

What is Nonviolent Communication?

Nonviolent Communication is based on the principle of ahimsa – the natural state of compassion when no violence is present in the heart.

~Marshall Rosenberg

Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is a consciousness that manifests as a way of being in the world. The purpose of Nonviolent Communication is to serve life and to create the quality of connection in which everyone's needs can be met through compassionate giving. When living in, and relating from NVC consciousness we embody the following attitudes:

❖ **Self-Connection** – We relate to ourselves and the world from a still place within--a place of compassion, truth, clarity, and peace. To maintain self-connection, NVC proposes one engages in a daily practice known as "Remembering". Examples of Remembering practices include meditation, prayer, inspirational readings, poetry, inspirational music, and quiet time in nature.

❖ **Honest Expression** – We express ourselves vulnerably and without criticism or blame. We reveal our feelings and needs and ask for what we want, without demanding.

❖ **Empathic Presence** – We listen to others with a silent mind and an open heart. Our sole purpose is to connect with the speaker by understanding his or her feelings and needs deeply and without judgment. We attempt to remain empathically present even when we are the target of criticism, blame and other such forms of communication.

❖ **Self-Empathy** – When we are no longer able to be present to the other person, or when we become angry, we take time out to vent our judgments in the privacy of our minds. We identify and connect with the unmet needs in a given interaction and we mourn the pain of the unmet needs. This process enables us to reconnect with our essence. We use self-empathy also to mourn and heal from disappointment or loss, to celebrate needs met, or simply to understand ourselves more fully. Once we experience an organic shift, we are calmer and have more clarity to address the challenge at hand. We ask ourselves what we can do to fulfill the unmet needs in the situation.

❖ **Use of Power** – We attempt to influence others in the context of connection, rather than through coercion. We want others to contribute to us out of natural giving, and never out of fear, guilt, shame, duty, desire for reward, or to buy love. We care about the needs of others as our own, and we are committed to seeking solutions that can meet the needs of all involved.

The Process – Marshall Rosenberg articulated the consciousness and developed a process that enables us to enter the consciousness. At first, when we are learning NVC we employ the process as a vehicle to the consciousness. Once there, we no longer need the vehicle. All we say and do will serve life. When we step out of the consciousness we can use the process to bring us back.

The Elements -- There are five elements to the process of Nonviolent Communication. When experiencing disconnection from others, we can use this list to see if all the elements are in alignment:

1. **Consciousness** – Am I self-connected? Am I expressing myself honestly and vulnerably? Am I listening empathically? Am I valuing the needs of others as my own? Am I committed to seeking solutions that can meet everyone's needs?
2. **Thought** – Is there judgment or blame in my awareness? Am I angry or resentful in this moment as I engage with the other person?
3. **Language** – Are my words free of criticism and blame?
4. **Communication** – Is my non-verbal communication -tone of voice and body language- congruent with my words?
5. **Use of power** – Do I want to overpower this person to get what I want? Am I caring about his or her needs as my own? Am I making a request or a demand in disguise? Am I prepared to hear no, listen empathically and maintain connection? Am I willing to stay in the dialogue until we find a solution that accommodates both of us? All involved?

Following are some fundamental concepts and assumptions of Nonviolent Communication:

Universal Human Needs -- The concept of needs is the cornerstone of Nonviolent Communication. A need is defined as the energy in living organisms that compels them to seek fulfillment and to thrive. Examples of needs include water, air, freedom and meaning. We hold needs as universal. Thus, expressing our needs and acknowledging the needs of others enables us to connect at a deep place of the human experience and create common ground.

We believe that all our actions --*anything anyone ever does*-- are attempts to meet our needs. With this realization in mind, we are able to understand others' actions however baffling. We can transform judgment into empathic understanding. In a safe environment, free of judgment and blame, it is easier to find solutions that can meet everyone's needs.

Connection First -- When conflict arises, we seek empathic connection first and then solutions. We define connection as the moment in which two people experience what is alive in each other simultaneously. We trust that in the space of heart connection we have access to a well of creativity where we can think of options that can meet everyone's needs. In the context of connection we can resolve disagreements peacefully.

The Need for Contribution – We believe that contributing to the well being of others is one of the most powerful forces of human motivation. At times, we disconnect from our need for contribution because of the way we have been conditioned to think -- that when our needs are not met it is the other person's fault. When this happens, we want to punish the other person, *not* contribute to him or her.

To restore our need for contribution we can ask someone to listen to us with Empathy or engage in Self-Empathy to help us reconnect with our compassionate nature.

Interdependence -- We believe that human beings are interdependent, as opposed to independent. We need one another to live and to thrive. We believe that what affects one affects all. If a child is starving, we are all affected if we are aware of our deep feelings and the human need for the well being of all. We need others to build the houses we live in, grow the fruit and vegetables we eat, and sew the clothes we wear. We need carpenters, doctors, janitors and teachers. Our environmental, health and economic systems affect the global community in visible and invisible but important ways.

Value Judgments -- NVC invites us to judge actions and situations by determining whether or not they are in harmony with our values as opposed to making moralistic judgments. For instance, rather than saying, "Violence is wrong," we would say, "I value the resolution of conflicts through safe and peaceful means."

Nonviolent Communication posits that moralistic judgments –thoughts of criticism and blame– are at the root of violence. Judging people as 'bad' or 'wrong' leads to anger, and anger often leads to violence. Furthermore, when we judge someone as bad or wrong we feel justified in acting with violence because we tell ourselves that the person *deserves it*. For instance, we may think "Terrorist deserve to die."

The Protective Use of Force -- When someone acts in a way that compromises safety, we use force as a means of protection, but never as punishment. We do not cause suffering so that a person learns a lesson. To bring back social order when it has been broken, Nonviolent Communication proposes education and restoration as opposed to retribution.

The Dimensions -- Nonviolent Communication consciousness and the process apply to three dimensions of life:

- I. **Personal** – We employ the NVC process to liberate ourselves from cultural conditioning; to heal the wounds of life; to transform judgments into understanding of unmet needs; and to transform anger, guilt, shame, depression and fear into life-serving emotions that increase inner peace and inner freedom.

II. **Interpersonal** – We relate to others with empathy, honesty, mutuality, and care thus increasing trust, understanding, and harmony in relationships.

III. **Societal** – We live Nonviolent Communication principles and implement the process in our efforts to contribute to a better world. Our social change work is fueled by gratitude as opposed to anger

We believe that these dimensions are intertwined. Our state of mind and heart influences how we relate to others. How we relate to people can set in motion a chain of actions and reactions that impact society in unforeseen ways – for better or for worse.

Universal Wisdom -- Nonviolent Communication is consonant with the highest principles of the great world religions.

Marshall Rosenberg developed Nonviolent Communication in the 1960s as a tool to implement the desegregation of schools in the United States. He was motivated to help people connect with their own humanity and that of others respectfully, compassionately, peacefully and with joy. For over 50 years, he traveled indefatigably sharing NVC in the world. Currently, over 500 certified trainers share NVC in schools, health care systems, non-profit organizations, prisons, corporations, churches, communities, and in the political arena in over 65 countries across the globe.

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