

What's In a Name?

NVC stands for Nonviolent Communication. People often ask, "Why use the word nonviolent?" Can't we name what it IS rather than what it is not?

At those times, I enjoy remembering how Mahatma Gandhi defined violence.... *When I make myself or the other person wrong in my own thinking - that is the seed of violence.*

If we want to shift our personal responses and our entire culture to one of peace, the transformation begins in the ways we think. For outer change to be sustainable, inner change is essential. NVC gives specific processes for looking deeply into the ways I judge myself and others, and using NVC I am able to see those judgmental thoughts not as faults (more self blame) but as signals that can lead me to deeply held values.

My judgments have the potential of helping me connect more and more deeply to the universal human needs that flow within me. I use the classical NVC form — **Observation, Feelings, Needs, Requests (OFNR)**—within my own mind long before I consider using it aloud with another person. That's why I often say that NVC is 90 percent an "inside" job.

So while we often think of NVC as a different form of communicating, I have found it more effective to conceive of it as a different pattern of thinking. When my thinking patterns change, then my language follows with less effort and more aliveness. I imagine that I also don't end up sounding to others like a strange alien talking in a stilted way. (Well, I probably do still sound a bit strange much of the time... but that's another story.)

This internal journey often includes these parts:

- Seeking out those seeds of violence (blame and judgment) in my thinking
- Accepting them as signals that parts of myself want expression
- Inviting myself to embrace these parts with openness
- And, if these blaming/judging parts of myself are strong, taking time to do self-empathy and/or be held in empathy by another

Sometimes the shift from unconscious reaction to self-awareness is quick. Other times it can take days of patiently accepting and accompanying my stormy thoughts with kind attention before a sustainable shift happens within me.

Before the shift is complete I find I often have a "clear and firm" sense of "who is at fault," myself or the other person. During this time, I often experience an urgency to express the Observation, Feelings, Needs, Request script that I have rehearsed over and over in my mind. I find that my intention in using OFNR sometimes can be to

release unpleasant pressure within myself or to educate the other person about how he or she ought to behave so that I don't suffer in the future.

When the shift to self-connection has occurred there is a noticeable change in my body. I often drop into "baby breathing": the breath is deep and expands my back and sides, as well as my lower belly. Taking time to check to see if "baby breathing" is present will provide an indication that a shift has occurred.

Another indication of a completed shift is calmness about expressing. When I have arrived at a place of presence there is no longer urgency within me to express what is going on inside of me. It's not that I don't want to express what is authentically alive in me, what is different is the level of urgency I experience about that expression.

When the urgency is gone and the baby breathing is there, I find speaking (or even emailing) is powerful and peaceful. For me, NVC is a strategy to shift my deep habits of blame and judgmental thinking to needs-based thinking, thereby contributing to the needs of connection, authentic harmony, authenticity, acceptance, community and eventually peace.

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Practice Suggestions

- 1) Consider taking additional NVC training from Open Communication.
- 2) Use the Feelings & Needs cards (www.opencommunication.org/resources.html) at least twice a week to examine a situation that is bugging you.
- 3) Do an internal check for "baby breathing" and a calm urgency-free inner state before making an OFNR statement in a spoken conversation or an email.
- 4) Practice baby breathing—breathing so your torso expands 360 degrees with each in-breath (expansion is experienced in the belly, on the sides and the back with each in-breath) for 2 minutes every day for 21 days to anchor awareness of this style of breathing into your body.
- 5) Connect with an empathy buddy at least once a week—by phone or in person. Communicate with your empathy buddy even if you "don't think you have a problem." For ideas about working with an empathy buddy, see the article entitled Empathy Buddies.

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