

Nonviolent (aka Needs-Based) Communication

Do you remember learning to talk? I don't. But I'm pretty sure I learned the way most humans do – imitating those around me. Just as naturally, we also tend to imitate the communication patterns of those around us. But when & where do we learn about all that drives *why* we communicate? And assuming we can answer that question, how closely do we look at whether or not it's working? Finally, are there methods we can experiment with for improved communication?

I first got interested in these questions some years ago when I came across Marshall Rosenberg, Ph.D., and **Non-Violent Communication (NVC)**. It's also commonly referred to as **Compassionate Communication** or **Needs-Based Communication**.

I find NVC to be a thorough and yet succinct and practical system for understanding human communication, with all its implications neurologically, culturally, historically, psychologically and linguistically. For now I just want to give you an introduction to the four core components comprising NVC, a process thousands of people have found to be transformative.

The Four Components of the NVC Process for Improving Communication:

1. Observation

First, identify (observe) the actual facts of a situation, free of any interpretation or evaluation. Example: When Sally came home, she walked through the room where I was sitting without speaking.

2. Feeling

Secondly, identify any feelings arising in response to the observation. Example: I felt annoyed and sad.

3. Needs

Third, identify what needs are connected to the feelings you've identified.

Example: My needs for connection and acknowledgment. *

4. Request

Fourth, address your needs and make a specific request expressing what you want from the other person to further enrich your life. Example: "Sally, would you be willing to greet me when you come home?"

Sally may then do one of three things: simply agree to your request; want to discuss your request; or decline your request. (Your response will reveal if your request was really a request, or actually a demand posing as a request! But that is another rich topic, one explored at length in NVC studies!)

The key point is this – communication becomes more satisfying and effective the more you identify & distinguish:

- (1) observations from interpretations; (2) feelings; (3) the needs the feelings point to; (4) make requests without demands

* In the NVC context, we are speaking of those universal needs common to all human beings – qualities that sustain life and make it more wonderful. As Lucy Leu writes in her NVC Companion Workbook: “Besides essential requirements for physical survival, such as air, food, sleep, etc., all human beings across all cultures share some basic needs (e.g. connection, autonomy, purpose, safety, respect, etc.) in order to thrive or to lead fulfilling lives and realize their human potential. We clearly distinguish these basic needs from more specific wants and desires that generate the strategies (specific to time, place, persons, or actions) by which we fulfill basic needs. These strategies and solutions are expressed through “requests” rather than identified as “needs” – a crucial distinction in NVC.”