

Compassionate Communication

with Inbal Kashtan

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The Center for Nonviolent Communication

Workshop Handout



The Center for Nonviolent Communication

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1. Why are you a member/leader of La Leche League?

Some of the needs that may be met by being a La Leche League member and leader:

Contribution
Support
Learning
Connection
Community
Affinity
Validation
Growth
Transformation
and more....

2. Some key principles of NVC

- ♥ Prioritizing connection (long-term rather than immediate solutions)
- ♥ Every action is an attempt to meet a need (instead of judging the person or the person's actions)
- ♥ We all have the same needs (this is the basis for mutual understanding and seeing each other's humanity)
- ♥ Everyone's needs matter (not just mine, not just yours)
- ♥ Choice - giving from joy (rather than "have to," "should," and the like)
- ♥ Taking full responsibility for our feelings and actions (instead of blaming ourselves or others)

(see longer list in reference section at the end)

3. NVC "language"

NVC "language" is not the heart of NVC. Much of NVC is non-verbal - it's a way of focusing on the heart in the face of conflict. Yet the language helps us embody the spiritual principles we want to live by.

OBSERVATIONS:

A description of what is seen or heard without added interpretations or judgments.

Example of judgment or interpretation: "She's having a temper tantrum."

One possible observation to describe what is seen and heard: "She is lying on the floor crying and kicking."

The distinction between **observation** and **judgment or interpretation** is important because:

- ♥ We avoid a reaction - our own and/or the other person's
- ♥ We recognize that what is going on outside of us *stimulates* our feelings instead of thinking that what is going on outside of us is the *cause* of our feelings - we begin to take responsibility for ourselves.
- ♥ We get to attend to the heart of what we want - connect with feelings and needs - instead of dwelling in the judgments or arguing about whether they are true.

FEELINGS:

Our emotions rather than our interpretations or thoughts about what is going on.

Words we use to describe feelings can either simply describe our internal emotional state, or they can get mixed with thoughts and interpretations.

Feeling words that are mixed with interpretations can be confusing, because:

- ♥ They don't describe what I'm actually feeling
- ♥ I'm attributing responsibility to you (as the cause of my feelings) rather than talking just about me

NEEDS:

Core human needs (our deepest, universal needs, values and longings) rather than the strategies we employ to get these needs met (which are specific to a person, place and/or time).

In NVC we recognize needs met or unmet as the cause of our feelings rather than someone else's actions. This is crucial to taking fullest responsibility for our own feelings and actions, thereby freeing ourselves from waiting for others to change before we can feel differently. By recognizing our own needs, we take the first step toward recognizing the strategies (requests) that may help us get those needs met. This is a step toward taking our full power.

REQUESTS:

Concrete actions that can contribute to meeting our needs rather than demands or vague wishes.

To make your requests clearer, focus on using observation language and avoid interpretations, ask for an immediate response (yes or no), and state your request in positive action language (what you want instead of what you 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 requests we are open to hearing a "no," taking it as an opportunity for further dialogue. (See more on hearing "no" below.)

Why don't we get our needs met as often as we would like? Two key reasons are:

- ♥ we haven't identified what our needs are
- ♥ we don't know what specifically we want from others that would help meet our needs

By making concrete requests we help ourselves clarify what would contribute to us, we make it clear to others how they can contribute to us, and we give them an opportunity to meet their need for contribution by giving us something that would truly meet our needs.

Children are eager to contribute - give them opportunities from early on to give to you.

4. Combining NVC steps into a sentence

Observation <i>When I see/hear . . .</i>
Feeling <i>I feel . . .</i>
Need <i>Because I need . . .</i>
Request <i>Would you be willing to...?</i>

5. EXERCISE: Translating into NVC - self-expression

Write down something you've said to your child, which you would like to say using NVC. Translate the statement into your observations, feelings, needs and requests. (The request doesn't have to "solve the problem" - it's just the beginning of a dialogue!)

Example:

Original statement: "No hitting!"

NVC statement: "When I see you hit Max and see Max crying, I feel sad because I need safety for everyone. Would you be willing to tell me what was going on?"

Original statement:

NVC statement:

When I [see/hear]:

I feel:

Because I need:

Would you be willing to:

CHECKING UNDERSTANDING OF NVC STEPS

Following the exercise, review what you wrote and reconsider:

- ♥ Are there any judgments or interpretations mixed in with the observation?
- ♥ Are there any interpretations mixed in with the feeling words?
- ♥ Is the need a deep universal one, or a strategy that is time, person or place specific?
- ♥ Is the request concrete, clear and doable?

6. What if someone won't meet our needs at the moment?

Our needs are not always met at a particular moment. What can we do if it becomes clear that a particular person will not contribute to meeting our needs right away? (For example, a sick child may not be able to contribute to meeting our need for rest; a toddler may not be able to meet our need for understanding.)

We can:

- ♥ Shift our relationship with ourselves - give ourselves the empathy and understanding we need.
- ♥ Build community so we have more resources for meeting needs.
- ♥ Offer our *children* opportunities to meet their needs for deep understanding and being heard.
- ♥ Focus on meeting our needs for being heard and understood, for care for ourselves, whether with the person (or child) we have a conflict with, or from someone else. When our need for understanding is met we may experience a huge relief and transformation can happen even when some other needs are temporarily not met.

7. Mourning and healing when we don't like our actions

Instead of judging yourself, worrying about the impact of your actions, or ignoring the actions you took that you didn't like, consider how you would use NVC to connect with yourself. You may also want to express your responses directly to your child.

- a. Observation: What is the action you regret?
- b. Feeling: How do you feel about that action?
- c. Need: What needs of yours weren't met?
- d. Request: What would you like to hear back from your child after you've expressed this? (I suggest not asking for forgiveness - it would likely meet both your needs for connection more to really check with your child about his or her feelings and needs rather than coming to a quick resolution.)

You might also consider what needs were you trying to meet by taking the action you originally took? (Remember, every action is an attempt to meet a need!) This will contribute to greater self-understanding and self-acceptance as you try to shift patterns of behavior.

HOW TRUST GROWS

"When Edward Tronick and Katherine Weinberg studied the development of trust in relationships between mothers and babies, they found that trust grows when babies and mothers establish that they can find each other again after the inevitable moments of losing touch. It is not the goodness of the mother or the relationship per se that is the basis for trust; it is the ability of mother (or father or caretaker) and baby together to repair the breaks in their relationship that builds a safe house for love."

From Carol Gilligan, *The Birth of Pleasure*, p. 31

8. Hearing "No"

"NO" can end conversations and start power struggles - or it can provide powerful learning and connecting opportunities.

FOUR WAYS OF HEARING

(Note: This was a demonstration of four ways of hearing using giraffe and jackal hand puppets, and a set of jackal ears and giraffe ears that fit on one's head)

- a. Jackal ears out: judgments of others (can lead to anger)
- b. Jackal ears in: judgments of self (can lead to depression)
- c. Giraffe ears out: connecting with the other person's feelings and needs (can lead to connection through empathy)
- d. Giraffe ears in: connecting with my own feelings and needs (can lead to self-connection through self-empathy)

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. It also helps us give to ourselves the understanding we want, and deepens our capacity for self-connection, self-trust, and compassion for ourselves.

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 is often dropped, unless the context of what we're talking about is not clear. The request may be dropped until both people are clear that the feelings and needs are understood; *then* is the time to guess about possible requests. When words are not wanted or are hard to offer, empathy can be offered silently.

In sentence form, empathy can be expressed this way:

[Observation] [<i>When you see/hear . . .</i>]
Feeling <i>Are you feeling . . .</i>
Need <i>Because you need . . .</i>
[Request] [<i>Would you like...?</i>]

CHOICE OF HOW TO RESPOND IN NVC

We have choices at every moment. If we want to use NVC to respond to someone, we have the choice between empathizing with them or expressing our own feelings, needs and requests. We also have the choice to begin with self-empathy, to help us recognize our power and *choose* what to do next instead of just reacting.

9. EXERCISE: Working with "No!"

Keys to responding to "No":

- ♥ "No" can always be taken as an invitation to further dialogue. Being able to hear a "no" and still find a way to dialogue about both sides' needs without enforcing our agenda is key to building a trusting relationship.
- ♥ We can continue to dialogue by connecting with what needs are being met by saying "no." Another way to think about this: What needs am I saying "yes" to when I say "no" to something else?
Example: If a child says "no" to a parent's request to go to bed, they might be saying "yes" to meeting their need for autonomy, trust that their needs matter to the parent, connection, safety, play, or others. Connecting with these needs and empathizing with them can open the door to mutual understanding and further dialogue.
- ♥ We can reach a mutual "yes" through a commitment to meeting *everyone's* needs: not just ours, not just others'. When our children trust this commitment, they will be more open to considering our needs.

The following exercises is designed to give you the flavor of how you can respond to "no" using NVC. Keep in mind, however, that it is only the first sentence of a conversation. The conversation can continue with you expressing your feelings, needs and requests and empathizing with the child's, and then when you both feel satisfied that both your needs are understood, looking for strategies that would likely meet both your needs.

Imagine your child saying "no" to your request from the first exercise.

Self-empathy: How do you feel and what need of yours do you notice when you hear the "no"?

Empathy for your child: How do you imagine your child feels and what need is he or she trying to meet by saying no to you? Phrase your guess as a question to the child:

Are you feeling _____ because you need _____?

Nonviolent Communication Quick Reference Guide

Expression	Empathy
Observation <i>When I see/hear . . .</i>	[Observation] [<i>When you see/hear . . .</i>]
Feeling <i>I feel . . .</i>	Feeling <i>Are you feeling . . .</i>
Need <i>Because I need . . .</i>	Need <i>Because you need . . .</i>
Request <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: Doable, immediate, and stated in positive action language (what you want instead of what you 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 requests 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 often 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.

Key Assumptions and Intentions of NVC

I. Assumptions Underlying the Practice of Nonviolent Communication

1. **Universality of Human Needs:** We all have the same needs. Where we differ from each other is in our strategies to meet needs. Conflicts occur at the level of strategies, not needs.
2. **Everyone's Needs Matter:** Not just mine, not just yours.
3. **Feelings Result from Needs Being Met or Unmet:** Our feelings are directly related to our needs. When our needs are met, we feel happy, satisfied, excited, etc. When our needs are not met, we feel sad, scared, angry, etc.
4. **All Actions are Attempts to Meet Needs:** Our actions are motivated by a desire to meet needs. We would *prefer* to meet needs in ways that don't harm others if we recognize a path of action that will also meet our own needs. Even when we resort to violence, we are still *attempting* to meet needs, however tragically.
5. **Natural Giving:** Human beings inherently *enjoy* contributing to others, and will often choose to give what we are asked provided that we trust it is *our choice* to do so.
6. **Sufficiency:** Though in individual situations it sometimes appears that there isn't enough to meet everyone's needs, there is no inherent scarcity for meeting everyone's basic needs. Dialogue and connection greatly contribute to our long-term ability to meet more people's needs more peacefully.

II. Key Intentions when Using Nonviolent Communication

We hold the following intentions when using NVC because we believe that they help us contribute to a world where everyone's needs are attended to peacefully.

1. **Taking Responsibility for Our Feelings:** We aim to move away from blaming ourselves or others for our feelings, by connecting our feelings to our own needs. 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 action based on seeing how it would meet our needs to do so; we aim to move away from taking action based on fear, guilt, shame, the desire for reward, or any ideas that we "should" or that we "have to".
3. **Prioritizing Connection:** We aim to focus on connection instead of immediate solutions, and to trust that connecting with our own and others' needs is more likely to lead to strategies that meet everyone's needs.
4. **Caring Equally for Everyone's Needs:** We aim to make requests and not demands; when hearing a "No" to our request, or when saying "No" to another's request, we aim to work towards solutions that meet everyone's needs, not just our own, and not just the other person's.
5. **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 rather than demands.
6. **Hearing with Empathy:** When we hear others, we aim to hear the feelings and needs behind their expressions, even when they express judgments or demands.
7. **Protective Use of Force:** We aim to use force only to protect, not to punish others or get our way without the other's agreement, and only in situations where the principles above were not sufficient to meet immediate needs for safety. We aim to return to dialogue as soon as safety is re-established.

Feelings Inventory

The following are words we use when we want to express a combination of mental states and physical sensations. 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.

A. Feelings we may experience when our needs are being met

AFFECTIONATE

compassionate
friendly
loving
openhearted
sympathetic
tender
warm

CONFIDENT

empowered
open
proud
safe
secure

ENGAGED

absorbed
alert
curious
engrossed
enchanted
entranced
fascinated
interested
intrigued
involved
spellbound
stimulated

EXCITED

amazed
animated
ardent
aroused
dazzled
eager
energetic
enthusiastic
giddy
invigorated
lively
passionate
surprised
vibrant

EXHILARATED

blissful
ecstatic
elated
enthralled
exuberant
radiant
rapturous
thrilled

GRATEFUL

appreciative
moved
thankful
touched

HOPEFUL

expectant
encouraged
optimistic

JOYFUL

amused
delighted
glad
happy
jubilant
pleased
tickled

INSPIRED

amazed
awed
wonder

PEACEFUL

calm
clearheaded
comfortable
centered
content
equanimity
fulfilled
mellow
quiet
relaxed
relieved
satisfied
serene
still
tranquil
trusting

REFRESHED

enlivened
rejuvenated
renewed
rested
restored
revived

B. Feelings we may experience when our needs are not being met

AFRAID

apprehensive
dread
foreboding
frightened
mistrustful
panicked
petrified
scared
suspicious
terrified
wary
worried

ANNOYED

aggravated
dismayed
disgruntled
displeased
exasperated
frustrated
impatient
irritated
irked

ANGRY

angry
enraged
furious
incensed
indignant
irate
livid
outraged
resentful

AVERSION

animosity
appalled
contempt
disgusted
dislike
hate
horrified
hostile
repulsed

CONFUSED

ambivalent
baffled
bewildered
dazed
hesitant
lost
mystified
perplexed
puzzled
torn

DISCONNECTED

alienated
aloof
apathetic
bored
cold
detached
distant
distracted
indifferent
numb
removed
withdrawn

DISQUIET

agitated
alarmed
discombobulated
disconcerted
disturbed
perturbed
rattled
restless
shocked
startled
surprised
troubled
turbulent
turmoil
uncomfortable
uneasy
unnerved
unsettled
upset

EMBARRASSED

chagrined
flustered
mortified
self-conscious

FATIGUE

beat
burnt out
depleted
exhausted
lethargic
listless
sleepy
tired
weary
worn out

PAIN

agony
anguished
bereaved
devastated
grief
heartbroken
hurt
lonely
miserable
regretful
remorseful

SAD

depressed
dejected
despair
despondent
disappointed
discouraged
disheartened
forlorn
gloomy
heavy hearted
hopeless
melancholy
unhappy
wretched

TENSE

anxious
cranky
distressed
distraught
edgy
fidgety
frazzled
irritable
jittery
nervous
overwhelmed
restless
stressed out

VULNERABLE

fragile
guarded
helpless
insecure
leery
reserved
sensitive
shaky

YEARNING

envious
jealous
longing
nostalgic
pining
wistful

Needs Inventory

The following 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.

INTERDEPENDENCE

CONNECTION

Acceptance
Affection
Appreciation
Belonging
Cooperation
Communication
Closeness
Community
Companionship
Compassion
Consideration
Consistency
Empathy
Inclusion
Intimacy
Love
Mutuality
Nurturing
Respect / Self-respect
Safety
Security
Stability
Support
To know others
To be known
To see others
To be seen
To be understood
Trust
Understanding
Warmth

HONESTY

Authenticity
Integrity
Presence

PLAY

Joy
Humor

PEACE

Beauty
Communion
Ease
Equality
Harmony
Inspiration
Order

PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

Air
Food
Movement/exercise
Rest / sleep
Sexual expression
Safety (protection from life threatening situations)
Shelter
Touch
Water

MEANING

Awareness
Celebration of life
Challenge
Clarity
Competence
Consciousness
Contribution
Creativity
Discovery
Efficacy
Effectiveness
Growth
Learning
Mourning
Participation
Purpose
Self-expression
Stimulation
Understanding

AUTONOMY

Choice
Freedom
Independence
Space
Spontaneity

NVC and Language

Excerpted from *Parenting from the Heart* by Inbal Kashtan (available from CNVC)

Because NVC appears to rely on verbal exchanges, it seems difficult--if not utterly impossible--to apply with young children. Yet at its heart, NVC is only peripherally about "language." Much more centrally, it is about a set of principles and approaches to connecting with ourselves and with others, such as the ideas of prioritizing connection, attending to *everyone's* needs, looking for the need behind whatever behavior we don't like, and sharing power instead of using power-over strategies.

In my experience, NVC practice with toddlers is often more about what I'm doing inside myself--how I'm talking with myself about what is going on with me and with my child--than about negotiation. Yet I also want to verbalize my understanding of what's going on for both of us, at least some of the time, even if I think my child doesn't understand the language, because it helps *me* connect with both of our feelings and needs. This, in turn, helps me calm down and find strategies that will more likely work for both of us. I also want to talk out loud because I believe this is how language and emotional literacy is acquired. If I don't express (and expand) my own feelings and needs vocabulary, my child will absorb only the words for the limited repertoire of feelings that we tend to disclose in our culture. It is my hope for children to be more emotionally aware than that.

Additional Resources

Many resources are available from CNVC at www.cnvc.org or by calling 1-800-255-7696. Following is a small selection of those resources. You may also want to explore the Parenting Resources page on the CNVC web site.

By Inbal Kashtan, CNVC Parenting Project coordinator:

Parenting from Your Heart: Sharing the Gifts of Compassion, Connection, and Choice (booklet)

By Marshall Rosenberg, founder of CNVC:

Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Compassion (book)

Raising Children Compassionately: Parenting the Nonviolent Communication Way (booklet)

Speaking Peace (2 CD's or 2 tapes)

The Basics of Nonviolent Communication: An Introductory Training (videotape)

And more...

The Compassionate Classroom: Relationship Based Teaching and Learning,
by Sura Hart and Victoria Kindle Hodson

Giraffe and Jackal Puppets

Giraffe and Jackal Ears