

## Moving Beyond Needs as Met or Unmet

In a Level 1 workshop, we explore the Nonviolent Communication concept of needs. The universal nature of needs is the gem of the NVC process developed by Marshall Rosenberg. NVC presents the model that needs are common to all of us regardless of age, gender, culture, religion, education, socio-economic status or where we live. This awareness gives me a way to conceptualize the inter-connectedness of humanity, and all of life.

I like to picture my needs as a symphony orchestra. There is an array of instruments, each representing one of my needs. All the instruments are on stage whether they are playing or not, just as my needs are always present inside me whether they are actively engaged in this moment, or not.

My needs are never in conflict with your needs—though our strategies for expressing our needs may conflict—just as the instruments in my internal orchestra are not in conflict with the instruments in your internal orchestra, though sometimes it may take some translation to enjoy the harmony our needs produce.

In many cultures, the word “need” often has a connotation of weakness, unpleasant vulnerability, and desperation; acknowledging needs may even imply something is lacking within me.

In NVC, needs are understood as the vital energy that makes up our humanness, each human having the same set of universal needs. We come to see that our reactions to events arise out of those needs, not the event itself. For example, sometimes when I call a friend and get their voicemail I feel sad and frustrated because I want connection and empathy and prefer to get it from that person. Sometimes when I call that same friend and get their voicemail I feel relieved because I want ease in conveying a message and didn't want to take much time. The event was the same, calling a friend and getting their voicemail, but my reaction is different depending on what needs of mine stimulated my calling.

Most books based in NVC further explain that feelings we enjoy arise from needs that are “met”, and feelings we find unpleasant arise when our needs are “unmet”.

As I traveled along my NVC journey I found that thinking of needs as met or unmet did not assist me in creating the quality of connections I was longing for in my relationships. Many times when I followed a classical NVC dialogue form, (**O**bservation, **F**eeling, **N**eed, **R**equest: **OFNR**) there was still an implication of wrong-doing. For instance: “When you didn't call at the time

you said you would, I felt frustrated and sad because my needs of connection and consideration were not met. Are you willing to tell me what comes up for you when you hear me say this?"

Though my intention was to use NVC to build connection with others, often they heard that I was blaming them and felt disconnected from me. Admittedly I had the belief that my needs "should" be met.

From this place I was not fully appreciating needs as the living energy inside me that created my humanness. I was holding needs as something that could be met or unmet by another person or situation, which left me unempowered and frustrated. My experience is that others tend to resist a request made from that energy.

By adding into my process a new step—taking the time to connect to the living energy (the beauty) of a need before making a request—I have experienced a shift to an expansive fullness that others are drawn to and brings me the connection I wanted. Here is an example of a strategy that works for me to reach this expansive fullness.

- 1) Pick a need that seems to be calling for my attention.
- 2) Close my eyes and think of a time that need was fully present in my life.
- 3) Think of where I was, what I could see, hear, smell and touch. Remember who was with me: people, animals, plants and all aspects of the setting.
- 4) Make a 'movie' of those things within my mind. If I cannot think of a time when that need was fully present, I make one up.
- 5) I shift my attention to how my body is doing. I anchor the feelings in my body by paying attention to all the sensations. When I have a clear and tangible experience of the need, I stop thinking of the movie and just feel my body with the need alive in my sensations, in my emotions, and in my mind.
- 6) When I am in this space I have a sense of openness and expansiveness. I treasure having that need and naturally find myself wanting everyone else to be connected to that need inside of themselves as well. \*

From this place of fullness I can make my OFNR statement and be truly open to however the other person reacts. Because the need is already fully present within me, I am not trying to get anyone else to meet it for me.

Now I can say: “Remembering that you didn’t call at the time you said you would, I feel afraid, sad, and curious because I value connection, consideration and understanding for us both. Are you willing to tell me what comes up for you when you hear me say this?”

I have noticed a major change in my internal energy as a result. I am open to both my authenticity and the other person’s. Instead of trying to find a nicer way to change someone’s behavior I have found a way to deeply connect to myself. This builds an energy that opens my heart to the other - generating the quality of inter-connection I’ve yearned for. I experience a calm centeredness inside of me from which I can live life with more joy.

- The term Beauty of Needs and this exercise first came to me from the NVC Training Institute in their 7-day training ‘Living Energy Of Needs’; much appreciation to the trainers Wes Taylor, Towe Widstrand, Susan Skye, and Robert Gonzales  
[www.nvcti.com](http://www.nvcti.com)

Ideas for Practice:

- 1) Use Feelings & Needs cards to clarify your inner journey. Pick a need from the deck and practice the exercise from the feature article.
- 2) Before you speak, check inside to see if you truly feel curious about the other person’s situation. If not, practice the somatic exercise described in the feature article.
- 3) Participate in (or create) an NVC Practice Group in your area. If there is no group in your area and you would like support or suggestions for starting one, please [peggy@opencommunication.org](mailto:peggy@opencommunication.org)
- 4) Participate in the NVC Training Institute’s Living Energy Of Needs workshop or a workshop from Open Communication.

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