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# Nonviolent Communication: Using Words That Enhance Life

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# Nonviolent Communication (NVC)

- Life-enhancing communication
- Communication can be words, actions, or silence
- We are all communicating all the time
- In good communication, everyone wins
- Skilled communication strengthens relationships and leads to more success in achieving goals



# The NVC Process

- Separate **observations** from evaluations
- Share how observations makes you **feel**
- Explain what **need** that feeling relates to
- Express a clear, positive, actionable **request**
- And... listen for the same in others. Try to understand what they are observing, feeling, and needing, and listen for or ask for a request



# Observation vs. Evaluation

- “When I see you giving \$10 to a homeless person, I think you are being too generous” vs. “You are too generous”
- “He visits here on average about three times a week, and that feels too much to me” vs. “He is always visiting!”
- **Which of these are observations?**
  1. Luke told me I don't look good in yellow
  2. My father is a good man
  3. Sam didn't ask for my opinion during the meeting



# Feelings, Needs, and Requests vs. Demands

- When we share our feelings, needs, and requests, we bring more life to the world
- We often do not know what we are feeling or needing, and how to express those in words
- Not-feelings vs. feelings:
  - “I feel that you are ignoring me” vs. “I feel lonely”
  - “I feel that you are smart” vs. “I appreciate you”
  - “It is cold in this room” vs. “I am cold”
- Needs and requests (completing the first item above)
  - I would like a sense of connection with you when you come home. Could we hug and sit together for a few minutes most days when you get home?



**Are these feelings:**

1. I feel misunderstood
2. I'm happy that you can come
3. That was a great report!



# Listening With Empathy

- Avoid advising, educating, one-upping, correction, consoling, interrogating, explaining, story-telling, etc.

A: “How could I do something so stupid?!”

B: “Nobody is perfect; you are too hard on yourself.” (consoling and educating)

**What more empathic response could be offered?**

- “Don’t just do something, stand there”
- Clarify, and paraphrase what you intuited was meant
  - “Are you upset because I interrupted you earlier today and you wanted your idea to be fully heard?”
  - “Are you feeling guilty because you did not listen to your son’s issue?”
- When other people use disconnected or seemingly hostile words, **try to connect to and acknowledge their unmet needs** that are being expressed, rather than defending oneself:
  - A: “No, I don’t want to go to that meeting with you!”
  - B: “Are you worried that I will stay there all day and leave you feeling stuck?”



# Expressing Anger's Core

- Angry communication is a tragic expression of unmet needs, and rarely succeeds in getting needs met
- Here are four steps for fully expressing anger's core:
  1. Stop and breathe
  2. Identify what thoughts are making you angry
  3. Connect with your real needs
  4. Express your feelings and unmet needs
- Be aware when expressing things “your old way”

“You totally mess up when you talk to your father!” → “When you talk to your father, I worry about you getting upset by his behaviors during those long conversations, and then I get upset because I want you to be happy.”
- **How might you express** the following with connection to vulnerability:

“You left your room a mess again; what is the matter with you? Are you just lazy?!”



# Protection vs. Punishment

- We should be aware, when force is used, whether it is protective or punitive
- When criminals are sent to jail or prison, is the goal to help them become better people and citizens, or is the goal to make them feel pain?
- Treating “misbehaving” children as guilty prisoners is also a mistake
- If the belief is that every person has the potential to contribute to those around them and to society, we should try to bring out the best in them
- **What is the benefit of protective as opposed to punitive restraint?**





# Liberation From Our Internal Programming

- We were raised in a “domination society”, separating people into bosses and followers, with inner messages focused on shame and self-blame
- Those inner conflicts divert our useable, positive energy, leading to anxiety and depression
- Focusing on our feelings and real needs, and expressing these, helps break the bonds of inner conflict
- Many problems we experience as humans result from a sense of separation: “I” as opposed to and separate from “You” or “Them”
- Empathy softens the illusion of separateness and allows healing.



**What inner message are you aware of that you play repeatedly and that does not serve you?**



# Summary

- **Nonviolent Communication** is based on empathy, and the desire to support that which alive in each of us
- Using practices that are in alignment with empathic understanding leads to increased connection and liberation from inner conflict
- We can always continue to learn





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