

## The Journey To Living Through Needs Compassionately and Assertively

Mary: "You said you were going to leave your computer at home when we took our trip".

Fred: "I changed my mind."

Mary: "If you are playing games on your computer, my needs for intimacy won't be met. Don't bring your computer."

A student requested an article on the "obnoxious stage" in learning how to express needs. I believe she was asking about a stage in many peoples' NVC development when we are so excited about coming into relationship with the needs within us that we project our strategies for nurturing those needs out into the world with a lot of demanding.

Before discovering NVC, I thought of needs in one of two ways: either from a consumer perspective, differentiating between needs and wants; or a "spiritual" perspective.... something to be transcended to achieve happiness.

In our NVC Level 1 workshops we learn a different definition of the word need. NVC uses needs to describe living energies that are universal and intrinsic. Every human has the same set of needs, which live in us as energy that cannot be touched, counted, given, or taken away.

The essence of NVC— all humans share the same needs— is the basis of our interconnectedness with other humans and all of life. Most of us have been acculturated away from awareness of this use of the word needs. When we learn NVC, we reunite with this awareness of needs as elements of our humanity, something to be honored and celebrated. Coming to realize we are 'need-full' can stimulate self-connection and delight.

As Bonnie Fraser writes in her NVC study book, *Connection: A Self-Care Approach to Conflict Management* -

"It seems to me that your choice is to adopt a social image and then try to make your behavior line up with it or to try to find your unique, individual self by knowing your needs and expressing that self with your behavior. Decide for yourself. Look again at the list of needs. Would it be a world you wanted to live in if everyone were trying to meet these needs and support others in meeting these needs? In learning to value our needs, we as individuals often go through three stages. Some have suggested societies go through the same stages. If so, what stage do you think we are in?

1) **PASSIVE:** "I have no needs and if I had some, they are not important."

2) **AGGRESSIVE/Obnoxious:** "It is very important that my needs are met, regardless of how that affects you."

3) **ASSERTIVE/Mutual:** "We both have needs and all of our needs are important."

The PASSIVE stage is the result of cultural conditioning. In it, I believe I am responsible for other people's feelings and often I focus on what I should do to keep everyone around me happy. In order to do this, my authentic feelings are suppressed. I often believe myself to be less worthy than others so if I do have needs they don't matter as much as others.

In this stage my statements might sound something like this: "I have so much energy and wanting to play... I'm going to turn on the radio to dance. What? You are tired and want to sleep... Oh, okay, never mind. I'll go in the other room and read quietly."

The AGGRESSIVE/Obnoxious stage can be an attempt at bringing NVC into my life. I realize I am not responsible for other's feelings, I have needs, and that these needs are important. It becomes clear that my communication habits from the passive stage keep me from living life fully. As I embrace this awareness, that I have needs essential to my full blooming as a human being, I often develop an urgency to get those needs met. Sometimes I use the NVC form to try and get other people to do things for me without consideration of them.

This stage may sound something like this: "I feel cold in this room, I have a need for ease and comfort. I need the furnace on, now."

Notice, there is no checking in with the other people to see if they have needs to be considered before choosing this strategy. And, if others don't go along with our idea, thoughts such as these may arise: "Those people are so inconsiderate! Can't they see I have a need and its not getting met?"

The ASSERTIVE/Mutual stage is one in which I have come to accept responsibility for my own feelings, needs, intentions, and actions. I have both an awareness of needs and I have developed the skills to connect to the beauty of those needs before expressing them to others. I move away from thinking of needs as "mine" or "yours" and can fully embrace the intrinsic nature of needs. I appreciate that every choice I make impacts others and seek to develop relationships in which everyone's needs are considered with care.

This stage may sound something like this: "When I think about our trip together I feel happiness arising from the needs of connection, fun and intimacy. When I hear you might bring your computer I feel anxious and



It is important to hold a lot of compassion for ourselves wherever we are in our needs journey. Awareness will give me more choice in how I interact with others.

To take more and more healthy responsibility in my relationships, I want to make use of my own internal "pause" button. Before I interact, I want to pause and consider which needs stage I am about to respond from. It is important to hold myself in kindness while considering. If I find that Stage 1 or 2 is what is alive in me, my intention is to wait, take some extra breaths, take a walk, do some journaling, call a friend for empathy, or use other forms of self-connection before responding

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