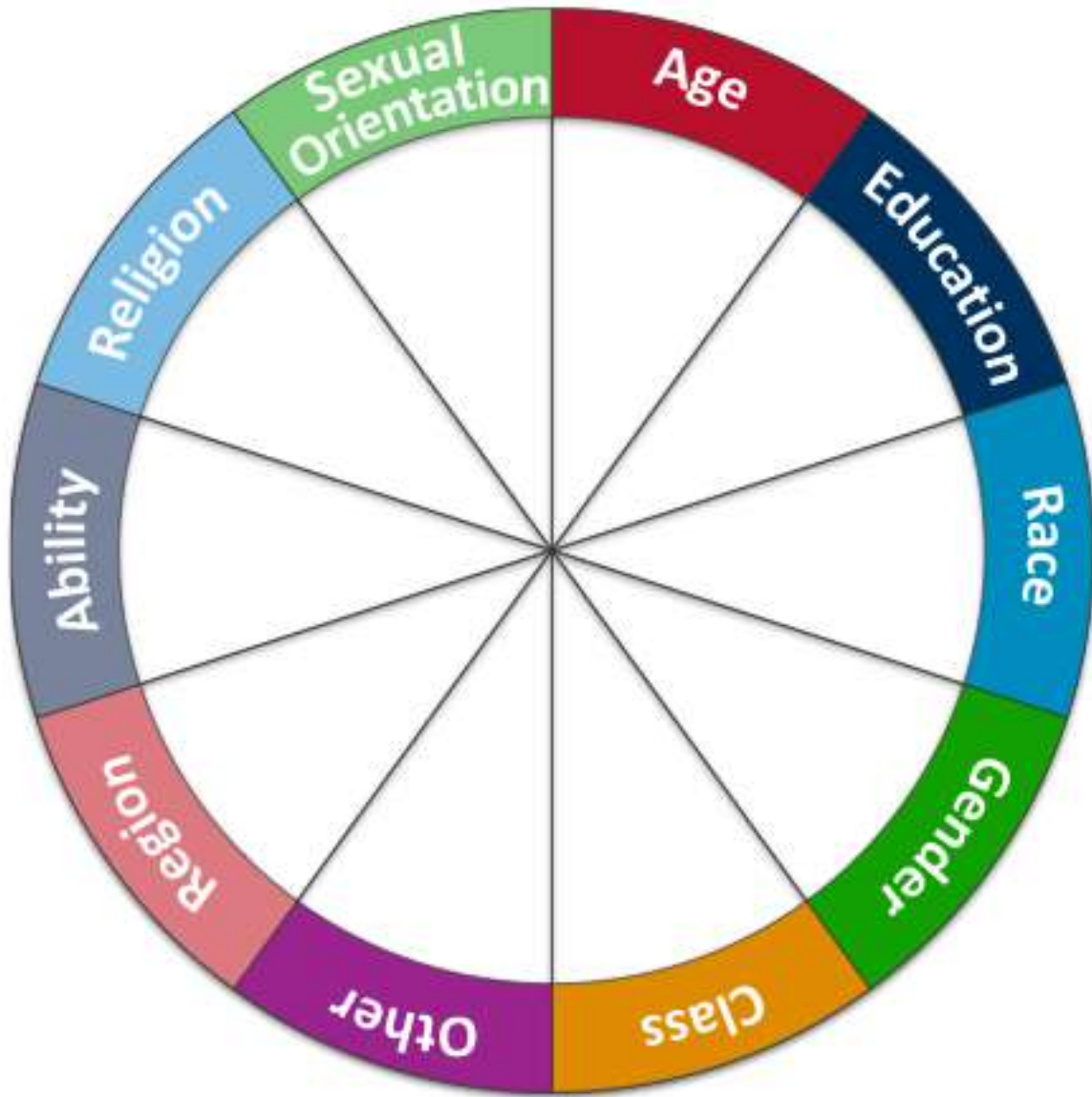
## Constrained choice

---

1. Distinguishing between the theoretical reality that we always have choice, and the practical reality that our choices are often constrained (externally due to social structures, and internally due to past experiences such as trauma which make choice not accessible)
2. Distinguishing between options, which can be limited from the outside, and choice, which is always internal.

## PRIVILEGE IDENTITY EXPLORATION (PIE) CHART

---



## PRIVILEGE IDENTITY EXPLORATION

---

- Color each section of your PIE, so that the more privilege you have, the closer you color to the outside rim of the circle. Notice the feelings you have as you color each segment.
- The “Other” section allows you to customize your PIE. You may wish to include language, caste, marital status, profession, or something unique to you.
- In small groups, take turns sharing your PIE. Talk briefly about your rank for each section of the pie. As speaker, pay attention to how you feel when talking about your rank. Notice if your sense of your rank changes from when you were alone.
- As you listen, when each person shares their PIE, notice how you feel.
- After everyone shares their PIE, notice how you feel when you have lower or higher rank in relationship to others. Each of you comment about your experience.

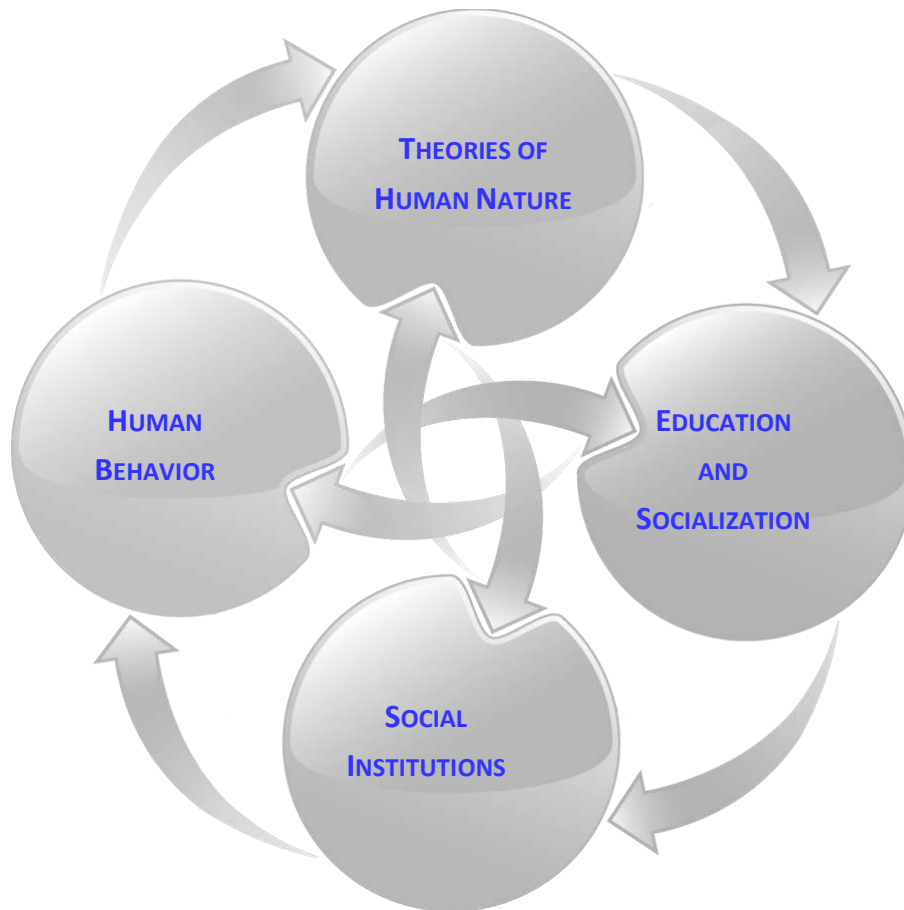
### Exploring Privilege:

For each of the explorations below, focus on supporting the person speaking with empathy.

- What do you appreciate about having higher rank? What do you appreciate about having lower rank?
- Choose one area where you have higher rank that you have a difficult time owning or living. Notice your edges and belief systems that create resistance to owning your rank or privilege.
  - Let your group reflect on how they feel about your higher rank. What irritates or scares you?
- Choose an area in which you hold judgments about those with lower rank in that area. What messages have you internalized that leads you to hold judgments about that area?
- Share a rank you have (low or high) about which you have difficulty receiving empathy. Explore what the barriers are. Receive empathy about the challenges of receiving empathy in this area.
- How can you use your privilege to benefit groups or society?
- Knowing this, how can you interact with others differently? Practice new ways of interacting within your groups.
- Uncertainty is a common reaction when recognizing, contemplating or addressing our privileged identities. Defensiveness often arises when exploring our dissonant feelings about social injustice. Common forms of defensiveness include denial, deflection, rationalization, intellectualization, envy, benevolence, minimization.
- Allow yourself to feel whatever comes up during your exploration, including guilt, anger, hurt, gratitude and more. All feelings are welcome.

## SOCIAL STRUCTURES

---



**Theories of Human Nature:** What is our understanding of the innate nature of humans? What's our story about how people are?

**Education and Socialization:** How do we treat children? How do we pass on our values and beliefs about humans?

**Social Institutions:** How do we set up organizations and institutions? What policies and structures are in place to enforce our values and our beliefs about humans?

**Human Behavior:** How do people actually act in our society? How do their actions reflect our beliefs about humans?

## Authority Based Societies

---

Over several thousand years more and more of the world's people have been living in systems based on authority: In the family and in the society at large, some people have the authority to make decisions and others are primarily expected to respect and follow those in authority. In such societies, most often some people have more resources to meet their needs, especially their material needs, while other people's needs are not being met.

### Reflection Questions:

---

1. What are some of the stories about human nature you heard as you were growing up?
2. Where did you hear those stories from? Who shared them with you?
3. How were you parented as a child? How did the way you were parented reflect the stories about human nature around you?
4. Think of institutions you interact with. How do their policies and structures reflect the stories about human nature in the dominant society?
5. How do people actually act?
6. How is your behavior influenced by your culture's beliefs about human nature?

## Collaborative Societies

---

The primary principle around which collaborative societies can be built is the principle of meeting the most needs for the most number of people possible and for the natural environment.

Other elements of this worldview could be:

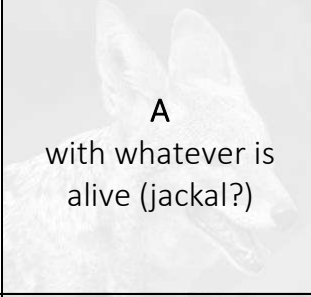



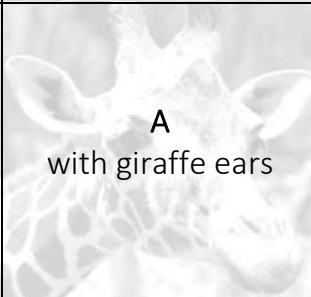
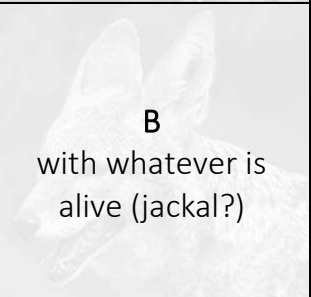

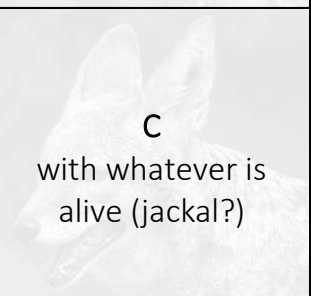
- People have the capacity for compassion just as much as the capacity for harm.
- People enjoy giving when they have choice.
- People need each other in order to attend to their needs.
- People can resolve their differences through mutually empathic dialogue.

The net result of this radically different story is that authority is not needed, and that human beings can self-govern collaboratively, share resources with care and wisdom, and steward the planet with grace and love.

## TYPES OF ROLE PLAYS / "ROLE BEINGS" - CHART

A refers to the person whose situation the role play is addressing, where A has felt hurt.

B and C refer to someone else – the leader/coach or a group member - who will take one of the roles of the people involved in the situation.

Possible purposes	Who plays A? How?	Who plays the other person? How?	Who witnesses/ observes?
1. Healing, empathy	 A with whatever is alive (jackal?)	 B with giraffe ears	none (or the group)
2. Humanizing the other person; healing, learning, modeling	 B with giraffe ears	 A with whatever is alive (jackal?)	none (or the group)
3. Skill building, integration, growth	 A with giraffe ears	 B with whatever is alive (jackal?)	none (or the group)
4. Modeling, learning, inspiration, healing	 B with giraffe ears	 C with whatever is alive (jackal?)	A (with the group)

## TYPES OF ROLE PLAYS / “ROLE BEINGS” - SUMMARY

---

A refers to the person whose situation the role play is addressing.

B and C refer to someone else – the leader/coach or a group member - who will take one of the roles of the people involved in the situation.

1. Person A plays themselves with whatever is alive, possibly including “jackal,” person B plays the other person with giraffe ears. (Main purpose: healing and empathy)
2. Person A plays the other person with whatever is alive, possibly including “jackal,” person B plays person A with giraffe ears. (Main purpose: humanizing the other person by understanding them from within their perspective; healing; modeling)
3. Person A plays themselves with giraffe ears, person B plays the other person with whatever is alive, likely in “jackal”. (Main purpose: practice)
4. Person B plays person A with giraffe ears; person C plays the other person with whatever is alive, possibly including “jackal.” (Main purpose: modeling, inspiration, healing).



## MOURNING, HEALING & RECONCILIATION – KEYS

---

### Internal Work – Mourning and Healing:

---

1. NVC invites us to shift our relationship to things we regret from one of guilt, self-recrimination and the like to mourning and understanding.
2. Self-recrimination and guilt arise out of self-judgments. The key to transforming self-judgments is to recognize the needs underneath our self-judgments – the needs that weren't met by our own behavior.
3. Mourning in NVC involves recognizing the needs that weren't met by our behavior and taking time to mourn how our needs (including our need for contribution to others) were not met.
4. Making space for self-compassion (self-acceptance, self-understanding) is another crucial process toward healing, involving understanding the needs we were trying to meet by our behavior. This is not the same as condoning or agreeing with our behavior – it's a matter of shifting our relationship to our actions to meet ourselves compassionately, knowing that we did the best we could to meet needs, however tragically.
5. When we explore needs in relation to a past action, it's important to give ourselves the time to explore our feelings and integrate what we learn. Healing emerges out of the growing self-connection, self-compassion and self-trust that this process enables.

### Relational Work - Reconciliation:

---

We can use NVC to heal pain and rifts in trust between us and others. The following three steps relate to situations where we mourn our own actions and recognize their impact on another person, rather than when we want to express our pain about others' actions. This work supports the process of healing and reconciliation, and can be done with the other person or as a role play.

1. **Empathic connection.** Invite the other person to share their pain however they express it. Connect empathically with the present pain in the other person, opening your heart to them without defensiveness. Maintain this focus as much as you can until the person is complete and expresses a desire to hear what arises in you. (You may ask them if they're complete and would like to hear how you feel.)
2. **Expression - mourning.** What arises in you may be quite complex, but for the purpose of taking responsibility for your actions, focus here on expressing your own mourning, sharing what needs of yours were not met by the actions you took. As much as you can, connect deeply with your unmet needs so you can share yourself without defensiveness. Check how the person feels when you're done, and see if they are interested in and ready for the next step.
3. **Expression - understanding.** Some of the pain we experience when others' actions don't meet our needs has to do with bewilderment about how someone could possibly act that way. There is a deep need for understanding and re-opening our hearts to others' humanity even when they have acted

in ways that were painful for us. This step is intended to meet this need for understanding. Share your understanding of the feelings and needs that led you to take the actions that contributed to pain for the other person. Focus on contributing to the other person, not on wanting to justify or even receive their understanding or forgiveness. You are still focused on the other person even though you are sharing your own pain. Therefore, again, the more you can connect deeply with your own humanity, the more you'll be able to speak without defensiveness, and with full compassion and care for both of you.

As always with NVC, continue to check in with your heart and to connect with the other person's heart. These steps are a general guideline, but in real life may include much more back and forth.

## HEALING AND RECONCILIATION PROCESS

### The three steps of the NVC healing and reconciliation process

(shown here with the likely transitions between them)

	RECEIVER	ACTOR	RECEIVER'S NEEDS	ACTOR'S NEEDS
	What the person in pain ("receiver") might say, do, or experience; the person's implicit request/question	What the person who triggered the pain ("actor") might say, do, or experience; the person's response to the "receiver's" request/question	Needs addressed for the person in pain ("receiver")	Needs addressed for the person who triggered the pain ("actor")
<b>STEP 1: EMPATHY</b>	Expresses her or his pain. This could be with owning feelings/ needs, or might be raw pain with judgments. "Do you get it?"	Listens with empathy (presence, verbal; whatever serves to convey understanding of the person's experience)	Connection, empathy, care, trust (that her or his pain is understood by the actor)	Connection, understanding (of the meaning and consequences of the action for the receiver)
<b>TRANSITION</b>	May stop speaking, or possibly begin to repeat the same themes.	Checks if the other person is complete with what s/he wanted to express. Checks if the other person trusts that her/his pain is understood. Checks if the other person would like to hear one's feelings about her/his pain.	Connection, trust	Connection, trust
<b>STEP 2: MOURNING</b>	Listens to the actor. Witnessing the mourning, the receiver may experience how her or his needs matter. "Do I matter?"	Having seen the impact, the actor connects with and expresses her or his own unmet needs in connection with having taken the action. (Principal unmet need is likely to be care for the other person)	Mattering, care, trust, connection, inter-dependence	Mourning, care, connection, inter-dependence, self-responsibility

	RECEIVER	ACTOR	RECEIVER'S NEEDS	ACTOR'S NEEDS
<b>TRANSITION</b>	May ask a "why" question, e.g.: "Why did you do it?!"	Checks if the other person trusts that her/his pain matters; checks if the other person would like to understand what led to the actions taken. (If answer is no, then more empathy is likely needed.)	Connection, trust	Connection, trust
<b>STEP 3: UNDERSTANDING</b>	Listens to the other person. Connecting with the needs behind the action taken, the receiver can experience the relief from the pain of the "why". "How could you do it?"	Actor connects with and expresses the needs s/he was trying to meet by taking the action taken, without relinquishing responsibility for those actions (no "justification"), with the aim of contributing to the receiver's understanding. Remains ready to return to empathy or mourning if this expression triggers more pain in the other person.	Understanding humanity, connection, healing, reconciliation. (Recognizing the actor's humanity may be the key to full inner healing and freedom.)	Contributing to understanding, humanizing oneself, connection, healing, reconciliation
<b>CLOSURE</b>	Check in about present feelings and needs; any requests.	Check in about present feelings and needs and if there is anything else the receiver wants.	Connection, trust	Connection, trust

Note: the above sequence is schematic and is offered as a general guideline. The actual transitions, sometimes even the order, are likely to vary widely. For example, the question "Why did you do it?!" may well appear at any point in the process, even before any empathy was received. Sometimes the question is an attempt to express pain, and will be most effectively met with empathy. Sometimes, however, the question is a genuine attempt to understand, and a response to it is what's most wanted. Attempting to respond to the question is likely to provide more information about what's being asked for. The key is flexibility, not a particular order.

## Three ways to use the healing and reconciliation process

1. Personal healing. Doesn't have to be done with the person who was the trigger for the situation – can be done as a role play. Particularly helpful when the person who triggered the pain is not alive, not accessible, or there is no trust that he or she could hear the pain. Could be in preparation for reconciliation.
2. Reconciliation between the two people when one person is in pain in relation to actions taken by the other person.
3. Double-reconciliation. When both people are in pain in relation to actions taken by each other.

## Three ways that NVC practitioners and trainers can support people by using the reconciliation process

1. Personal healing – Take the role of the other person (role-being). Note: key to the healing is to enter deeply into the experience of the person so as to be able to provide internal insight into the humanity and heart of the person whose actions were the stimulus for so much pain.
2. Reconciliation – Guide/facilitate the process, supporting both people with empathy when needed but principally coaching the person who took the triggering actions through the steps.
3. Double-reconciliation – Mediate between people using the reconciliation process, most likely with one person taking a turn to complete all three steps before switching to the other person.

## Preparation for a reconciliation process

When possible, one or both people can use the following journals for self-reflection and self-empathy, in preparation for a reconciliation process:

- a. When we have taken an action that triggered pain for another and we feel connected to mourning – use mourning and/or transforming self-judgments
- b. When we have taken an action that triggered pain for another and we do not feel connected to mourning; we might experience some judgments of the person for the feelings s/he has - use transforming judgments
- c. When we are in pain in relation to someone else's actions – use transforming judgments or enemy images
- d. In any of these cases, use layers of needs or facets of needs to access the deepest self-understanding and deepest self-connection.

## Brief reconciliation for people in close/intimate relationships

Couples (or others) who want to integrate the reconciliation process as a regular practice can take the following steps:

- a. Notice small issues that arise – local hurts/pains, judgments, irritations, etc.

- b. At the first opportunity, or at a pre-arranged time (consider making such a time regularly), initiate a brief reconciliation process about the small issue.
- c. Move through the reconciliation steps with the expectation of 1-3 sentences per step (30 seconds to 3 minutes per step). Use the handout for a reminder of the steps.
- d. After each of the first few times of doing brief reconciliations, make time to debrief the experience, connect about needs met/unmet, and choose whether to continue to engage with this process.

## Challenges with the reconciliation process, and possible strategies to address them

Challenge	Possible strategy
The receiver may get re-triggered when hearing the third step (“understanding”), particularly if s/he experiences it as “justification.”	Return to empathy and mourning.
The “actor” may find it very challenging to open her or his heart, particularly if s/he is having self-judgments (or conversely if being fully at peace with her or his original action).	Prepare ahead of time with work on self-judgments; shift to empathy for that person (if “receiver” can do it, or seek empathy from another person); Explore possibility of having the person in pain express with full NVC consciousness/skill, reducing the need for the other person to stretch emotionally/spiritually to hear the pain.
The “receiver” may find it very challenging to feel “complete” with the expression.	Consider whether there are additional issues below the original pain and acknowledge them.
When the behavior is not easy or doable to change, the shift from conflict/separation to dilemma/connection/joint mourning may be very challenging at first.	Develop strategies for ongoing attention to this issue, so there is commitment to continuity and not “dropping” the issue; work with “Working with ‘No’” journal and needs journals.

## SELF-JUDGMENTS: MOURNING AND SELF-COMPASSION

---

1. Think of something you've done that you feel regret about. Write down what it is in observations (without judgments).
2. What are judgments you have of yourself in relation to what you've done? Write them down, as much as possible without editing.

### A. Mourning:

1. How do you feel in relation to what you did? Notice and note both emotions and physical sensations in your body.
2. Identify which needs of yours were not met in choosing this action:
  - a. Needs related to your own values
  - b. Needs related to the unhappy results even if your choice is aligned with your values (connect with the other person's unmet needs)
3. Take some time to fully connect with each of the needs you identified until you feel your heart open in full.
4. Take a moment to breathe and check in with yourself. Do you notice more judgments? If yes, write them down.
5. Again, identify feelings and needs behind these judgments. Pause each time you identify a feeling or a need to experience it as much as possible.

### B. Self-Compassion:

1. Now shift your attention to the needs you were trying to meet when you did the thing you've regretted. Write them down and give your attention to connecting with them. You may also recall feelings from that time.
2. How do you feel as you notice the needs you were trying to meet? Again, connect as much as you can with both emotions and physical sensations.
3. Take a moment to breathe and check in with yourself again. How are you feeling now? What needs are met or not met in this moment?
4. Do you have any requests of yourself at this moment that may support you in meeting your needs?
5. If you notice any self-judgments arise, connect once again with the feelings and needs behind them. Continue to shift back and forth between mourning and self-compassion until the mourning is free from self-judgments.

### **C. Self-Connection in the Moment:**

1. Read through all of the needs you have identified and connected with so far. Are there any needs of yours that are met by connecting with your needs right now? Is there any internal shift in your energy about the judgment? Any learning for you?
2. If the judgment still seems as alive to you, consider the following question: Which needs of yours are you trying to meet by holding on to the judgment you have of yourself? How do you feel when you connect with these needs?
3. Connect with your feelings and needs in this moment. Do you have any requests yourself in this moment? Any insights that you want to jot down to remember?



## REQUESTS IN NVC

---

In order to meet our needs, we make requests to assess how likely we are to get cooperation for particular strategies we have in mind for meeting our needs. Our aim is to identify and express a specific action that we believe will serve this purpose, and then check with others involved about their willingness to participate in meeting our needs in this way. In a given moment, it is our connection with another that determines the quality of their response to our request. Therefore often our requests in the moment are "connection requests," intended to foster connection and understanding and to determine whether we have sufficiently connected to move to a "solution request." An example of a connection request might be: "Would you tell me how you feel about this?" An example of a solution request might be "Would you be willing to take your shoes off when you come in the house?"

The spirit of requests relies on our willingness to hear a "no" and to continue to work with ourselves or others to find ways to meet everyone's needs. Whether we are making a request or a demand is often evident by our response when our request is denied. A denied demand will lead to punitive consequences; a denied request most often will lead to further dialogue. We recognize that "no" is an expression of some need that is preventing the other person from saying "yes". If we trust that through dialogue we can find strategies to meet both of our needs, "no" is simply information to alert us that saying "yes" to our request may be too costly in terms of the other person's needs. We can then continue to seek connection and understanding to allow additional strategies to arise that will work to meet more needs.

To increase the likelihood that our requests would be understood, we attempt to use language that is as concrete and doable as possible, and that is truly a request rather than a demand. For example, "I would like you to always come on time" is unlikely to be doable, while "Would you be willing to spend 15 minutes with me talking about what may help you arrive at 9 am to our meetings?" is concrete and doable. While a person may assent to the former expression ("Yes, I'll always come on time"), our deeper needs – for connection, confidence, trust, responsibility, respect, or others - are likely to remain unmet.

If someone agrees to our request out of fear, guilt, shame, obligation, or the desire for reward, this compromises the quality of connection and trust between us. When we are able to express a clear request, we raise the likelihood that the person listening to us will experience choice in their response. As a consequence, while we may not gain immediate assent to our wishes, we are more likely to get our needs met over time because we are building trust that everyone's needs matter. Within an atmosphere of such trust, goodwill increases, and with it a willingness to support each other in getting our needs met.

Learning to make clear requests and shifting our consciousness to making requests in place of demands are very challenging skills for most people. People often find the request part to be the hardest, because of what we call a "crisis of imagination": a difficulty in identifying a strategy that

could actually meet our needs without being at the expense of other needs. Even before considering the needs of others, the very act of coming up with what we call a positive, doable request is challenging. We are habituated to thinking in terms of what we want people to stop doing (“don’t yell at me”), and how we want them to be (“treat me with respect”) rather than what we want them to do (“Would you be willing to lower your voice or talk later?”). With time, and a deeper connection to our needs, our creativity expands to imagine and embrace more strategies.

This fourth step is critical to our ability to create the life we want. In particular, shifting from demands to requests entails a leap in focus and in faith: we shift from focusing on getting our needs met, to focusing on the quality of connection that will allow both of our needs to truly matter and ultimately also to be met.

As you read each scenario below, answer the following questions:

1. What are my needs in this situation?
2. What are the other person’s needs in this situation?
3. What are the needs for the relationship?
4. What request do I want to make to support connection?
5. What request do I want to make to support movement?

1. I just got home from a very hard day at work and I want a few minutes of quiet to clear my head, but when I walk in, my daughter has the music cranked up high while they wash dishes.
2. I want to go out for a walk at the ocean with my spouse who is often busy working on the weekends.
3. My support group meets on the one day of the week I always work out of town. I would like to participate in the meetings occasionally.
4. My neighbor leaves an angry phone message telling me not to let my son park in front of his house. The next time I see my neighbor I speak with him about it.
5. I return an item to the store where I bought the item last night; the clerk says without much interest, "We don't give refunds without the receipt."

## Practices for Requesting

---

1. Consider something you would like in your life right now. Consider a request you could make of yourself or another. Refine this to a next step which is:
  - Stated in the positive, i.e. what you do want rather than just the absence of something.
  - Concrete and specific (Doable)
  - Something can be done right now (Present moment)
  - Flexible (Open to outcome)

Write your request here: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Write another request here. Having more than one request often reduces our sense of urgency or demand about a yes response.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Write another request here. Having more than one request often reduces our sense of urgency or demand about a yes response.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Requesting becomes easier as one refines the intention to connect. We naturally reach out in connection with two requests:

- a. **Reflection:** What I've said is authentic and important to me. I long to have a mutual understanding with you...

*"Would you be willing to tell me what you heard is important to me?"*

- b. **Feedback:** What you feel and think is important to me. I long to have a mutual understanding with you...

*"Would you be willing to tell me how you feel about what I've said?"*

Write each of these requests in your own words for your situation.

Reflection Request: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Connection Request: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## MAKING REQUESTS

---

### **Purpose:**

To understand the variety of layers of awareness and skill involved with making requests. Pick a situation in which someone is doing something that is not in harmony with your own needs.

1. Write down your observations, feelings, and needs with regard to this situation.
2. What would you like this person to do (solution request)?
3. Is your request specific? If not, revise it.
4. Is your request in the present (are you asking for a reply NOW)? If not, revise it.
5. Is your request in positive action language (what you DO want)? If not, revise it.
6. Do you predict your needs will be met if this action is taken? (Reconnect with clear purpose about this strategy)
7. Can you imagine other strategies for meeting your needs other than agreement to your request? (If you cannot, you may have a hard time holding your request as a request and not a demand. In this case, you may want to enter into a deeper connection with your needs to help you open to more strategies. See separate journals on this topic.)
8. How do you feel and what needs come to life for you when you imagine that the person would say no and not shift, or that your need may not be met in this situation? (This question begins an exploration of the shift from having to meet our needs to being present with our needs. See Needs: Facets of Self-Connection, a separate journal, for deeper engagement with this process.)
9. If you shift from trying to find a solution to the situation, to trying to connect, what might you request from this person (connection request)?
10. What need of yours would be met by this request? What feelings arise?
11. Having explored these various layers of making requests, do any insights or reflections arise for you? Feelings and needs? Take a few moments to connect with yourself.

## CONNECTION REQUESTS: MOTIVATIONS AND EXAMPLES

---

Connection requests focus on the quality of connection between people instead of on any particular strategy or solution. While the core motivation for a connection request may be connection with the other person, varied internal states and needs may help guide us toward different types of connection requests.

Self-connection and understanding of our motivation in making a connection request can therefore greatly support our capacity for discovering and articulating what specifically we want from the other person that we believe may contribute to moving our dialogue forward toward an outcome that attends to both of our needs.

Simply put, connection requests emerge from whatever thoughts we have about what we want to know in order to navigate this conversation. When coming from an experience of 100% responsibility, the goal of the requests would be to attend to:

1. the other person understanding us;
2. us understanding the other person;
3. the other person trusting that we understand and care about them;
4. us trusting that they understand and care about us;
5. getting us to a place of having a mutual commitment to a solution that works for both of us.

We are the ones navigating all of this, especially if the other person doesn't have the skill or intention to participate in that kind of dialogue, in support of getting what we want, which, in the NVC frame, means not at cost to the other person.

When your focus is on the quality of connection, after you express feelings and needs, pause to consider the needs that arise within you in the moment. As much as you are able, focus on the needs in relation to the moment of this interaction rather than the content of what you expressed to the person. We call this a shift from *content* to *quality of connection*. Use the options below to check what is true for you, and share your authenticity as vulnerably as you are open to. If what you share is indeed different from the original content, reveal the needs behind the request you make.

In a certain sense, if your motivation truly is to further the dialogue and you are not attached to outcome in any way, you can ask just about anything in the world that invites the other person to look inside themselves and respond. In most cases, it is easiest for them if you provide a yes/no question rather than an open-ended one: "Is there any part of you that hears what I just said as criticism?" ... "Is there any part of you that now has a bit more compassion for me given what I said?" ... "Did I go on longer than you would want to hear?" ... "Is there something you would like to repeat or elaborate?"

Accordingly, the five specific types of connection requests presented below are not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to offer a range of possibilities among which you may find your own truth.

1. **Asking for reflection of what we said** – for confidence that we were understood for our intentions

Asking for reflection is often challenging for us and for the other person, principally when people interpret such requests to mean that we think they don't understand us. This can trigger self-judgments or judgments of us ("You think I'm stupid?!").

As always when making a request, revealing the need behind the request can nurture connection and clarity. In this case this would mean prefacing the request for reflection by sharing what leads us to ask for reflection. For example, after expressing what you want to be heard about, and before making the request, you might say:

- Sometimes I'm not as clear as I want to be...
- I'm worried I'm not making sense...
- I talked more than I intended, and I want to make sure the essence of what I was saying was clear...
- I'm a little anxious about what I said, and it would help me to hear...

The request itself can take any number of forms, such as:

- i. Would you tell me what you just heard me say?
- ii. Would you tell me what you hear is important to me (or what is the essence of what I shared)?

2. **Asking for empathic connection with us** – for empathic support, care, mattering, revealing our humanity

We may feel vulnerable to ask for empathic connection with us in the midst of a dialogue, and if so, consider sharing that vulnerability first (see above for examples of a similar focus on sharing the vulnerability about asking before making the request). It may also be challenging for the other person when they don't know what exactly we want from them. If you are asking a person with NVC experience for empathic connection, you can simply name a request for empathy. But if the person does not have experience, consider what would give you a sense that the person is empathically present with you, and whether this is even doable for that person. For example:

- i. I'd love to know whether you get the feelings and needs I'm trying to express. Would you tell me what you're getting?
- ii. I'm wondering whether you have a sense of what's in my heart? [If yes...] It's helpful to me to hear how others sense my heart – can you tell me what you sense?
- iii. Do you have a sense of your heart being open to me and present with me?

3. **Asking to hear about the impact of our words** – out of care and/or for clarity on how to proceed

Two primary motivations can lead us to want to hear about the impact of our words:

a. We want to *shift focus* and connect with the other person

In this case, our connection requests are straightforward, though it's still helpful to reveal what leads us to ask the question. For example:

- I'd love a sense of how you feel about what I'm saying.
- It matters to me to connect with what's up for you.

Followed by a request, such as:

- i. Would you tell me how you're feeling about what I just said?
- ii. What's this bringing up in you?
- iii. How is it for you to hear this?
- iv. How are you doing right now?
- v. I just noticed [your breathing]. Can you tell me what's going on in you?
- vi. I'm really curious to know what's happening in you. Are you willing to share that?

b. We want to know how we are received, but our focus is still on *ourselves*. We may feel vulnerable, nervous, etc., and hearing from the other person can help us get clarity and choose how to continue the conversation.

If this is the case, instead of just asking about what's going on in the other person, we could, again, reveal the feelings and needs behind our request. Unacknowledged fear may easily be interpreted as aggression or disconnection by the other person, so by revealing our own vulnerability we make it more likely that we will be accurately understood. Additionally, when we ask the other person about what is going on for them, we invite *them* to vulnerability. By sharing our own vulnerability first we increase the likelihood that the other person will experience willingness to share their vulnerability.

For example, we might say one of the following:

- I feel pretty vulnerable about what I shared and want to have a sense of how I'm heard. Would you tell me...
- I am a little nervous about what I just shared, and I want to have clarity and honesty between us. Would you tell me...
- I want to make sure that hearing me is not at cost to you. Would you tell me...
- I'm worried I've been talking longer than you enjoy listening. Would you tell me...

Then follow with one of the requests listed above.



Sometimes, instead of using open-ended questions like the ones above, we may be hoping for or concerned about a particular effect of our expression. In those cases, it may be helpful to make this hope or concern explicit. For example:

- i. I want to check whether you are hearing any blame or judgment because it's not my intention. Would you tell me whether that's coming up for you?
- ii. I am feeling quite vulnerable, and hoping that my expression is supporting a sense of connection between us. Would you tell me if you are feeling any closer to me hearing what I shared?

#### 4. **Supporting connection towards solution** – to establish partnership in moving to strategies for solution

Sometimes, when we have some confidence in the quality of connection and we want to try to move towards a solution, we may want to begin the shift toward solutions by establishing an intention of caring for both people's needs together. For example:

- i. I want this to work for both of us. Would you tell me what are your concerns about the strategy I am proposing?
- ii. Would you tell me what might not work for you about what I am requesting?
- iii. Would you brainstorm together to come up with solutions that would work for both of us?
- iv. Would you tell me if you are open to exploring other options to work this out?
- v. Would you tell me if you imagine any other strategies that would meet both of our needs?

#### 5. **Checking about openness to dialogue or to listening**

At times, we are not even confident that the other person is ready to hear us or to have a conversation. Instead of starting directly with the content we want to bring up, we can begin with expression about our desire for dialogue and inquire about the person's availability for that. For example:

- i. Would you be willing to listen to me talk about my experience?
- ii. Are you open to having this conversation now?

As with other elements of NVC, making connection requests invites us to offer our presence, authenticity, and compassion to others. Our own honesty, vulnerability, and self-understanding will more likely contribute to the quality of connection we want than any particular form or wording. Yet by recognizing the variety of needs that lead us to want to connect, and the variety of requests we may make to support those needs, we can more easily attend to our own and to others' needs for clarity, trust, and connection.

## GOALS OF CONNECTION REQUESTS

---

### Exercise 1:

Think of a request you're making of someone, maybe one that has you feeling frustrated, one you've been stuck on.

- a. Share the issue in your small group, get two or three lines of empathy.
- b. What kind of request was it?
  - i. Solution request – focused on the content of the issue and finding a solution?
  - ii. Connection request – focused on the quality of the connection between you and the other person?

### Goals

1. Getting us to a place of having a mutual commitment to a solution that works for both of us.
  - a. Are you open to connecting about this right now?
  - b. Are you willing to hear what's been up for me?
2. The other person understanding us
  - a. Ask for a reflection of what we said
3. Us understanding the other person
  - a. Can I tell you what I'm understanding?  
(sometimes mirroring is important)
4. The other person trusting that we understand and care about them
  - a. Ask to hear the impact of our words on the other person
5. Us trusting that the other person understands and cares about us;
  - a. Ask for empathic connection with us
    - i. Can you tell me what you understand is most important to me right now / what's in my heart?
6. Getting us to a mutual commitment to a solution that works for both of us.
  - a. What might not work about the plan we came up with?
  - b. Can we brainstorm ideas that would work for both of us?

### Exercise 2:

Return to your small group. If you moved from finding a solution to connecting, what would you ask for? Which goal would you be trying to meet?

Roleplay a few lines and notice what comes up

## REQUESTS: EXAMPLES

---

### Requests for Dialogue

- Would you be willing to listen to me talk about my experience?
- Are you open to having this conversation now?
- Would you be willing to take some time to talk with me about... [topic]?"
- Could we sit down together and look at what we both need to see if we can find a way to work this out?

### Yes / No Requests:

- Is there any part of you that hears what I just said as criticism or blame?
- Is there anything in what I said that you see differently?
- Do you feel a little bit more compassion or openness given what I just said?
- Are you feeling any more open to my request after hearing that?
- Did I go on longer than you wanted to hear?
- Is there something you'd like to say more about or elaborate on?
- Is there anything getting in the way of listening to me with an open mind?

### Requests for a Reflection:

*You might begin by naming the need or context:*

- Sometimes I'm not as clear as I want to be...
- I'm worried I'm not making sense...
- I talked more than I'd intended, and want to make sure my main concerns/point came across...
- I'm a little anxious about what I said, and it would help me to hear...

*Then make a request:*

- ...Can you tell me what you're getting (from what I said)?
- ... What are you understanding?
- ... Would you tell me what you heard?
- ...Would you tell me what the key points are you heard?
- ...What are you hearing matters to me (about all of this)?

### Requests for Empathy:

- I'd love to know whether you get how I'm feeling and why. Would you tell me what you're getting?
- I'm wondering whether you have a sense of what's in my heart? [If yes..] It'd be meaningful for me to hear more. What are sensing?
- Do you have a sense of your heart being open to me and present with me?
- What I just said is really important to me. Would you be willing to tell me what you're getting?

### **Requests for Information:**

*To shift focus to the other person or ask for a response:*

- How is it for you to hear this? [or] How are you doing right now?
- What comes up for you when you I share this?
- What do you think about that? How do you feel about that?
- How do you feel about what I just said?
- How this is for you matters to me. What's coming up for you now?
- I'm curious to know what's happening for you. Are you willing to share?
- Is there anything else you'd like me to understand about this?
- Could you tell me one or two things I might say or do right now that would help you to feel more understood / more heard?

*For information about how we're being received, but keep the focus on ourselves:*

- I feel pretty vulnerable about what I shared and want to have a sense of how you're hearing me. Would you tell me...
- I'm a little nervous about what I just shared. Would you tell me...
- I want to make sure that listening isn't at cost to you. Would you tell me...
- I'm worried I've been talking longer than you enjoy listening. Would you tell me...
- I want to check whether you're hearing any blame or judgment, because that's not my intention. Would you tell me what's coming up for you?
- I'm hoping that all of this might bring us closer together. Would you tell me if you're feeling any closer to me after hearing what I just shared?

*Requests to get information about collaborating:*

- Is there anything else you'd like me to understand about that?
- Do you have any ideas about what might work for both of us?
- Are there any concerns you have that you think would prevent this from working?

### **Requests to move towards a solution:**

- Could we brainstorm some solutions that would work for both of us?
- Are you open to exploring other options to work this out?
- Can you imagine any other strategies that would meet both of our needs?
- I want this to work for both of us. Would you tell me what are your concerns about the strategy I am proposing?
- Would you tell me what might not work for you about what I am requesting?

## ENRICHING LIFE WITH REQUESTS

---

### KEYS:

- a. We hold connecting as a priority and a means to collaboration, so we may want to begin with connection requests to be sure we have a connection before making action (solution) requests. We want to cultivate an atmosphere that supports joyful giving in both parties and where both people's needs are included.
- b. In making requests, remember that we can't do "don't." Have different ideas in mind for what action(s) we actually would like the other person to take.
- c. When making requests, keep them present, positive, clear and do-able.

In each situation below, identify your needs. Then write an OFNR statement to ask for what you would like to see happen. Consider making a connection request first.

1. You are a volunteer board member who is very angry and upset. A staff member did not send a report on time, and it looks like the organization is going to lose one of their biggest donors.
2. You are dismayed when your spouse says your 5-year old can watch TV after you told the child he has to do his homework before watching TV.
3. You are the customer service representative speaking with a customer who is angry about your tone of voice.
4. You are a school principal talking to a teacher who wants another teacher to be fired for negligence.
5. You are a supervisor speaking to employee about unsatisfactory work habits during the employee's performance review.

6. Your 6 year old child says, "I don't want to go to school! I hate school!"
  
7. You are a committee chairperson speaking to a committee member who did not bring in his work when he said he would.
  
8. You are a waitress speaking to the cook who has put out the wrong order for the third time in a row.
  
9. You are a summer camp counselor complaining about a disruptive camper to the Camp Director.
  
10. You are a tourist yelling at the desk clerk in a hotel where the reservation has been lost.
  
11. You are a customer who is not happy with the sound of your engine after a scheduled tune-up, speaking to the mechanic.
  
12. You are calling your romantic partner and saying you are lonely and want to see the other person tonight.

## **LINKING CONNECTION REQUESTS TO NEEDS**

---

In this activity we will try to connect “connection requests” directly to the needs that we are hoping to meet by making those requests.

1. Think of a situation in which you are having trouble getting the understanding you want about your needs. Write down the situation or share it with another person.
2. Write or say to another person your observations, feelings and needs in relation to the situation.
3. What may be a connection request you would want to make?
4. What need do you predict this request would meet?
5. If the need in relation to the situation and the need in relation to the request are not the same, consider again how you might express your needs and requests.

## REQUESTS INCLUDING BOTH PEOPLE'S NEEDS

---

### KEYS:

- a. A core intention in NVC is “caring equally for everyone’s needs.” We can practice this by developing requests (strategies) which attend both to my needs and to the other person’s needs.
- b. Situations which call us to practice this intention include:
  - i. inner conflict – between two sides in myself
  - ii. outer conflict between others
    - o informal -- spontaneous, unrequested
    - o formal – mediation
  - iii. when I am one of the people in a conflict
  - iv. when I say “NO”
  - v. when I hear a half-hearted “YES”
  - vi. in groups (best to work with representatives who will bring all the needs to the table and can also assess which needs are most pertinent to the discussion.)

1. Choose one of the situations when we want to include everyone’s needs from the list in b (above). Think of an example and write a short sentence about the situation.
2. What are your feelings and needs in the situation? (self empathy)  
[If inner conflict: What needs are your actions trying to meet?]
3. What are the other person’s feelings and needs? (empathy)  
[If inner conflict: What needs are the “inner educator” trying to meet?]
4. What request can you make that will include both your needs and the other person’s needs?  
[If inner conflict: What request can you make that will include both sets of needs inside you?]
5. If you are working in a group, read your responses to questions 1-4, and open the floor to hear other requests which might meet both people’s needs. (If you like any of the suggested requests, you may want to write them down here.)



## REQUESTS: CONNECTING REQUESTS TO NEEDS

---

**Purpose:** Becoming aware of the variety of feelings connected to needs of ours that are met or unmet in response to a situation, discerning which need to address, and which request is more or less likely to get our needs met.

**Examples:** Review the examples below (which are in “classical” NVC) before the practice.

1. When you say you’re going to wash the dishes by 9pm and then you don’t, I feel frustrated because I need understanding for my needs. Would you be willing to tell me what you understand are my needs in relation to the dish washing?
2. When you say you’re going to wash the dishes by 9pm and then you don’t, I feel concerned because I need trust in our understanding of each other. Would you be willing to tell me what you just heard me say?
3. When you say you’re going to wash the dishes by 9pm and then you don’t, I feel annoyed because I need support. I’m wondering whether you’d be willing to wash the dishes now?
4. When you say you’re going to wash the dishes by 9pm and then you don’t, I feel confused and uncomfortable because I need trust that people will follow up on their commitments. Would you be willing to tell me what went on for you that led to your not washing the dishes?
5. When you say you’re going to wash the dishes by 9pm and then you don’t, I feel angry because I’m telling myself that you don’t care about my needs, and sad because I want my needs to matter to others. Would you tell me how you feel about my needs around washing dishes? [OR: how you feel in relation to what I’m saying?]
6. When you say you’re going to wash the dishes by 9pm and then you don’t, I feel overwhelmed because I need support and also ease in managing daily life. Would you be willing to tell me any ideas you have that may make it more likely that my needs might get met?
7. When you say you’re going to wash the dishes by 9pm and then you don’t, I feel concerned because I want confidence that people make choices to do things based on wanting to meet everyone’s needs. Would you be willing to tell me what need of yours you were hoping to meet by agreeing to wash the dishes? [AND/OR: what needs you were meeting by not doing it? AND/OR: whether you considered both our needs in making the choices you’ve made?]

**Practice 1:** Review the examples above. After reading them, for one or more, write down how you might express the same message in a more colloquial, authentic way.

**Practice 2:** Review the examples above. After reading them, write down an observation of something someone else is doing or saying that is challenging for you, then write down at least three different continuations of the sentence with different feelings and/or needs leading to different requests. Choose a situation that is sufficiently charged that you are likely to have multiple feelings and needs in response to it.

1.

2.

3.

4.



6. What needs of mine might be met if I shift and completely let go of my request? (This is not a recommendation of what you might want to do, but rather only a suggestion for reflection that might increase self-understanding.)
  
7. If I imagine that the person would not shift, how do I feel and what needs of mine come to life?
  
8. If I imagine not getting my original needs met in this situation, how do I feel and what are my needs?
  
9. What is alive in me right now (my feelings and needs)? Have I gained any insights from reflecting on these questions?

## HEARING "NO" IN NVC

---

### KEYS:

- a. "NO" can be an opening to further dialogue.
- b. We can continue to dialogue by connecting with what needs are being met by saying "NO." Another way to think about this: What needs is this person saying "YES" to when they say "NO" to my request? This is the key to my capacity to stay in dialogue. Example: If someone says "no" to my request to talk about something, they might be saying "yes" to meeting their need for autonomy, space, respect, play, etc. Connecting with these needs and empathizing with them can open the door to further dialogue.

1. Think of someone whose "NO" you are having a hard time hearing. Who is this person? Write down the situation.
2. What are your feelings and needs when you hear or think about the "NO?" (self-empathy)
3. Think of the person who is saying the "NO." What may be their feelings and needs? Or, what are they saying "YES" to? What needs are they trying to meet? (empathy)

In writing or in dyads, use NVC in the following dialogue format, beginning with an empathy guess about the person's "NO":

You: Are you feeling \_\_\_\_\_ because you need \_\_\_\_\_?

Other person: \_\_\_\_\_.

You (empathy): Are you feeling \_\_\_\_\_ because you need \_\_\_\_\_?

Other person: \_\_\_\_\_.

You (expression): I feel \_\_\_\_\_ because I need \_\_\_\_\_.

Would you be willing to \_\_\_\_\_?

Other person: \_\_\_\_\_.

You (choose expression or empathy): \_\_\_\_\_

---

Continue for 2-3 more rounds in the same manner.

## SAYING "NO" IN NVC

---

### KEYS:

- a. "NO" can be expressed in NVC in three steps: 1) Connect with the need of the other person that is expressed in their request; 2) Connect with your need that is preventing you from saying "YES" to the request; 3) Come up with a request that's designed to help meet both your needs and the needs of the other person.
- b. We can reach a mutual "YES" through a commitment to meeting everyone's needs: not just ours, not just others'. When others in our life trust this commitment, they will be more open to considering our needs.

1. Think of someone to whom you have a hard time saying "NO." It can be a friend, your child, boss, or anyone else. Who is this person, and what are they requesting of you?
2. What needs of theirs are being expressed in the request? (Empathy)
3. What are you saying "yes" to by saying "no" in this situation? (Self-empathy: What needs are you trying to meet? What prevents you from saying "yes" to their request?)
4. What would you like to request at this point that might contribute to both people's needs being met?
5. What might you like to tell this person using NVC? Consider your observations, feelings, needs and requests and use the following format for the dialogue.

You (expression): I feel \_\_\_\_\_ because I need \_\_\_\_\_.

Would you be willing to \_\_\_\_\_ ?

Other person: \_\_\_\_\_.

You (empathy): Are you feeling \_\_\_\_\_ because you need \_\_\_\_\_ ?

Other person: \_\_\_\_\_.

You (empathy): Are you feeling \_\_\_\_\_ because you need \_\_\_\_\_ ?

Other person: \_\_\_\_\_.

You (choose expression or empathy): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

Continue for 2-3 more rounds in the same manner.

## **WORKING WITH OTHERS' MIXED "YES"**

---

Think of a situation in which you got a "yes" to your request but you are not confident that it was agreed to freely or joyfully. Write down the situation and request, then explore your response to the "yes" by responding to the following questions.

1. The situation:
2. My feelings, needs and request:
3. How am I feeling about hearing "yes" and what is my need?
4. Is there anything concrete that is leading me to consider that their "yes" may not be given joyfully?
5. What is my understanding of the other person's feelings and needs?
6. What needs might they be saying "no" to by saying "yes" to my request?
7. What needs might they be saying "yes" to that are leading them to say "yes" to my request?
8. When I imagine that the other person's needs would not be met, how do I feel and what are my needs?
9. How am I feeling and what is my need in relation to my original request?
10. Can I imagine other strategies for meeting my needs other than this person agreeing to my request?
11. How do I feel and what needs come to life for me when I imagine that the person would say "no"?
12. How do I feel and what are my needs when I imagine not getting my original needs met in this situation?
13. What is alive in me right now (my feelings and needs)?

## **WORKING WITH OUR OWN MIXED “YES”**

---

Think of a situation in which you have said a “yes” to someone’s request but you did not experience your “yes” as given freely or joyfully. Write down the situation and request, then explore your responses to the following questions).

1. The situation and the request that was made of me:
2. What feelings and needs am I noticing in relation to the request?
3. What am I telling myself (what am I thinking, or what are judgments I’m having) about the request and/or about myself or the other person that is leading me to say “yes”?
4. What needs am I hoping to meet by saying “yes”? What feelings am I noticing coming up in relation to each of these needs?
5. What needs am I noticing are not met by saying “yes”? What feelings am I noticing coming up in relation to each of these needs?
6. What is my understanding of the other person’s feelings and needs that led to their request?
7. When I consider saying “no” to the request, what feelings and needs come up?
8. Can I imagine other strategies that would meet their needs other than my saying “yes”?
9. When I imagine that the other person’s needs would not be met, what are my feelings and needs?
10. When I consider again the original request, how do I feel and what needs do I notice?
11. How do I imagine I would respond to the request now, and what feelings and needs come up in relation to this response?
12. What is alive in me right now (my feelings and needs)?



## FACING “DEMANDS”

---

**Purpose:** To increase our ability to access a true sense of choice beyond submission / rebellion, and respond authentically to another’s request even when we hear a demand.

### KEYS:

- a. Our need for autonomy is met through an internal process of conscious choice; it is not something others can meet for us. Others can contribute by meeting our need for respect for our autonomy.
- b. When we hear a demand, we may interpret it as lack of respect for our autonomy and we may react to this interpretation.
- c. When we react to a perceived demand by either saying “yes” out of fear or by saying “no” to protect our sense of autonomy, we are constraining the range of choices available to us. We may be operating within the “submission/rebellion” paradigm instead of living from our authentic autonomy and being grounded in interdependence.
- d. No matter how the other person expresses their request, ultimately the choice to hear it as a demand or as a request resides within us.

1. Think of a situation in which you perceive someone as making a demand of you. Write down what the person says, and what you are hearing (said or unsaid, imagined or real).
2. What are your feelings and needs in the moment of hearing this? If the need that arises is autonomy, what other needs are alive in you? (e.g. acceptance, full internal choice, self-connection)
3. What is your best guess as to the feelings and needs of the other person? Take a moment to connect with those needs.
4. What feelings and needs become alive in you as you stretch to open your heart to this person?

# REQUESTS IN A GROUP

---

## *Preparation Sheet*

### Part 1: Clarity on Needs

1. What's the strategy (request) that you would like to bring to the group's attention?
2. Is this strategy a response to something happening right now that you are not satisfied with? (If not, skip questions 3 & 4)
3. Write down any judgments you have about what is happening.
4. What are the feelings you have about what is happening?
5. What needs are alive in you in this moment? For each need you identify, take a moment to connect with the need before proceeding to another one.
6. Pick one of the above needs that you would like to work towards meeting right now. Check to see if the need is related to the original request. If not, and that request is still alive for you, consider which need that request is most connected to and work with that need.

### Part 2: Stretching Beyond Attachment to Outcome

1. Write down a strategy that could meet this need aside from the original request you made. This could be a request of yourself or others, something that could happen now or later, etc.
2. Write down another strategy that could also meet this need, same as in question 1.
3. Write down yet another strategy that could also meet this need, same as in question 1.
4. How do you feel and what needs are alive in this moment as you consider the above strategies?

5. Do you now want to bring any of these strategies to the attention of the group (the original or any of the three additional ones you just identified)? What needs do you imagine would be met by bringing a request to the attention of the group at this point? What needs would not be met? Take a moment to connect with the needs before proceeding.
  
6. Imagine you are bringing this strategy to the consideration of the group, and that through a group process the decision is made not to proceed with your strategy. Connect with your feelings and needs in this moment. You may want to use the “Working with No” journal to explore your feelings and needs more fully before proceeding.

### **Part 3: Formulating the Request**

1. Write down the strategy you now want the group to consider.
  
2. What information would you like to get from the group to know if you would be comfortable proceeding with your strategy? Consider the threshold of partnership that you want to achieve: Do you want to proceed only if everyone actively wants to, or are you comfortable with at least some people being willing even though they don't actively want to? How much stretching are you comfortable to invite others to make to support your needs getting met?
  
3. Write down the request you would like to make now.
  
4. Assess the do-ability of your request: How will you know people's answers? (Show of hands? A different way?) Is there a clear 'yes' or 'no' to your question? Is your threshold clear so people can assess how to respond? If not, revise your request here.

Take a moment to connect with yourself again before proceeding. How are you feeling and what needs are alive in this moment?

## UNIQUE FEATURES OF NVC AS A FEEDBACK-GIVING TOOL

Evaluation-Based Feedback	NVC-Based Feedback
<b>Purpose:</b> creating change in behavior	<b>Purpose:</b> Connection; understanding and trust as the basis of deciding whether and which change will take place
<b>Source of Authority:</b> Facilitator	<b>Source of Authority:</b> Shared between facilitator and receiver
<b>Outcome:</b> Pre-determined	<b>Outcome:</b> Emerges from dialogue; mutual understanding of the issues
<b>Mode:</b> Fact setting without necessarily consulting the receiver and considering their situation	<b>Mode:</b> Dialogue and inquiry about the receiver's feelings, needs, values, and conditions
<b>Form:</b> Evaluation and generalization, including about personality	<b>Form:</b> Description of the moment; specific observations of behavior
<b>Response to Reaction:</b> Debate, argument, criticism; assumption of knowledge on the part of facilitator and "resistance" on the part of the receiver	<b>Response to Reaction:</b> Empathy; attempt to understand and give voice (through questions) to the feelings and needs of the receiver, acknowledging his/her difficulties
<b>Level of Engagement:</b> Assumption of neutrality; inner experience not considered relevant	<b>Level of Engagement:</b> Transparency; willingness to share inner experience in the service of connection
<b>Stance:</b> Commitment to "What's right;" reluctance to incorporate new input	<b>Stance:</b> Flexibility; openness to shift position on the basis of potentially unexpected responses or information
<b>Closure:</b> Vague conclusions; lack of clarity about what's wanted from receiver in the moment or in future interactions	<b>Closure:</b> Clear requests at end, both in the moment and for future interactions
<b>Consequences:</b> Positive for implementing feedback, negative for not acting on feedback	<b>Consequences:</b> Needs met or needs unmet; intention to continue dialogue to increase chances of need-meeting

# FEEDBACK GIVING

---

## I. Purpose of Providing Feedback

The primary intention of providing feedback is to contribute to another person’s capacity to support a shared purpose. Within an organizational context, this intention is usually clear to the person receiving the feedback as well as the person giving it.

The more we are able to remain within this intention, the easier it would be for the person receiving the feedback to make use of what we offer. If we are angry, upset, disappointed, or full of criticism, we are likely to express ourselves in ways that will implicitly require a lot of listening capacity on the part of the other person. This is because in those states we are unable to focus clearly on the intention to contribute to the shared purpose, and instead unwittingly create an expectation that the person receiving the “feedback” will provide the relief that comes from being heard.

### A. Distinguishing Feedback from Personal Trigger

	Feedback	Personal trigger
Key needs behind expression	Contribution	Honesty, integrity, connection, hope for relationship, healing, etc.
Outcome	Learning for other person (and possibly for me)	Learning for me (and possibly other person)

When the person giving feedback is aligned with the intention of providing feedback rather than personal trigger it makes it easier for the other person to receive the feedback. Put differently, sharing a personal trigger implicitly requires a much higher skill level and willingness level from the other person.

### B. Aligning with the Intention to Provide Feedback

The first step to create this alignment is to identify and transform any personal trigger that may interfere with the intention to contribute. Here are some questions that can be useful in finding this clarity:

1. Am I holding right/wrong?
2. Am I buying into the “truth” of my assessment?
3. Am I seeking to create healing or reconciliation? Am I wishing to be seen?

4. If the answer to any of the above is “yes” there is probably some inner work necessary before any feedback would be useful to the other person. .

The second step is to seek support in the form of empathy from a colleague, journaling, meditation, or any other process that supports an inner shift. The outcome of such work is one of three:

1. The intensity drains completely, and there is ease in finding the intention to contribute
2. The intensity shifts, and the feelings that were present can now be included in the feedback as information for the other person
3. The intensity remains, and a different process than feedback is initiated with the other person.

## **II. Steps of Feedback Giving**

The steps below are schematic and designed to maximize the possibility of the feedback being useful to the person receiving it. Actual conversations are likely to flow back and forth between different steps.

### **A. Engaging Willingness to Receive Feedback**

Even though some relationships have an implicit agreement that feedback giving is part of the relationship (e.g. employer and employee; teacher and student), that doesn't mean that the person is equally ready and willing to receive feedback every time the person giving feedback wants to offer it. Checking to see if the willingness is there, and especially being willing to postpone the offering until a time when the willingness is there, is likely to contribute to more openness because the person receiving the feedback gets confirmation that their needs and timing matter, too.

Note: this step is particularly important when you want to offer feedback outside the context of a relationship that tends to include feedback.

### **B. Inviting the Person to Provide Feedback to Self**

This practice has several benefits:

1. It establishes a collaborative relationship which creates more openness.
2. It enhances a sense of responsibility and empowerment, especially if the self-feedback includes concrete steps for moving forward (see below).
3. It provides an opportunity to experience the level of awareness and frame the feedback accordingly.

4. Note: this step would rarely make sense outside the context of a formal feedback giving session.

### C. Offering Feedback

The notes below provide guidelines for how to make the feedback giving most likely to be useful to the other person once the willingness and openness have been established.

1. **Specific and Concrete Observations:** Use of vague generalizations tends to diminish the amount of learning. Connecting feedback to tangible moments plays a key role in helping the person receiving the feedback understand the feedback and connect with it. This level of specificity is equally important for both expressions of satisfaction as well as expressions of dissatisfaction.

Example: Instead of saying “You are not a team member,” a concrete statement can be “For the last three weeks in a row I don’t remember you once saying ‘yes’ to a request to stay overtime and support your co-workers when we had a crunch in delivering our product.”

2. **Why This Matters:** Letting the person receiving feedback know the significance of the actions provides the motivation for creating change. Rather than expressing this in terms of what “should” happen, this means linking the feedback to what the person giving feedback wants to create, either personally or for the team or organization.

Example: In the above example this could be conveyed in a variety of ways, such as: “I want everyone on the team to have trust that we work together,” or “It’s important to me that we create a sense of community in times of stress,” or “The team’s sense of collaboration is essential for everything we do here.”

3. **Emotional Effect of the Actions:** Sometimes letting the person receiving the feedback know the emotional effect of their actions can help the connection with the person giving feedback. However, in many cultural contexts expressions of emotion are not commonly accepted, and thus this step is often omitted from feedback meetings, especially in organizational settings.

Example: In the above example the emotional effect would likely be omitted, or could be expressed if the person giving the feedback wants to emphasize the significance. One way of expressing it could be “I’m really concerned about how this will affect our team.”

4. **Suggestions:** Another important element for feedback is concrete and doable suggestions (if we have any) for what to do about the specific observation. The more concrete, the more helpful to someone who wants to learn. Suggestions work best when offered as the beginning of a search for solutions rather than as commands. Suggestions

can also be offered when the feedback expresses satisfaction as a way to enhance what is already working.

Example: In the above example, several suggestions arise: “I’d like you to talk with others in the team and work this out with them,” or “What might support the team is if you find at least one day a week that you have enough flexibility to stay and help out as needed.”

5. **Understanding of Person Receiving Feedback:** There are a variety of challenges that arise for a person receiving feedback. One of the key elements that make for collaborative feedback is the openness to hear from the person receiving feedback. Empathy may be critical to be able to integrate it and make use of any suggestions. Some of the common challenges:

- a) Difficulty in taking in appreciations (only applicable to expressions of satisfaction)
- b) Difference in perception about what happened or what it means
- c) Factors not known to the person giving feedback can result in significant experience of not being understood
- d) Shame or self-judgment about the action taken
- e) Obstacles in being able to implement suggestion(s)

Each of the above can easily lead to reactions such as defensiveness, surface compliance that will not result in any change in action, discouragement, or resignation. Empathy would mean making room for the person receiving feedback to be understood in all the above ways. The person receiving feedback often wants to be seen for their intentions and efforts, and to experience care in the process. Empathy in those moments can shift the dynamic and make for fruitful dialogue designed to find solutions that work for everyone.

Example: In the above example, the person receiving feedback may say something like: “My wife has a chronic illness and I can’t stay after work ever.” The empathic response to that could be something like: “Is it that you want some understanding about how you wish you could support others in the team and that there are difficult circumstances in your life?” Or the person could say something like: “That’s not true; I always help out. I don’t know what you are talking about.” And the empathic response (which would precede any reference to timesheet) could be: “It sounds to me like you want to be trusted for your care and willingness to help. Is that right?”



#### D. Action Plan:

Once mutual understanding is complete, the two parties can work together to find ways of addressing what matters most in a way that works for everyone. The key in this step is for the person giving feedback to maintain a clear focus on what matters and the overall goal, while at the same time making sure that whatever plan is implemented has a real chance of working and is accepted with full willingness.

What follows applies only to situations in which the feedback expresses dissatisfaction.

1. If the person giving feedback believes that the situation is not remediable and the issues are significant enough to end the relationship, that decision can be made unilaterally, or the two parties can work together towards a collaborative process of bringing the relationship to an end.
2. If the person giving feedback is interested in continuing the relationship, then the point is to come up with steps to move towards greater satisfaction. Satisfaction is more likely to occur if both parties are included in the plan of action and are both clear that it's workable. Otherwise the action plan can be a recipe for further frustration or an unwitting step towards ending the relationship without making a clear decision that this is what's wanted.

Example: In the above example, the person may accept the suggestion as provided initially. Or, in the case of having difficult life circumstances, the team may come around to accepting the person's challenges and work without that person's support in time crunches. Or, in the case of having a difference in perception, the two people can work out a plan for documenting what happens so they can reach a shared understanding.

## GIVING FEEDBACK CHART

<p><b>1</b> Feedback or Trigger</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do you have judgment? e.g., “I’m right and you’re wrong!”</li> <li>▪ Do you unconditionally believe the truth of your assessment?</li> <li>▪ Do you want to be seen/acknowledged?</li> <li>▪ Do you want healing or reconciliation?</li> </ul> <p><b>If yes to any of the above, pause and get support.</b></p>
<p><b>2</b> Check Willingness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Is the timing good?</li> <li>▪ Is the person receptive to feedback?</li> <li>▪ Consider: workload, energy, physical needs other stressors</li> </ul>
<p><b>3</b> Ask for Self-feedback</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Establishes collaborative relationship</li> <li>▪ Assesses level of awareness in preparation for next step</li> <li>▪ Enhances self-responsibility and empowerment</li> </ul>
<p><b>4</b> Offer Your Feedback</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Specific and Concrete Observation</li> <li>▪ Why it Matters (Needs Met or Unmet)</li> <li>▪ The Emotional Impact of Their Actions</li> <li>▪ Doable, Concrete Suggestions</li> </ul>
<p><b>5</b> Check for Understanding</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Is the feedback received without deflection, defensiveness or minimization?</li> <li>▪ Is there shared perception about what happened?</li> <li>▪ Is there agreement about what it means?</li> <li>▪ Are there factors they know that are unknown to you?</li> <li>▪ Are they experiencing any shame or self-judgment?</li> </ul>
<p><b>6</b> Co-Create Action Plan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Does it address the needs identified in Step 4?</li> <li>▪ Are there barriers to successful implementation?</li> <li>▪ Do they have full willingness to implement it?</li> </ul>

## CORE PRINCIPLES FOR MEDIATING CONFLICT

---

Both as participant in the conflict or 3rd person mediator

1. **Avoid the ping-pong.** Listen slowly and deeply and reflect what you've heard. Most arguments or hard conversations go back and forth like a ping pong ball, with one person saying something and the other person disagreeing or defending. The goal in this conversation is for each person to experience having his or her point of view deeply understood. So -- slow down, listen, reflect what you're hearing, and see if you can understand the coherence and power of the other person's way of looking at it. When you think you've gotten it, reflect back, and check: "Did I get it?" If the answer is no, listen some more. Reflect again. Check in again. "Did I get it?" If the answer is yes, check in, "Is there more?" If yes, listen some more. What you hear after asking "is there more?" could be the most valuable thing you hear, because by this time the person may trust that you want to hear it all.
2. **As you're listening, try to stay curious and open to the other person's underlying needs or values.** Even when we disagree with what someone is saying or doing or wants to do (his/her plans or strategies), we can relate to and honor their underlying needs, if we realize what they are. In your reflections, you might say things like, "It sounds to me that what really matters to you is having a sense of movement — that we get something done. Is that right?"
3. **"No" to one thing is "yes" to another.** When a person says "no" to something, he or she is always implicitly saying "yes" to something else. To understand that person, it's crucial to understand what he or she is saying "yes" to. So don't be stymied by a no— get in there and guess what the person is affirming or saying "yes" to.
4. **Connection before solution.** When people feel trust and connection, and when their needs for being seen and heard are met, they are much more likely to be able to think creatively and flexibly about strategies. They might even shift in their own perception of what really matters to them in that moment. Be ready to recognize shifts in how you or the others see the situation -- after being heard, you and the other person may be less polarized, because the core of the disconnection was about lack of trust in the possibility of being seen, heard, and fully considered. Therefore, put off the temptation to solve; instead, seek connection and understanding first.
5. **Conflicts are around strategies, not needs.** Conflicts usually arise on the level of particular strategies or action-steps, not on the level of the deeper needs. Recognizing that there are many possible strategies to meet any need can loosen the grip of conflict.

6. **When it's time for you to talk, express your needs, not your judgments or particular strategies.** Work to express what you hope for in terms of your shared deepest values: "It sounds like we need a solution that would give people choice and also ensure that everyone gets what they need." "I hear your need for efficiency. I also want to make sure that everyone involved has a voice. Can we think of how to do both?" This kind of expression is very different from any version of "I want you to stop doing what you're doing" or "Can't you see that what you're doing is inappropriate/hurtful/short-sighted. . ." Or "We need to do it like this!"
7. **Move from conflict to dilemma.** After feeling more connected, a key goal in any conflict is to move from conflict to dilemma. It's not about who's going to win. It is: "We've got different needs on the table here; how can we try to meet them all?"

## 5- STEP MEDIATION MODEL (MM) AND 9 SKILLS

---

### Mediate Your Life

#### A. The 5-Step Mediation Model (MM) with 2 phases (connection and resolution)

1. Person A expresses to person B, and mediator empathizes with A.
2. Mediator asks B if they would tell A what they heard, including the needs. Mediator tracks if needs get reflected and reminds B if not.
3. Person B expresses to A, and mediator empathizes with B.
4. Mediator asks A if they would tell B what they heard, including the needs. Mediator tracks if needs get reflected and reminds A if not.
5. Mediator facilitates solution requests and agreements.

#### B. Nine Mediation Skills (NVC)

1. Empathy – presence, silent empathy, understanding, need language
2. Connection Requests
  - a. “Would you say what you heard?”
  - b. “How do you feel about what you heard?”
3. Pulling by the Ears – mediator re-requests disputant to say back what they heard when disputant self-expresses or says back other’s judgments but not understanding or needs
4. Emergency (1<sup>st</sup> Aid) Empathy – when a disputant has been asked to say back what they heard the other say and is too triggered to do it
5. Tracking – where mediation is in terms of the 5-step process
6. Interrupting – when disputant(s) are speaking in ways mediator assesses are detracting from the process
7. Self-Empathy – mediator gives empathy to self during mediation
8. Self-Expression – mediator expresses to contribute to the mediation
9. Solution Requests – specificity of action(s) linked to needs, request vs. demand, interdependence vs. dependence and independence

- a. Need Behind the No (NBN) process
  - i. Clarify request and needs of person A
  - ii. Empathize with needs behind person B's "no"
  - iii. Ask B for a new request that seeks to meet needs for both, or ask A
- b. Three Types of Agreements
  - i. Main – what you mutually agree to do between you
  - ii. Supporting – agreements of what to do to support main agreements
  - iii. Restoring – agreements of what to do if main agreements not kept

## PREPARING FOR DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

---

- 1) **Purpose:** In the situation you are working with write down your purpose and how you will know when the purpose has been accomplished.
  
- 2) **Surfacing judgments and thoughts:** In the same situation, write down your opinions about the other person and your interpretations of his or her behavior.
  
- 3) **Understanding yourself:** Write down what matters to you about this situation.
  - a) What's at stake for you?
  
  - b) What are your core values that this reaction gives voice to?
  
  - c) What are your human needs that are of the essence here?
  
- 4) **Understanding the other person:** Write down what you imagine may be going on for the other person that would lead to this behavior. Which needs and values might this person's behavior represent?
  
- 5) **Formulating a message you want to deliver:** Write down the message you want to deliver to the other person. Include a clear and specific observation of her/his behavior, the effect this behavior has on you, and some sense of your understanding of what is leading to her/his behavior. Then check in to see if he or she is willing to go forward with this conversation.

## KEY TIPS FOR DIALOGUES ACROSS DIFFERENCES

---

1. The first goal is CONNECTION.
  - a. What is most important is not preventing conflict or disconnection but to come back to connection.
2. Don't choose sides.
3. Be mindful of pacing – slow down.
  - a. Use your breath, the body, the pace of your speech to modulate and regulate your nervous system activation.
4. Succinctness. Remember: the more words you use, the less understanding you get.
5. Simplicity. Take things one step, one issue at a time.
6. Meet a volatile situation with an assertive, grounded presence.
7. Attend to all participants through eye contact and body language. Let them all know they are being held/seen, that they matter.
8. Be aware of your own power and privilege.
9. Frame as an opportunity for the dominant member to contribute by stretching.
10. Practice direct and indirect ally-ship. Attend to the member of the historically oppressed group first.
11. Create/Attend to safety for the person in the target group, and acceptance/safety for the person in the dominant group.
12. Know your intentions.
13. Know the purpose/intentions of the participants in the dialogue.
14. Use language that fits the group / context.
15. Use 'active' generous empathic listening for deeper understanding.
16. Distinguish between intention and impact. Explore the space between intention and impact and the learning thereof.
17. Pay attention to the steps related to naming observations and exploring the need for shared reality when relevant.



18. Ask questions that support connection.
  - a. Emphasize NEEDS, minimize 'story'.
  - b. Ask neutral questions.
19. Anchor the connection around shared needs.
20. Empathy before education; connection before correction.
21. Remember to make a request after an observation or expression. Be willing to ask for a reflection if you sense this would help build understanding or be supportive.
22. Observe the thresholds.
23. Acknowledge/appreciate every effort to stretch towards "we".
24. Pull the jackal by the ears. (When they hear blame, try again in giraffe).
25. Take the risk of being authentic and being present to repair work.

## DIFFICULT DIALOGUES

---

### Connecting In (Focus on yourself)

---

1. Starting Point – Clarify your Intention.

We often enter dialogs when we have charge about what's going on. If I am just reacting, I am not connected to my intent, and what comes out of my mouth will be trigger. To have a dialog I need to unpack my judgments that are getting in the way of me, seeing you. Part of this is being vulnerable and owning our judgments, acknowledging that we have them.

a. What would be my intention for having this, or going into this dialog?

i. ONE value I have that's causing me to speak (need).

ii. ONE thing I want back.

b. Am I in trigger? What's coming up for me if I am having a strong reaction?

i. What's that reaction connected to?

ii. What's the pain? The source?

iii. What needs / values is my trigger connected to?

c. Do I have judgments about the other person?

i. What are my judgments telling me?

2. I can be triggered and enter dialog. I just want to be clear about what's important to me - am I self-connected or not? Am I reacting or responding? I want to be intentional and aware of my needs.

### Connecting Out (Focus on our connection)

---

3. Am I asking you to hear me or asking for a true dialogue where we both hear each other?

a. Am I truly open to hearing what you have to say? Ask to be heard, not a dialogue, if you are not spacious.

4. Identify where you can be vulnerable? What feelings and needs can you share?

5. Identify what you want back in speaking.

a. Specify what you want back in any given moment. Otherwise the other person (and you) is left with, "What do I do with this?"

- i. Reflection: Was I heard in a way that I wanted to be heard?
- ii. Mirroring: Tell me exactly what you heard me say because I want to know.
- b. Know your ultimate goal in speaking.
  - i. I want for my reality to be known and acknowledged.
  - ii. I want a change of behavior. Action request.
  - iii. Being witnessed: I choose to speak so that other people see me and understand even if the person I am talking to does not.

<i>Intentions in entering dialogue</i>	<i>Possible Desired Outcomes from dialogue</i>
empathy	empathy can also be a strategy that leads to an outcome
to be understood	to be understood
	stopping something, changing a behavior
	reconnection (can influence my intention).
practice (for maintaining self-connection during difficult conversations)	clarity of self, or other's needs
self-connection	understanding
to be heard	to be heard
authenticity	authenticity
	to trust that my needs matter to myself or another
	education (ex: to bring awareness to systems)
	clarity about the relationship (if this is a connection or reconnection, do I want to maintain it? Start it?)
	solidarity (letting people know I got you, I see you.)
	to acknowledge multiple perspectives

## DAILY PRACTICE OPTIONS

---

Some of the options below are just internal, and others call for reflection. You can do this in writing to yourself, by sending an email to a buddy, recording to a tape, meditating, walking in nature and contemplating, or in any other way that suits your temperament.

All these suggestions are designed to support the deepening of your individual practice.

1. **Checking in:** set an alarm clock to go off every hour or so. Each time it goes off, stop whatever you are doing (we usually CAN, and that in itself is quite liberating), sit quietly with yourself for a moment, and connect with your feelings and needs which are alive in you in that very moment. Then make a choice about whether you want to continue doing what you were doing, or change course based on your self-connection.
2. **Gratitude:** at the end of the day or in the morning, whichever works better for you, write down (or in one of these other methods) a few things you are feeling gratitude for that have happened that day (or the day before if you do this in the morning). For each thing you write, translate fully into observations, feelings, and needs: what exactly happened? What is the specific feelings that arise in you about it? What needs are met? Spend a moment sinking into those needs and allowing the gratitude to nourish you. For some of these, you may also choose to share your gratitude with another person who may have been the one who did what you feel grateful about. Make sure to include at least one piece of gratitude to yourself for choices you made that are nourishing to you.
3. **Post-hearsal:** review the day, and see if there is anything you did or said that was not aligned with your practice of NVC. Then do a post-hearsal in writing. Write a full imaginary dialogue of how you might have expressed yourself differently, what you imagine the other person would have said to that, and how you might have responded to that, etc. Do about 3 rounds of that.
4. **Translating jackal thinking:** in the course of the day, jot down judgments that arise in you in response to various events. At the end of the day, take a few of those and translate them fully, both to what are your own observations, feelings, needs and what request you would make if you spoke with this person, and make your best guess as to what the feelings and needs of the other person.
5. **Meditating on needs:** you can develop a meditation practice that focuses on connecting with needs. The object of focus is the line "I have a need for \_\_\_\_." Just as with any other form of meditation, your mind will likely wander. You will likely hear internal responses, such as: "But this need cannot be met; why bother?" or, "Yeah, but this person is not going to change," or, "I should just grow up and get over this petty wish of mine," or, "This is not just about some personal need of mine. This is about everyone's right to dignity." The aim of the practice is to

bring your attention back to the need you are meditating on, without harshness. Rather than punishing yourself for wandering, just gently bring your attention back.

Encountering and connecting with needs is different from naming them as checklist items. Whenever we do this practice, we can take a moment to breathe, to really experience the flavor of that need being inside of us – exactly what it feels like, what the sensations of having this need are, and what this need means to us.

6. **Power:** This practice can be particularly useful in the morning. You can review your day, what you know of what's coming, not counting the unannounced, unplanned forceful flow of life. For each piece of your coming day that you remember, you ask: "What can I do to be more powerful in that situation? What would bring more leadership? How can I be more intentional about attending in the moment to everyone's benefit?"

You can also answer the following questions in addition to the broad reflection I suggested earlier. In order to make use of these questions, it's important that you know yourself clearly and gently enough to recognize your own habitual responses when your access to power is blocked.

- a. Describe an upcoming situation during the day in which you anticipate being challenged in terms of maintaining your sense of power.
  - b. Imagine yourself in the situation. Imagine the other players. Imagine the actions others might take that would be particularly challenging for you.
  - c. How might you wish to respond in the moment you imagine? What would be the inner obstacle? What are the messages that you tell yourself that create the obstacle (e.g. "There is nothing I can do;" "I am not adequate for this challenge;" or, "I will be kicked out of this meeting if I speak up")?
  - d. Once you've identified the message, look inside for what you most want in that moment (e.g. a vision of what to do, sufficient skill to pull it off, or courage to meet the consequences).
  - e. What do you want to remember to tell yourself in the moment that might help you overcome the inner obstacle and act powerfully?
7. **Choice:** this is likely an end of day practice.
    - a. Review the day, and identify moments in which you are satisfied with the degree of choice you experienced (regardless of your satisfaction with the actual choice you made in the moment). You can focus on one particular area, or on your overall capacity to exercise choice.
    - b. What contributed to your ability to make a conscious choice?
    - c. Pick a moment in which you didn't bring as much consciousness to your choice as you would like. What kept you from making a fully conscious choice?

- d. What would you have wanted to do in the situation you picked? What might have contributed to your ability to bring more consciousness to the moment? What needs might have been attended to by making a different choice?
8. **Additional practices:** If these practices are not sufficient for your particular needs related to your self-development into the person you want to become, you can use more practices which appear in *Spinning Threads of Radical Aliveness: Transcending the Legacy of Separation in Our Individual Lives* (Miki Kashtan), or use instructions in that book for creating your own.

## USEFUL COMMUNICATION PHRASES

---

### Requests for Dialogue

- “Would you be willing to take some time to talk with me about ...[topic]?”
- “Could we sit down together and look at what we both need to see if we can find a way to work this out? (or, to see if we can find a solution that works for both of us?)”

### Offering Empathy

- “Let me see if I’m hearing you right. What I’m getting is ...?”
- “I want to make sure I’m getting it. It sounds like ...?”
- “May I recap what I’m hearing so far?”
- “Here’s what I’m hearing... is that right?”

### Eliciting information

- “Tell me more.” “Go on...” “What else?”
- “Help me to understand. Would you say more about...?”
- “I’m curious about...”
- “Is there anything else you’d like me to understand about this?”
- “Could you tell me one or two things I might say or do right now that would help you to feel more understood / more heard?”
- “The story I’m telling myself is... Could you tell me what’s going on for you?”

### Requests for Empathy

- “What would be most helpful for me right now is just to be heard. Would you be willing to listen for a bit and tell me what you’re hearing?”
- “I have so much going through my head right now that I’m struggling to focus. Do you have some space to listen to me before you say more?”
- “I just said a lot and I’m not sure it all came out the way I was intending. Could you tell me what you got from all that?”
- “What I just said is important to me. Would you be willing to tell me what you’re getting?”
- “I’m wondering if you could take a moment to tell me what you’ve heard. It would really mean a lot and help me to know if I’ve gotten my feelings across.”
- “Could you tell me what you hear matters to me in this situation?”

### Inserting a Pause

- “I’d like a moment to gather my thoughts.”
- “I’m not sure. Let me think about that.”
- “This sounds important. I’d like to give it some time.”
- “I’d like some time to take that in. Can we pause here for a moment?”
- “Our conversation is moving so quickly I’m having a hard time taking it in. Can we back up / slow down / start over?”

## Taking a Break

- “I’d really like to continue our conversation, and I’m not in the best frame of mind to do that right now. Can we take a break and come back to this . . . ?”
- “I’d really like to hear what you have to say, and I’m feeling a little overwhelmed, so I don’t think I’ll be able to listen well. Could we take a break and continue tomorrow?”
- “I’m committed to figuring this out together and don’t quite have the space to think clearly now. Can we put this on hold until . . . ?”
- “I want to finish our conversation, and I don’t think anything else I say right now will be useful. Could we take a break until . . .”
- “I notice that I have so little bandwidth right now. Can we talk ...[insert time]?”
- “I’d really like to hear what you have to say, but the way you’re saying it is very difficult for me. I wonder if you could ...explain what’s happening for you in another way?”  
... take a break until we’ve both had a chance to reflect on this?”  
... let me have a moment to tell you what’s going on for me?”

## Interrupting

- “Hang on—Let me make sure I’m still with you . . .”
- “I want to make sure I’m getting everything you said. Can we pause for a moment so I can make sure I’m following it all?”
- “I want to hear the rest of what you’re saying, and I’m starting to lose track. Can I summarize what I’m hearing so far?”
- “Can I pause you for a second?”
- “I want you to continue, but I’m a bit confused. May I ask a question?”
- “I want to keep listening, and there’s something I want to clarify. May I respond for a moment?”

## Redirecting

- “I’m glad you mention that. Before we go there, I’d like to say something more about...”
- “I appreciate you bringing that up. I want to discuss that too, but first can we...”
- “Yes, that’s important to me... Can we finish talking about this first, and come back to that in a moment?” Or, “I’d like to rewind. Can we go back to something you were saying before?”
- “I wasn’t quite finished with my thought. Do you mind if I say one or two more things?”

## Hearing No

- “I’m curious to know, why not? Could you share more?”
- “What’s leading you to say no? Do you have other ideas?”
- “Can we take some time to brainstorm ideas that could work for both of us?”
- “Can you tell me why this doesn’t work for you?”
- “What would you need to know, or what could I do, to make it possible for you to say yes?”



## Saying No

- “I’d like to say yes, and here’s what’s getting in the way of that right now.”
- “I’m hearing how important this is to you, and I’m not seeing how I can make it work given that I also have a need for... Could we explore some other options that might work for you?”
- “I can’t agree to that without a significant cost to myself in terms of . . . [other needs]. Would it work for you if we tried...instead?”

## Requests for “Do-overs”

- “That didn’t come out quite right. Can I try that again?”
- “I feel like we got off to the wrong start. Could we start over?”
- “I’m concerned some of the things I said aren’t helping. May I try again?”  
“Things didn’t really go the way I was hoping when we talked. Could we try having the conversation again?”

## LIST OF PHYSICAL SENSATIONS

---

<b><u>Pressure / Weight</u></b>	<b><u>Texture</u></b>	Shaky	<b><u>Density</u></b>	<b><u>Size / Shape</u></b>
Breathless	Bumpy	Straight	Airy	Big
Floating	Even	Streaming	Dense	Blob-like
Light	Itchy	Tickling	Empty	Circular
Lifting	Jagged	Tingling	Expansive	Flat
Soft	Metallic	Throbbing	Hollow	Huge
Spacey	Prickly	Trembling	Light	Large
Supported	Rough	Twitchy	Loose	Lines
Touching	Sandpapery	Queasy	Open	Miniscule
Uplifting	Soft	Upward	Solid	Round
Crushing	Silky	Vibrating	Steady	Small
Hard	Smooth	Vital	Spacious	Tiny
Heavy	Uneven	Wobbly		
Pressing			Blocked	<b><u>Degrees</u></b>
Pulling	<b><u>Movement /</u></b>	<b><u>Speed</u></b>	Closed	Cellular
Pushing	<b><u>Direction</u></b>	Brisk	Clenched	Deep
Sinking	Bubbly	Easy	Congested	Dull
Suffocating	Buzzy	Fast	Constricted	Gentle
Weighed down	Dizzy	Moderate	Contracted	Gross
	Downward	Slow	Dense	Immense
	Draining	Still	Full	Large
<b><u>Temperature</u></b>	Electric	Quick	Knotted	Mild
Chills	Energized		Tight	Microscopic
Clammy	Erratic	<b><u>Tone</u></b>	Thick	Shallow
Cold	Effervescent	Agreeable	Tense	Slight
Cool	Flowing	Bitter	Viscous	Subtle
Freezing	Fluid	Pleasant	Wooden	Teeny
Frozen	Fluttery	Comfortable		Tender
Icy	Inward	Disagreeable	<b><u>Painful</u></b>	Tiny
Boiling	Nauseous	Neutral	Achy / Aching	Vast
Burning	Nervy	Unpleasant	Bruised	
Warm	Opening	Uncomfortable	Numb	<b><u>Absence</u></b>
Inflamed	Outward	Soothing	Sore	Blank
Fiery	Pounding	Sour	Sharp	Disconnected
Sweaty	Radiating	Sweet	Sensitive	Empty
Hot	Releasing		Stabbing	Nothing
	Roiling		Tender	Numb
	Shivery		Twisting	

This is a partial list. Sensation is a subjective experience and can include synesthesia: physical sensation experienced as or with color, image, smell, taste... (dark, bright, sour, bitter, sweet). Sensations may also occur or be expressed through metaphor or simile (“like a hard rock”).

# FEELINGS INVENTORY

(internal sensations, without reference to thoughts, interpretations)

---

## PEACEFUL

tranquil  
calm  
content  
engrossed  
absorbed  
expansive  
serene  
loving  
blissful  
satisfied  
relaxed  
relieved  
quiet  
carefree  
composed  
fulfilled

## LOVING

warm  
affectionate  
tender  
appreciative  
friendly  
sensitive  
compassionate  
grateful  
nurtured  
amorous  
trusting  
open  
thankful  
radiant  
adoring  
passionate

## GLAD

happy  
excited  
hopeful  
joyful  
satisfied  
delighted  
encouraged  
grateful  
confident  
inspired  
touched  
proud  
exhilarated  
ecstatic  
optimistic  
glorious

## PLAYFUL

energetic  
effervescent  
invigorated  
zestful  
refreshed  
impish  
alive  
lively  
exuberant  
giddy  
adventurous  
mischievous  
jubilant  
goofy  
buoyant  
electrified

## INTERESTED

involved  
inquisitive  
intense  
enriched  
absorbed  
alert  
aroused  
astonished  
concerned  
curious  
eager  
enthusiastic  
fascinated  
intrigued  
surprised  
helpful

## MAD

impatient  
pessimistic  
disgruntled  
frustrated  
irritable  
edgy  
grouchy  
agitated  
exasperated  
disgusted  
irked  
cantankerous  
animosity  
bitter  
rancorous  
irate, furious  
angry  
hostile  
enraged  
violent

## SAD

lonely  
heavy  
troubled  
helpless  
gloomy  
overwhelmed  
distant  
despondent  
discouraged  
distressed  
dismayed  
disheartened  
despairing  
sorrowful  
unhappy  
depressed  
blue  
miserable  
dejected  
melancholy

## SCARED

afraid  
fearful  
terrified  
startled  
nervous  
jittery  
horrified  
anxious  
worried  
anguished  
lonely  
insecure  
sensitive  
shocked  
apprehensive  
dread  
jealous  
desperate  
suspicious  
frightened

## TIRED

exhausted  
fatigued  
inert  
lethargic  
indifferent  
weary  
overwhelmed  
fidgety  
helpless  
heavy  
sleepy  
disinterested  
reluctant  
passive  
dull  
bored  
listless  
blah  
mopey  
comatose

## CONFUSED

frustrated  
perplexed  
hesitant  
troubled  
uncomfortable  
withdrawn  
apathetic  
embarrassed  
hurt  
uneasy  
irritated  
suspicious  
unsteady  
puzzled  
restless  
boggled  
chagrined  
unglued  
detached  
skeptical

Feelings likely to be present when our needs ARE or ARE NOT being met. This list is neither exhaustive nor definitive. It is meant as a starting place to support anyone who wishes to engage in a process of deepening self-discovery and to facilitate greater understanding and connection between people.

# UNIVERSAL HUMAN NEEDS – PARTIAL LIST

(without reference to specific people, time, actions, things)

---

<b>SUBSISTENCE AND SECURITY</b>	<b>CONNECTION</b>	<b>MEANING</b>	
<b>PHYSICAL SUSTENANCE</b>	<b>AFFECTION</b>	<b>SENSE OF SELF</b>	<b>TRANSCENDENCE</b>
Air	Appreciation	Authenticity	Beauty
Food	Attention	Competence	Celebration of life
Health	Closeness	Creativity	Communion
Movement	Companionship	Dignity	Faith
Physical Safety	Harmony	Growth	Flow
Rest / sleep	Intimacy	Healing	Hope
Shelter	Love	Honesty	Inspiration
Touch	Nurturing	Integrity	Mourning
Water	Sexual Expression	Self-acceptance	Peace (internal)
	Support	Self-care	Presence
	Tenderness	Self-connection	
<b>SECURITY</b>	Warmth	Self-knowledge	
Consistency		Self-realization	
Order/Structure	<b>TO MATTER</b>	Mattering to myself	
Peace (external)	Acceptance		
Peace of mind	Care	<b>UNDERSTANDING</b>	
Protection	Compassion	Awareness	
Safety (emotional)	Consideration	Clarity	
Stability	Empathy	Discovery	
Trusting	Kindness	Learning	
	Mutual Recognition	Making sense of life	
<b>FREEDOM</b>	Respect	Stimulation	
<b>AUTONOMY</b>	To be heard, seen		
Choice	To be known, understood	<b>PURPOSE</b>	
Ease	To be trusted	Aliveness	
Independence	Understanding others	Challenge	
Power		Consciousness	
Self-responsibility	<b>COMMUNITY</b>	Contribution	
Space	Belonging	Creativity	
Spontaneity	Communication	Effectiveness	
	Cooperation	Exploration	
<b>LEISURE/RELAXATION</b>	Equality	Integration	
Humor	Inclusion		
Joy	Mutuality		
Play	Participation		
Pleasure	Partnership		
Rejuvenation	Self-expression		
	Sharing		

This list builds on Marshall Rosenberg's original needs list with categories adapted from Manfred Max-Neef. Neither exhaustive nor definitive, it can be used for study and for discovery about each person's authentic experience.

# NEEDS INVENTORY FOR THE WORKPLACE

---

## RESOURCES

### PHYSICAL NEEDS

Air / Food / Water  
Comfort, Ease  
Consistency  
Equipment, Tools  
Health  
Movement, Exercise  
Privacy  
Respectful Physical Contact  
Rest / Relaxation  
Safety, Security  
Supplies  
Time, Efficiency

### COMMUNICATION

#### MENTAL NEEDS

Awareness  
Clarity, Direction  
Data, Research  
Decision Making  
Discernment  
Education, Training  
Information  
Reflection  
Stimulation, Challenge

#### AUTHORITY

#### EMPOWERMENT

Autonomy  
Choice  
Co-creation of strategies  
Collaboration  
Discipline  
Freedom (emotional,  
spiritual and physical)  
Individuality  
Solitude

## ACCOUNTABILITY

### INTEGRITY

Authenticity  
Contribution  
Effectiveness, Progress  
Feedback, Tracking  
Honesty  
Humility, Self-reflection  
Morality  
Punctuality  
Quality  
Self-worth  
Sincerity

### INTEGRATION

#### INTERDEPENDENCE

Acceptance  
Appreciation  
Clarity  
Closeness  
Community  
Compassion  
Connection  
Consideration  
Cooperation  
Emotional Safety  
Empathy  
Harmony  
Inclusion  
Intimacy  
Love  
Reassurance  
Respect  
Support  
Trust  
Understanding  
Validation  
Warmth

## SELF-EXPRESSION

### CREATIVITY

Creating, Generating  
Growth, Process  
Learning, Mastery  
Meaning  
Play, Fun, Laughter  
Teaching

### SELF-ALIGNMENT

#### NATURAL ENERGY

Beauty  
Equality, Mutuality  
Harmony, Peace  
Inspiration  
Order  
Purpose, Meaning  
Respect

### MARKING OF TRANSITIONS

#### CELEBRATING BEGINNINGS

Ceremony, Ritual  
Delight  
Enjoyment  
Excitement  
Healing  
Humor  
Passion

#### ACKNOWLEDGING ENDINGS

Accept Learnings  
Accept Limitations  
Acknowledge Regrets  
Grieve Dreams Unfulfilled  
Mourn Lost Relationships