

# NVC Instruction Guide

**(Note: Much of the information in this instruction guide draws extensively from the work of Marshall B. Rosenberg, Ph.D. as presented in his book, Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life. We strongly recommend that the best way to learn about Nonviolent Communication is to read the book and use the workbook in combination with this guide, as well as find a group of people with whom to practice these important skills. Throughout each section of this guide you will find references to particular sections from the book or from Lucy Leu's Companion Workbook. – Jiva Manske)**

## **Introduction: Nonviolence and NVC**

We live in a world in which violence has become more and more accepted as the norm. It's all around us. From wars between nations to crime on the street, and even imposing on our everyday existence, violence manifests itself both explicitly and implicitly. Yet for many people, the very idea of violence seems foreign. They are not involved in physical confrontations or abuses, and thus they believe that violence is not present. But the reality is that whenever we become disconnected from our compassionate nature, whenever our hearts are not devoid of hatred in all of its forms, we have a tendency to act in ways that can cause pain for everyone in our lives, including ourselves.

Nonviolence, then, does not refer to the mere absence of physical harm. It is a way of life that takes its lead from a compassionate and connected heart, and can guide us toward a more complete and happy way of being. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "Nonviolence is not a garment to be put on and off at will. Its seat is in the heart, and it must be an inseparable part of our very being." It is a practice rooted in understanding, in living honestly, and in acting empathically with all beings. Of course this starts with the self. We must first understand and act empathically towards ourselves in order to impact the world in wonderful and compassionate ways. This means cultivating nonviolence in every action and being present to our own needs and feelings in each and every moment.

Marshall Rosenberg realized the importance of nonviolence in every day life throughout his childhood and on into his adult and professional life. He understood how nonviolence could affect the world through the individual and through nurturing relationships on a personal level. Because of his experience with clinical psychology, comparative religion, and mediation, he was able to create Nonviolent Communication (NVC) as a very simple model for transforming everyday existence and for

practicing nonviolence. His trainings, which began in the 1960's, eventually grew into an institution, the Center for NVC, which was created in 1984 and which remains a vital resource for a turbulent world.

*What is NVC?* (Read Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life, Chapter 1)

NVC is a “language of life” that helps us to transform old patterns of defensiveness and aggressiveness into compassion and empathy and to improve the quality of all of our relationships. Studying and practicing NVC creates a foundation for learning about ourselves and our relationships in every moment, and helps us to remain focused on what is happening right here, right now. Although it is a model for communication, NVC helps us to realize just how important connection is in our lives. In fact, having the intention to connect with ourselves and others is one of the most important goals of practicing and living NVC. We live our lives from moment to moment, yet most of the time we are on autopilot, reacting out of habit rather than out of awareness and presence of mind. By creating a space for attention and respect in every moment, NVC helps create a pathway and a practice that is accessible and approachable.

### *The Model*

The basic model for NVC is really quite straightforward and simple. It is a process that combines four components with two parts. While the four components are specific ideas and actions that fit into the form and the model of NVC, the two parts provide a solid foundation for NVC as well as for living nonviolently. They are the basis for Marshall's ideas of giving and receiving from the heart. These brief definitions will be expounded further in the sections below:

#### Four Components

1. *Observation*: Observation without evaluation consists of noticing concrete things and actions around us. We learn to distinguish between *judgment* and *what we sense in the present moment*, and to simply observe what is there.
1. *Feeling*: When we notice things around us, we inevitably experience varying emotions and physical sensations in each particular moment. Here, distinguishing feelings from thoughts is an essential step to the NVC process.
1. *Needs*: All individuals have needs and values that sustain and enrich their lives. When those needs are met, we experience

comfortable feelings, like happiness or peacefulness, and when they are not, we experience uncomfortable feelings, like frustration. Understanding that we, as well as those around us, have these needs is perhaps the most important step in learning to practice NVC and to live empathically.

1. *Request*: To make clear and present requests is crucial to NVC's transformative mission. When we learn to request concrete actions that can be carried out in the present moment, we begin to find ways to cooperatively and creatively ensure that everyone's needs are met.

### Two Parts

1. *Empathy*: Receiving from the heart creates a means to connect with others and share experiences in a truly life enriching way. Empathy goes beyond compassion, allowing us to put ourselves into another's shoes to sense the same feelings and understand the same needs; in essence, being open and available to what is alive in others. It also gives us the means to remain present to and aware of our own needs and the needs of others even in extreme situations that are often difficult to handle.
1. *Honesty*: Giving from the heart has its root in honesty. Honesty begins with truly understanding ourselves and our own needs, and being in tune with what is alive in us in the present moment. When we learn to give ourselves empathy, we can start to break down the barriers to communication that keep us from connecting with others.

From these four components and two parts, Marshall has created a model for life enriching communication that can be highly effective in solving conflict with our family members, with our friends, with our coworkers, and with ourselves. The basic outline of the model is the following:

When I see that \_\_\_\_\_  
I feel \_\_\_\_\_  
because my need for \_\_\_\_\_ is/is not met.  
Would you be willing to \_\_\_\_\_?

Keep in mind that this is just a model, and that using this form and this language is not the most important aspect of NVC. In fact, as you

practice more and learn more, you'll begin to notice that all four of these components can be present in the complete absence of the form.

### *Learning and Using NVC*

Like nonviolence, itself, NVC is a practice that we must constantly pursue and refine. This guide is meant to present NVC in a simple and clear way that is accessible to everybody who is interested in the mission and projects of the Peace Army of Costa Rica. For beginners, we recommend that you work slowly, carefully, and consciously through each chapter, spending a week on each so that you can integrate the information and the model into your being. We recommend that if you are familiar with NVC, it is still important to review the basic ideas of the model now and again, and we have also tried to provide sections on specific situations that come up in everyday life. Yet because this presentation is so simple it is important to use other resources in conjuncture with practice groups and training sessions. The primary resources that you will need for introducing yourself to NVC are the following:

Leu, Lucy. Nonviolent Communication: Companion Workbook. Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press, 2003.

Rosenberg, Marshall. Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life. Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press, 2003.

You can get these resources through The Center for Nonviolent Communication (<http://www.cnvc.org/matls.htm>).

Finding or creating a practice group is also important in order to share the experience of learning NVC with others. These are settings in which it is easy to learn from other students, as well as certified trainers, and some trainers offer many different options, depending on familiarity with the concepts and practice of NVC. To find an NVC practice group in your area, [click here](#).

### *Practice—Feeling Peace*

The Institute of Heartmath has done extensive research to develop a theory that when all of our organs are working together in simultaneous rhythm, our minds and our emotions tend to be more stable. More specifically, when the rhythm of our heart beat remains even, we are able to think more clearly and feel more present in every moment and in every action. This is called entrainment. This is a quick, easy practice that will help you familiarize yourself with entrainment, as well as help you get ready for your study and practice of NVC either by yourself or in a group setting.

Remember, you can use this in any situation as a way to focus on the present moment.

1. Find a quiet, comfortable place to sit, where you will not be disturbed.
2. Begin by making yourself comfortable and begin to notice your breathing. You can do this with your eyes open or closed. Breathe normally and smoothly, without straining to take deep breaths, and notice how it feels to be present and aware of your body. If your mind begins to wander, gently bring your focus back to your breath.
3. Move your awareness over your body, and notice how you are feeling as you sit. Move through your body, from your toes, up through your legs, to your torso and through your head, and just take stock of how you feel. Focusing on your breath, notice what emotions are present right now.
4. Keeping your focus on your breath, allow yourself to become aware of your heart. As you do this, remember a specific event or a specific person that brings you a sense of appreciation. Allow that feeling of appreciation to wash over your being as you sit. If your mind begins to wander, gently refocus on your breath, and return to your feeling of appreciation.

*Individual Practice*—Read Chapter 1 in Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life

-Throughout the course of the week, begin to notice how you are feeling, and when your needs are or are not met. Notice when you are acting with empathy and honesty in your relationships with yourself and with others, and begin to see the place for nonviolence in everyday existence.

-Consider the need for contribution (link), which Marshall calls the most important human need of all. Write the word on an index card or piece of paper and put it in a place where you will see it at least twice each day, perhaps on your bathroom mirror. In the morning, connect with your need to contribute and consider how you might enjoy meeting that need during the day. In the evening, before bed, consider how you did or did not meet your need for contribution without self-judgment.

-Suggested Practice—Read and do individual assignments in the Companion Workbook, pgs 57-60.

*Group Practice*—Review Chapter 1 in Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life

- Review answers to individual exercises
- Companion Workbook pgs. 61-64

### **NVC Instruction Guide**

In this guide we will follow the first few chapters of Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life. Our hope is to simplify and present the model in a very straightforward way to make NVC easy to learn. In essence, this is a study guide for the basic skills and knowledge that are needed to begin to practice NVC and allow it to become a transformative part of our lives. For aspiring trainers, it is useful to have the Companion Workbook handy, for it provides many interesting exercises that can help to deepen understanding. Also, after each practice group, it is important to gather feedback from participants about the structure of the group and each activity that you have done. Since every person has a different learning style and every group has a different dynamic, it is important to be responsive to the needs of each.

### Communication That Blocks Compassion

(Read Ch. 2 in Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life)

Violence is pervasive. It is not simply what we see in action movies or the grisly details of the evening news reports. Instead, it is a much more intricate concept that manifests itself in subtle ways that oftentimes go unnoticed. Starting to understand just how violence can manifest itself on such a small, personal level, and realizing that violence is much more prevalent than we might expect is the first step toward beginning to comprehend and practice a life of nonviolence.

In particular, Marshall talks extensively about the idea of “Life-Alienating Communication,” which blocks us from connecting with ourselves and with others. For Marshall, these types of language “alienate us from our natural state of compassion” (pg. 15), and thus contribute to violence by leading us to states of mind in which it is more likely that we become defensive or aggressive. The four main types of life-alienating communication can be described as the Four D’s: Diagnosis, Denial of responsibility, Demand, and Deserve. The first two are very concrete, and provide a foundation for the other forms of life-alienating communication that are found in the book and here. Notice how each builds on the others, and how they all contribute to our daily experience of life-alienating

communication.

### *Diagnosis*

*Moralistic judgments* are statements or thoughts that imply *goodness* or *badness*. It is the implication that someone *is* something else. Similarly, when we make *comparisons* between our own situation and that of others, we are making a judgment, and rather than focusing on the absolute qualities of others, we are focused inward to criticize, saying that we or they are not good enough. In truth, there will always be people who are better at some things than others. But dwelling on these differences can hinder connection and other life-enriching prospects. It is as easy to fall into these patterns of life-alienating communication as it is to see why they can impede our intention to connect with empathy and honesty. When we use labels, we trap ourselves and others into categories from which it is very difficult to break free. This can lead to a very superficial understanding of others, and can make communicating and meeting our needs nearly impossible. As Marshall says,

It is my belief that all such analyses of other human beings are tragic expressions of our own values and needs. They are tragic because, when we express our values and needs in this form, we increase defensiveness and resistance to them among the very people whose behaviors are of concern to us. Or, if they do agree to act in harmony with our values because they concur with our analysis of their wrongness, they will likely do so out of fear, guilt, or shame (pg 16).

Responses that are based on fear, guilt, or shame, rather than those based on empathy, can lead to difficulties and unwanted consequences. In fact, these types of judgments can promote violence, for it classifies and differentiates between people rather than focusing on what we share as human beings living together in the world. “At the root of much, if not all violence...is a kind of thinking that attributes the cause of conflict to wrongness in one’s adversaries, and a corresponding inability to think of oneself or others in terms of vulnerability.” Moralistic judgments simultaneously deny responsibility for violent actions and make those very same actions acceptable and even laudable. Instead, we need to be aware that our judgments are a reflection of our own values, and in turn we must take responsibility for how we feel.

Exercise: Change the following statements from moralistic

judgments to expressions of compassion that include our value judgments.

Ex. Violence is bad. People who kill others are evil.

*I am fearful of the use of violence to resolve conflicts; I value the resolution of human conflicts through other means.*

- a. My teacher is mean. She assigns too much homework.
- b. My boss is unreasonable. He always expects so much out of me.
- c. I hate how needy my girlfriend is. She calls way too much.

### *Denial of Responsibility*

We spend much of our life doing what we think we “have to” do. We have to go to school. We have to do our homework. We have to get a job. We have to go to work. At the same time, many of these “obligations” seem to “make us feel” in certain ways. When we use this language, it only serves to reinforce the *denial of responsibility* that is so inherent in much of our lives. We are conditioned to accept these situations and these consequences, but in the process we forget that we remain individual, autonomous, and empowered beings who are still able to make the choices that govern our lives. And when we deny responsibility we are less likely to see ways that we can contribute to ourselves and others, and we can become frustrated or annoyed with our existence as it seems to slip further and further from our control. This, in turn, can lead to conflict, especially when we are working or living closely with other people. Facilitating a change from this language that denies responsibility to language that acknowledges responsibility contributes to living and communicating with empathy and honesty.

Types of Denial of Responsibility (From pg. 20)	Example
Vague Impersonal Forces	“I cleaned my room because I had to.”
Our condition, diagnosis, personal or psychological history	“I drink because I’m an alcoholic.”
The actions of others	“I hit my child because he ran into the street.”
The dictates of authority	“I lied to the client because the boss

Group pressure	told me to.” “I stared smoking because all my friends did.”
Institutional policies, rules, and regulations	“I have to suspend you for this infraction because it’s the school policy.”
Gender roles, social roles, or age roles	“I hate going to work, but I do it because I am a husband and a father.”
Uncontrollable impulses	“I was overcome by my urge to eat the candy bar.”

Exercise: Replace the above examples with language that acknowledges responsibility, using the form

I choose to \_\_\_\_\_ because I want \_\_\_\_\_.

### *Demand*

There are many instances when we articulate our desires as demands, especially when we are in positions of relative authority. The most important concept here, though, as Marshall says, is that “we can never really make anybody else do something, we can only make them wish they had.” We have already learned that in order to connect it is important to take responsibility for our actions, and this also applies to trying to influence the actions of others. They, too, always have a choice, and many times when we try to make others act in certain ways, it seems to lead to less, not more connection. As we learn more about NVC, we will start to discover new ways to use language to get the things that we want and still meet everyone’s needs. Whereas a demand implies the threat of punishment, criticism, or blame and tends to result in reactions based on fear, guilt, and shame, a request is something that we can make from the heart and with empathy for the feelings and needs of our listener. This is a concept that is an intricate part of the NVC model, and will be discussed in much more detail later.

### *Deserve*

We have been conditioned to believe that we will get what we deserve. If we work hard, we deserve to make money and spend it however we would like to. If we break the law, we deserve to be punished. Of course, although these ideas sound good on paper, they are rarely what actually happen in real life. Not everyone gets what he or she “deserves.” And when we think we are not getting what we deserve, we tend to disconnect from our unmet needs and lapse into blame or criticism. But the

very idea of “deserve” is clearly a mode of life-alienating communication, mixing Diagnosis with Denial of responsibility at every turn. When someone “deserves” something else, like a criminal “deserves” punishment, it removes all responsibility for *our own* thoughts and actions from the picture.

When we use this language, we are lapsing into a judgment that moves us further from connecting with what is truly alive in us and in another person in the moment, and it blinds us from our own feelings and needs. It is also this kind of thinking that tends to be a benchmark for any domination culture, which leads to enormous suffering, both self-inflicted and from others. By allowing ourselves to get sucked into the mindset that certain things *deserve* to happen, we ignore reality and accept the status quo. It is such a subtle idea and yet so deep-seated within our mentalities that for most of us, we use this language and think these thoughts unconsciously. Yet if we learn to stay present to and aware of what is alive in us in the moment, and learn to understand our feelings and our needs, we will begin to take responsibility for our own situation as well as develop the necessary tools to transform ourselves and our surroundings.

We have seen in this section that there are many forms of communication that we all use in everyday life that serve to alienate us from what we are feeling and what we are needing, and impede us from communicating and connecting with empathy and honesty. These are, in fact, ways in which the violence that pervades our society has found a way into our lives below our radar. This week, pay special attention to the Four D’s and how they appear in your own conversations and in the language of others. View this as an opportunity to connect with what is alive in yourself and in those around you, and keep in mind that it is important to remain gentle with yourself and stay present even as we feel tempted to use life-alienating communication on ourselves. It may help to keep a journal of examples of when these four examples of life-alienating communication come up in your life.

### *Individual Practice*

-Exercise (From Companion Workbook, pg. 66): Write down a dialogue (of about 6-8 lines) that isn’t going well between two people. It could be a dialogue between you and another person in your own life (but it does not have to be). After you have completed writing down the lines, re-read them and determine if either person has communicated using one of the Four D’s.

-This week, consider the need for learning (link). Write the word on an index card or piece of paper and put it in a place where you will see it at least twice each day, perhaps on your bathroom mirror. In the morning, connect with your need for learning and consider how you might enjoy meeting that need during the day. In the evening, before bed, consider how you did or did not meet your need for learning without self-judgment.

-Suggested Practice—Other exercises from Companion Workbook, pgs. 66-67

*Group Practice*—Review Chapter 2 in Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life

-Review answers to individual exercises

-Companion Workbook pgs. 67-71

Observing Without Evaluating

(Read Ch. 3 in Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life)

We embark on the transformative path of NVC now that we have begun to realize just how life-alienating communication permeates our lives. The first component in the model, then, is observation without evaluation. This component helps us to remain in the present moment, focusing on what concrete, specific things, events, and actions are stimulating us to feel and need. In fact, “the Indian philosopher J. Krishnamurti once remarked that observing without evaluating is the highest form of human intelligence” (pg. 28). It denotes a fuller consciousness and a fuller awareness of the world around us. Noticing what we are seeing, feeling, touching, hearing, and smelling and separating those things from our own limited interpretations, opinions, and evaluations can help us to understand each situation more deeply, and guide us along the path toward connecting with what is alive in the moment with empathy and honesty.

As we have already seen, much of the language that we use in our daily existence falls into the trap of one or more of the Four D’s. Now, we can start to see that many of the times when any of those forms of life-alienating communication sneak into our language, we are mixing evaluations with our observations. When we use this kind of language, people tend to hear criticism, even if that is not our intention, and as we all know, hearing criticism can lead to defensiveness or aggression. Separating evaluations from our observations, on the other hand, allows us to stay present and connect using concrete examples and situations. It allows us to

recognize the constantly changing state of the world without generalizing and falling into the Four D's.

Here is a list of situations and examples of how evaluation can become mixed up with our observations:

Distinguishing Observations from Evaluations (pgs. 30-31).

Communication	Example of observation with evaluation mixed in	Example of observation separate from evaluation
1. Use of the Verb <i>to be</i> without indication that the evaluator accepts responsibility for the evaluation	You are too generous.	When I see you give all your lunch money to others I think you are being too generous.
2. Use of verbs with evaluative connotations	Juan Enrique procrastinates.	Doug only studies for exams the night before.
3. Implication that one's inferences about another person's thoughts, feelings, intentions, or desires are the only ones possible	She won't get her work in.	I don't think she'll get her work in.
4. Confusion of prediction with certainty	If you don't eat balanced meals, you'll be unhealthy.	<i>Or</i> She said, "I won't get my work in." If you don't eat balanced meals, I fear that your health may be impaired.
5. Failure to be specific about referents	Nicaraguens don't take care of their property.	I have not seen the family living in that house clean up the yard in a long time.
6. Use of words denoting ability without indicating that an evaluation is being made.	Ronaldo is a poor soccer player	Ronaldo has not scored a goal in 20 games.
7. Use of adverb and adjectives in ways that do not signify an evaluation has been made	Alfonso is ugly.	Alfonso's looks don't appeal to me.

As you can see, when we generalize or exaggerate, it is easy to hear these

statements as attacks, which can obviously hinder, rather than support connecting with what is alive in us. Thus, it is important to stay away from words like always, never, ever, whenever, frequently, and seldom, and rather stick with specific examples and specific situations to examine how and why we are feeling *right now* (pg. 31).

In this section we have learned that when we mix evaluations with our observations, we risk being heard as attacking or criticizing when that may not be our intent. We have also learned that using specific language to describe exactly what is going on in particular situations is useful for connection. As before, use this week to notice the times when you are mixing evaluations with your observations (observe your observations!). Throughout each day of the week, pick moments and stop to just observe. It could be when you're standing in line or sitting in traffic or when you're with family or friends. Whenever you remember to do this, take a few seconds to focus on your breathing. Notice what you see around you; notice the colors and the textures of objects, and how people or things are moving. Notice what you smell, hear and taste. Notice what thoughts and feelings come up. Even only 5 minutes each day can be a helpful practice to get into and can increase your mindfulness and awareness of the present moment. It may also be helpful to write these experiences down and then go back and notice where evaluations have crept into your statements.

### *Individual Practice*

-Exercise 1: Observation or Evaluation? (From Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life, pgs. 34-35)

Are these statements observations, or evaluations? For any statement that is an observation mixed with evaluation, how would we remove the evaluation?

Ex. John was angry with me yesterday for no reason.

*This is an observation mixed with and evaluation, and could be changed to "John told me he was angry yesterday."*

1. Yesterday evening, Nancy bit her fingernails while watching television.
2. Sam didn't ask for my opinion during the meeting.
3. My father is a good man.
4. Janice works too much.
5. Henry is aggressive.
6. Pam was first in line every day this week.
7. My son often doesn't brush his teeth.

8. Luke told me I didn't look good in yellow.
9. My aunt complains when I talk to her.

-Exercise (From Companion Workbook, pg 73-74): Go back through the table of forms of communication above, and think of an example of each that mixes observation with evaluation. Then, change that example to make sure that evaluation is not mixed with observation.

-Consider the need for clarity (link). Write the word on an index card or piece of paper and put it in a place where you will see it at least twice each day, perhaps on your bathroom mirror. In the morning, connect with your need for clarity and consider how you might enjoy meeting that need during the day. In the evening, before bed, consider how you did or did not meet your need for clarity without self-judgment.

-Suggested Practice—Other exercises in Companion Workbook, pg 73-74

### *Group Practice*—Review Chapter 3 in Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life

- Review answers to individual exercises
- Companion Workbook pgs. 75-79

### Identifying and Expressing Feelings

(Read Ch. 4 in Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life)

The second component in our NVC model is learning to identify and express our feelings. We live in a society that does not value expressing our feelings. Instead, we are conditioned from early in our lives to act and feel in certain ways depending on each particular situation in which we find ourselves. Because teachers, parents, or friends tell us that we need to be strong and solve our problems for ourselves, or that getting upset and acting on our feelings will only increase conflict, we tend to bottle our emotions. However, although we may have misplaced the necessary vocabulary to express how we are feeling, the sentiments themselves have certainly not disappeared. As we ignore our emotions, or at the very least fail to express them in a coherent way, conflict tends to escalate as we lose our ability to connect. Since the most important part to connection is being open to what is alive in us and expressing ourselves with empathy and honesty. In fact, “expressing our vulnerability can help resolve conflicts” (pg. 40), for if we

are in touch with our feelings and are able to express them to others, we can begin to get to the root of conflict. We need to rediscover a vocabulary that can express how we are feeling in a particular moment, helping us to connect with the people that we care about.

*Distinguishing Feelings from Thoughts*

Whenever we begin a sentence with, “I feel...” we are not necessarily communicating a feeling. Although this may seem counterintuitive at first, with a little thought and a little practice, this idea soon becomes crystal clear. In fact, we can easily notice that throughout our day, we hear “I feel...” quite a bit, and usually *without* attaching a feeling to the end. For example, “I feel like learning NVC can be really difficult,” does not clearly express a feeling. Perhaps what we are really trying to communicate here is that “I feel frustrated because some of the concepts of NVC are different from what I’m used to.” This expresses more concretely what exactly is going on for us in the moment. Marshall identifies three primary situations when we might confuse feelings with thoughts in everyday speech (pg. 41-43):

	<i>Distinguishing between WHAT WE FEEL and WHAT WE THINK</i>	<i>Distinguishing between WHAT WE FEEL and WHAT WE THINK we are</i>	<i>Distinguishing between WHAT WE FEEL and HOW WE THINK others react or behave toward us</i>
Indicators	<b>Words</b> like <i>that, like, as if</i> ; <b>pronouns</b> like <i>I, you, he, she, it</i> ; or <b>names</b>	Description of <b>what we think</b> we are.	Description of <b>how we think</b> others are behaving
Examples	“I feel <i>that</i> you should know better.” “I feel <i>it</i> is useless.” “I feel <i>my boss</i> is being manipulative.”	“I feel <i>inadequate</i> as a guitar player.”	“I feel <i>unimportant</i> .” “I feel <i>misunderstood</i> .” “I feel <i>ignored</i> .”
Example of	“I feel <i>frustrated</i> ”	“I feel <i>impatient</i> ”	“I feel <i>sad</i> .”

expression with feelings	that we are having such difficulty connecting.”	with myself as a guitar player.”	“I feel <i>anxious</i> .” “I feel <i>hurt</i> .”
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Aside from confusing feelings with thoughts, one of the most difficult traps to keep from falling into is using language that describes how we think others are behaving towards us, rather than our actual feelings. But, as we already learned in our discussion of the Four D’s, it is important to take responsibility for what is going on in our own lives. To that effect, the following is a list of words, like *ignored* or *unimportant*, that we often use to describe how we interpret others behavior, rather than being present to our actual feelings:

(From Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life, pg. 43).

Abandoned	Cheated	Intimidated	Overworked	Rejected	Unheard
Abused	Cornered	Let down	Patronized	Taken for	Unseen
Attacked	Diminished	Manipulated	Pressured	granted	Unsupported
Betrayed	Distrusted	Misunderstood	Provoked	Threatened	Unwanted
Bullied	Interrupted	Neglected	Put down	Unappreciated	Used

### *Expressing Our Feelings*

The most important thing to take from this is an ability to distinguish between our feelings and our thoughts. This is part of being present and open to what is alive in us in the moment. Building on the idea of observation without evaluation, we can begin to see just how important it is to be aware of our internal experiences and to be able to express ourselves honestly. In order to be more aware of our feelings, we must begin to build a vocabulary to describe exactly how we feel in the moment better than simply saying, “I feel good,” or “I feel bad.” These statements are vague and general. The following lists express how *specifically* we might be feeling when our needs are or are not being met. Remember, to use these words in your language you do not have to use the words, “I feel...” You might simply say, “I am sad...”

How we are likely to feel when our needs “are” being met (Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life, pg. 44)

Absorbed	Cheerful	Encouraged	Glowing	Merry	Secure
Adventurous	Comfortable	Energetic	Grateful	Mirthful	Sensitive
Affectionate	Complacent	Engrossed	Gratified	Moved	Serene
Alert	Composed	Enlivened	Happy	Optimistic	Spellbound

Alive	Concerned	Enthusiastic	Helpful	Overjoyed	Splendid
Amazed	Confident	Excited	Hopeful	Peaceful	Stimulated
Amused	Contented	Exhilarated	Inquisitive	Perky	Surprised
Animated	Cool	Expansive	Inspired	Pleasant	Tender
Appreciative	Curious	Expectant	Intense	Pleased	Thankful
Ardent	Dazzled	Exultant	Interested	Proud	Thrilled
Aroused	Delighted	Fascinated	Intrigued	Quiet	Touched
Astonished	Eager	Free	Invigorated	Radiant	Tranquil
Blissful	Ebullient	Friendly	Involved	Rapturous	Trusting
Breathless	Ecstatic	Fulfilled	Joyous	Refreshed	Upbeat
Buoyant	Effervescent	Glad	Jubilant	Relaxed	Warm
Calm	Elated	Gleeful	Loving	Relieved	Wonderful
Carefree	Enchanted	Glorious	Mellow	Satisfied	Zestful

How we are likely to feel when our needs “are not” being met (Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life, pg. 45-46)

Afraid	Confused	Downhearted	Hostile	Nettled	Startled
Aggravated	Cool	Dull	Hot	Numb	Surprised
Agitated	Cross	Edgy	Humdrum	Overwhelmed	Suspicious
Alarmed	Dejected	Embarrassed	Hurt	Panicky	Tepid
Aloof	Depressed	Exasperated	Impatient	Passive	Terrified
Angry	Despairing	Exhausted	Intense	Perplexed	Tired
Anguished	Despondent	Fatigued	Irate	Pessimistic	Troubled
Annoyed	Detached	Fearful	Irritated	Puzzled	Uncomfortable
Anxious	Disaffected	Fidgety	Jealous	Reluctant	Uneasy
Apathetic	Disenchanted	Forlorn	Jittery	Repelled	Unglued
Apprehensive	Disappointed	Frightened	Lazy	Resentful	Unhappy
Ashamed	Discouraged	Frustrated	Leery	Restless	Unnerved
Beat	Disgruntled	Furious	Lethargic	Sad	Unsteady
Bewildered	Disgusted	Gloomy	Listless	Scared	Upset
Bitter	Disheartened	Guilty	Lonely	Sensitive	Uptight
Blue	Dismayed	Harried	Mad	Shocked	Vexed
Bored	Displeased	Heavy	Mean	Skeptical	Weary
Brokenhearted	Disquieted	Helpless	Miserable	Sleepy	Withdrawn
Chagrined	Distressed	Hesitant	Morose	Sorrowful	Woeful
Cold	Disturbed	Horrorified	Mournful	Sorry	Worried
Concerned	Downcast	Horrible	Nervous	Spiritless	Wretched

This week we have continued to build our model of NVC by adding the second component: feelings. Being in touch with our feelings and

expressing them with openness and honesty helps us connect with ourselves and with others. Throughout the course of the week, take several moments each day to stop and notice how you are feeling. Stop and focus on your physical sensations, allowing yourself to integrate into the presence of the moment. Then, just observe your feelings without judgment. How do you feel? How do you know what you are feeling? Where do you focus in order to know? Again, it may be helpful to write these things down in your journal. These are important skills for remaining present and for connecting with yourself to express your feelings, as well as for understanding others.

### *Individual Practice*

#### -Exercise 2: Expressing Feelings

(From Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life, pg. 47)

Do the following statements express a feeling? If not, how would you change it to verbally express how you are feeling?

Example: "I feel you don't love me."

*"I feel sad because my need for connection with you is not met."*

- a. "I'm sad that you're leaving."
- b. "I feel scared when you say that."
- c. "When you don't greet me, I feel neglected."
- d. "I'm happy that you can come."
- e. "You're disgusting."
- f. "I feel like hitting you."
- g. "I feel misunderstood."
- h. "I feel good about what you did for me."
- i. "I'm worthless."

-Exercise (From Companion Workbook, pg. 82). Start your own inventory of feelings. Think of a situation in which all of your needs are met. Notice what that looks like, including where you would be, how your surroundings would look, what tastes, smells, and sounds you would be hearing. Now, close your eyes and imagine yours in that exact situation. Really allow yourself to enter that state of being completely, and see, hear, smell, and touch what is around you. What feelings come up? Write down in a journal what comes up for you, then repeat the same process using a situation in which your needs are not met. You can continually add to this list of feelings as time goes on, and feel free to use the lists above as a guide.

- Consider the need for connection (link). Write the word on an

index card or piece of paper and put it in a place where you will see it at least twice each day, perhaps on your bathroom mirror. In the morning, be aware of and present to your need for connection and consider how you might enjoy meeting that need during the day. In the evening, before bed, consider how you did or did not meet your need for connection without self-judgment.

-Suggested practice—Companion Workbook, pgs. 81-82 If there

Group Practice—Review Chapter 4 in Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life

-Review answers to individual exercises

-Companion Workbook pgs. 83-86

Taking Responsibility For Our Feelings

(Read Chapter 5 in Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life)

The third component in the NVC model is to become aware of the universal human needs of ourselves and others. Needs are the resources that we require to sustain and enrich our lives. Every person has needs, and whether or not our needs are met determines how we feel. If our needs are being met, we tend to experience comfortable feelings, and if our needs are not being met, we tend to experience uncomfortable feelings. However, much of the time we tend to think that our feelings are caused by someone or something else. When hear what someone else says as blame or criticism, for example, we tend to think that this criticism *makes* us feel bad. But NVC teaches us to take responsibility for our own feelings, thoughts, and actions, and to be present with what is alive in us. So, it is important to realize that although others can provide a *stimulus* for our feelings, they can never be the *cause*. We have a choice about how we hear criticism or other negative messages. Marshall identifies four options (pgs. 49-50):

Four Options for Receiving Negative Messages

Options	Example Response	Results
Blaming or criticizing ourselves (“Jackal Ears In”)	“Oh, I should’ve been more _____.”	Great cost to our self-esteem: feelings like guilt, shame, depression...
Blaming or criticizing others	“You are _____!”	Anger, defensiveness, aggression

(“Jackal Ears Out”)

Sensing our own feelings and needs (“Giraffe Ears In”)

“When I hear you say\_\_\_\_\_, I feel\_\_\_\_\_ because I need\_\_\_\_\_.”

Communication with openness and honesty that can result in meeting our needs.

Sensing others’ feelings and needs (“Giraffe Ears Out”)

“Are you feeling\_\_\_\_\_ because you need\_\_\_\_\_.”

Communication with openness and empathy that can result in connection.

The giraffe is a symbol of NVC because it is the animal with the biggest heart. Thus, when we are thinking and acting in terms of NVC, we are using our “Giraffe Ears” to sense either our own needs or others’ feelings and needs. Conversely, the jackal is the scavenger, attacking our weaknesses and allowing our unmet needs to cloud our ability to stay present, and therefore when we are listening with “Jackal Ears” we tend to hear blame or criticism rather than the feelings and needs behind words.

Exercise: Think of a situation in which you’ve received message you didn’t like. How would you respond using each of the 4 options above?

### *Staying Present*

Taking responsibility for our feelings and being aware of our needs can create a pathway for giving from the heart. In fact, sensing our own feelings and needs, as well as sensing others’ feelings and needs is the most essential component of NVC. It enables us to stop for a second and stay present with ourselves and with other people. There will be more exercises and opportunities to practice these skills below, but for now we can simply understand that if it is our intention to connect with what is alive in ourselves, or in someone else, we are practicing NVC. As long as we remain present to the feelings and needs that are coming up for each of us, we have a chance to connect and resolve conflict without being motivated by fear, guilt, or shame.

Notice that throughout much of our NVC model, the goal is to transform general statements to reflect *specific* observations, feelings, and needs (and later, requests). Here are some generalized speech patterns that deny responsibility for our feelings and needs

(From pg. 52)

Words or Phrases that include...

Example

---

impersonal pronouns such as “it” or “that” “That bugs me a lot.”  
 a focus on the actions of others “I’m hurt when you don’t call.”  
 “I feel \_\_\_\_\_ because you, he, she, they, it...” “I feel angry because she lied.”

Exercise: Connect your feeling with your need.

Think of a situation when you had a distinct feeling. Now, what caused that feeling? Use the form “I feel \_\_\_\_\_ because I \_\_\_\_\_.”

*Needs vs. Strategies*

When we start to take responsibility for our feelings and begin to express our needs, we are much more likely to have those needs met. How can someone help us to meet our needs if we are disconnect from them, ourselves? We are socialized to put the needs of others ahead of our own, just as we are conditioned to ignore our feelings. Yet when we ignore our own needs, they are likely to continue to go unmet, causing our discomfort to intensify, and reducing our connection with ourselves and with others. We start lapsing into language and thoughts that focus more and more on the Four D’s, and we spiral further and further away from a state of being that might lead to meeting those needs. Thus, being clear with ourselves and with others about how we are feeling and what we are needing is an essential step for reducing and resolving conflict. So, now we can build a vocabulary of needs:

Needs (From pgs. 54-55)

Acceptance	Community	Exercise	Interdependence	Protection	Shelter
Air	Consideration	Food	Laughter	Reassurance	Support
Appreciation	Contribution	Fun	Love	Respect	Touch
Authenticity	Creativity	Harmony	Meaning	Rest	Trust
Beauty	Emotional	Honesty	Movement	Self-worth	Understanding
Celebration	safety	Inspiration	Order	Sexual	Warmth
Closeness	Empathy	Integrity	Peace	expression	Water

All of these words represent essential and integral parts of our being. And yet they make no reference to any specific person doing any specific thing. When we are speaking of specific actions we are pointing to strategies that might fulfill a need. This is an important distinction, especially as we begin to realize that sometimes there are many different strategies that could help us meet our needs.

Exercise: Think of a time when your needs were unmet. How were you feeling, and what needs, specifically were

unmet? What did you do to try to meet those needs? Think of three different strategies that might also have contributed to meeting your needs.

### *Emotional Slavery and Emotional Liberation*

Though this sounds like a simple practice, transforming ourselves and breaking free of old patterns is anything but easy. It is a process that takes practice, patience, and time. Although learning the model of NVC can be frustrating at times, it is helpful to track our progress as we learn, and it can be encouraging to know that these concepts do not come easily to many people. Thus, Marshall has identified 3 stages of the path to emotional liberation.

(From Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life, pg. 57-60)

Stage	Characteristics
1. Emotional Slavery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>. Taking responsibility for others' feelings</li><li>. Striving to keep everyone happy</li><li>. Risks others becoming burdensome</li></ul>
2. Obnoxious	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>. Awareness of the costs of emotional slavery</li><li>. Anger—remnants of fear, guilt, and shame about our own needs</li><li>. We are not responsible <i>for</i> others' needs and feelings, but don't know how to respond <i>to</i> them</li></ul>
3. Emotional Liberation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>. Respond to others out of compassion</li><li>. Take responsibility for our feelings and needs</li><li>. State clearly what we need while taking into account the needs and feelings of others.</li></ul>

This week we have continued to build our model of NVC by adding the third component: needs. NVC helps us to create a space and the resources to develop our emotional liberation. We learn to stay present to what is alive in us and respond to others with empathy, taking responsibility for our own feelings and needs. Throughout the course of the week you will encounter situations in which you experience distinct feelings. When you notice these come up for you, take a moment to realize what is causing those feelings. Remember to distinguish between a *stimulus*, an outside event, and the *cause*—the met or unmet needs—behind the feelings. This will help you develop along the path to emotional liberation and stay connected and present with what is alive in you.

*Individual Practice*

-Exercise 3: Acknowledging Needs

(From Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life, pg. 65)

Do the following statements acknowledge responsibility for a need? If not, how would you change it to verbally express responsibility for our needs?

Example: "You irritate me when you leave company documents on the conference room floor."

*"I'm irritated when you leave company documents on the conference room floor, because my needs for safety and order are not being met."*

- a. "I feel angry when you say that, because I am wanting respect and I hear your words as an insult."
- b. "I feel frustrated when you come late."
- c. "I'm sad that you won't be coming for dinner because I was hoping we could spend the evening together."
- d. "I feel disappointed because you said you would do it and you didn't."
- e. "I'm discouraged because I would have liked to have progressed further in my work by now."
- f. "Little things people say sometimes hurt me."
- g. "I feel happy that you received that award."
- h. "I feel scared when you raise your voice."
- i. "I am grateful that you offered me a ride because I was needing to get home before my children."

-Exercise (From Companion Workbook, pg. 88): Identify a specific situation in your own life where your need for the following was or was not being met. Use the form "I feel \_\_\_\_\_ because my need for \_\_\_\_\_ is/is not being met."

- a. autonomy
- b. celebration
- c. integrity
- d. understanding from others
- e. understanding of others
- f. community

g. peace

- Consider the need for autonomy (link). Write the word on an index card or piece of paper and put it in a place where you will see it at least twice each day, perhaps on your bathroom mirror. In the morning, connect with your need for autonomy and consider how you might enjoy meeting that need during the day. In the evening, before bed, consider how you did or did not meet your need for autonomy without self-judgment.

-Suggested practice—Companion Workbook, pgs. 87-89.

*Group Practice*—Review Chapter 5 in Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life

-Review answers to individual exercises

-Companion Workbook pgs. 90-93

Requesting that which Would Enrich Life

(Read Chapter 6 in Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life)

Once we have learned to understand and express our feelings and needs, we can start to figure out how to get our needs met. The fourth and final component in the NVC model is learning to make clear and present requests. We already ask for things throughout the day, from passing the salt at dinner to helping out around the house and at the office. But much of the time we use language that is vague or general, even when we think we are being clear. Similarly, we often ask others *not* to do something, without actually revealing exactly what it is that we would like. This week we will learn how to request those things that will enrich our life by asking what someone *is willing to do right now*. And, we will learn how to make a request without making a demand.

*Making Requests*

The following are some guidelines for making sure that we are requesting something concrete that can happen right now.

(From Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life, pgs. 67-74).

	Counterexample	Example
Use Positive Action Language	“I wish you wouldn’t spend so much time at work.”	“Would you be willing to spend at least one night a week at home?”

Use Clear, Concrete Language	“Would you please take some responsibility?”	“Would you be willing to take out the trash?”
Make Conscious Requests: Be clear about what you want right now	“I’m annoyed that you forgot the groceries I asked you to pick up for dinner.”	“Would you be willing to go back to the store now and get the groceries?”

One of the keys to being present to our feelings and our needs is expressing ourselves in clear and present language. Thus, when making a request it is important to understand and express what we *want* rather than what we do not want, offering a clear way for someone else to help enrich our life. Being specific about our requests will in turn help us embark on a path toward getting our needs met and connecting with another person with openness, empathy, and honesty. In order to make these clear and present requests, we must have an understanding of ourselves, including our feelings and needs, so we can clearly and consciously express how those needs could be met.

*Specific Requests in NVC*

A huge part of NVC is connecting with those around us. To that end, there are specific requests that we make when practicing NVC to make sure that we really are connecting. Remember that these are only steps in the process of connecting with what is alive in us as well as in our friends and loved ones.

(From Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life, pgs. 74-77)

Request	Example	The NVC Process
Asking for a <i>reflection</i>	“Would you be willing to tell me what you heard me say?”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Make sure that message sent is message received</li> <li>. Express appreciation when your listener tries to meet you request</li> <li>. Empathize if the listener doesn’t want to reflect back</li> </ul>
Requesting honesty	“I would like you to tell me how you feel about what I just said.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Learn about how your message is received</li> <li>. Learn about what your listener thinks of what we said</li> </ul>

- . Learn whether your listener is willing to take particular action to meet your needs

Exercise: Think of a situation in which your needs are not being met. Write a dialogue that begins with the NVC form:

“When I see that \_\_\_\_\_ I feel \_\_\_\_\_ because my need for \_\_\_\_\_ is not being met. Would you be willing to tell me what you heard me say?”  
 How would the person you are talking to respond?  
 Empathize with that response, and then move on to requesting honesty.

Although making these requests may seem awkward for both the speaker and the listener at first, if we approach the process with empathy and honesty, we can make sure that our messages are not received as blame or criticism. “We make clear that we’re not testing their listening skills, but checking out whether we’ve expressed ourselves clearly” (pg. 76). If we listen empathically and respond to our listener’s needs, we will continue on the road to connection. Similarly, if we make specific requests that can be made in the moment, we can make sure that we get the answers that we are looking for.

### *Requests Versus Demands*

Of course, when we make a request, we would like our listener to comply. But if compliance is our only goal in making that request, what we have said is likely to be received as a demand. When people hear demands, they are likely to respond out of fear, guilt, or shame rather than giving from the heart (pg. 79). So how do we know when we are requesting and when we are demanding? The biggest difference is in our own response to noncompliance. If we are willing to hear noncompliance as an expression of feelings and needs, and then are willing to empathize with them, we are more likely to achieve our goals of openness and connection.

### Characteristics of Requests and Demands (pgs. 79-81)

<b>Request</b>	<b>Demand</b>
Speaker only wants compliance if the listener is willing	Listener will either <i>submit</i> or <i>rebel</i>
Speaker empathizes with what the person is wanting instead of hearing it	Speaker interprets noncompliance with rejection

as rejection

Response to noncompliance expresses recognition of listener's feelings and needs      If the request is not complied with, the speaker will criticize, judge or guilt-trip

Empathy, when making requests, supports cooperation. If we are aware of and open to what is alive in ourselves and in others, we will continue to connect, and our needs are more likely be met in ways that will be mutually satisfying. This does not mean that we do not want our request to be met. It just means that our most important objective is to be present with the connection at hand and to create a "relationship based on honesty and empathy" (pg. 81), making sure that *everyone's* needs are being addressed.

This week we have added the fourth and final component to the NVC process: making clear and present requests. Yet learning to make requests in NVC oftentimes takes more practice than the other components, because we often expect others to already understand what we want. It is also more difficult to practice on your own, so it would be a good idea to practice either with a group or with a partner who is willing to give you feedback as to whether you are being clear and present, and if what you are asking is doable in the moment (an opportunity to practice making a request!). Throughout the week, as you make requests of other people, make a special effort to be conscious of whether or not it is your objective to connect. Pay close attention to whether what you are requesting is truly a request or if it is a demand. If you feel yourself compelled to respond to noncompliance with criticism or judgment, view it as an opportunity to reconnect with yourself and recommit to your objectives of creating relationships based on empathy and honesty.

### *Individual Practice*

#### -Exercise 4: Expressing Requests

(From Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life, pg. 88)

Do the following statements clearly express that specific action be taken? If not, how would you change it to verbally express a specific request?

Example: "I want you to understand me."

"*I want you to tell me what you heard me say.*"

a. "I'd like you to tell me one thing that I did that you appreciate."

b. "I'd like you to feel more confidence in

- yourself.”
- c. “I want you to stop drinking.”
  - d. “I’d like you to let me be me.”
  - e. “I’d like you to be honest with me about yesterday’s meeting.”
  - f. “I would like you to drive at or below the speed limit.”
  - g. “I’d like to get to know you better.”
  - h. “I would like you to show respect for my privacy.”
  - i. “I’d like you to prepare supper more often.”

-Exercise (From Companion Workbook, pg. 98): Recall an interaction with someone that did not satisfy you. Give one or several requests you made or could have made in this situation using positive action language. Next, write down how you would tell the other person your observation, feeling, and need, and follow with 1) a request for what the listener is feeling, and 2) a request for what the listener is thinking.

- Consider the need for honesty (link). Write the word on an index card or piece of paper and put it in a place where you will see it at least twice each day, perhaps on your bathroom mirror. In the morning, connect with your need for honesty and consider how you might enjoy meeting that need during the day. In the evening, before bed, consider how you did or did not meet your need for honesty without self-judgment.

-Suggested practice—Companion Workbook, pgs. 97-98.

### *Group Practice*—Review Chapter 6 in Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life

-Review answers to individual exercises

-Companion Workbook pgs. 99-103.

### Receiving Empathically

(Read Chapter 7 in Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life)

Thus far we have sketched an outline of the NVC model, and have begun the transformative process of learning how to express ourselves honestly by observing our surroundings, understanding and interpreting our feelings and our needs, and requesting that which will enrich our lives when our needs are not met. But as we already know, honesty is but one part of

the heart of NVC. Now we will delve into the second part of NVC, which is learning to hear and understand the feelings and needs of others with empathy. Of course, this takes patience and practice, as well, but once we begin to learn about empathy we will see how important it really is in helping us to connect with what is alive in others as well as ourselves. We will also see that it NVC only takes one person with the intention to connect. If we remain present to our own feelings and needs while keeping in mind the feelings and needs of others, we will begin to connect in ways that may have never seemed possible before.

### *Empathy and Empathizing*

We all have experiences hearing other peoples' problems, and most of the time we are happy to do what we can to make our companions feel better. Yet although we are all well equipped with the tools to sympathize, advise, console, or educate our friends, most of the time these things are not what they want or need. Instead, when we are suffering, a lot of the time we want empathy. We just want to be heard and understood rather than reassured or fixed. When we are upset and we look for guidance or help from others, we are calling for connection and for acknowledgment, and if we just receive advice, those needs will remain unmet.

Empathy is "a respectful understanding of what others are experiencing" (pg. 91). It is not only listening with our ears or with our minds, but with our whole being, and rather than trying to analyze and fix a situation, we are simply being present to the feelings and needs of the person in pain. "We give to others the time and space they need to express themselves fully and to feel understood" (pg. 92). Whereas always searching for ways to fix a situation can distance us from what is really going on, being present and listening with our whole being fosters connection and helps people to know that they are acknowledged and understood. Think of the times that we seem closest with others; these are times when we have shared experiences that have created a deeper understanding that someone else is a part of the same thing. Through empathy we can cultivate this idea of closeness and connection everyday, and even in every moment.

Exercise: Listening with your whole being

Think of a time when your needs were not met, and you were experiencing very intense feelings. Remember what was stimulating your emotions (your observations) and remember exactly how you were feeling and write a brief paragraph outlining your feelings and your

needs. Now, write a dialogue in which you are empathizing with yourself. You will need two different characters, a speaker and a listener. What might you have said when you were upset? As the listener, hear the needs and feelings behind the language that is being used. Stay present with the speaker, without offering advice or solutions unless they are requested.

### *Listening in NVC*

By this point we have already developed some of the tools that are necessary to understand our own observations, feelings, needs, and requests. Now, we can shift that understanding to the way we listen. All of us are constantly expressing these four components, although many people do not use the specific language we have learned in NVC. Our job as listeners, then, is to hear these four components without judgment, blame, or criticism. When we are committed to being present to what is alive in someone else, we are empathizing, and sometimes we do not even need to say a word to others to help them get through their pain. They just have to know that we are there for them to listen. We also have the option of reflecting back and paraphrasing what we have heard in order to let our speaker know that he or she has been heard. This can be an important tool that can contribute to compassion and understanding in an interaction. The following table shows examples of how to paraphrase in NVC.

### Paraphrasing in NVC (from pg. 97 in Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life)

Question about...	Example
What others are observing	“Are you reacting to how many evenings I was gone last week?”
How others are feeling and the needs generating their feelings	“Are you feeling hurt because you would have liked more appreciation of your efforts than you received?”
What others are requesting	“Are you wanting me to tell you my reasons for saying what I did?”

Of course, since not everyone will be speaking in NVC terms, it will not always be completely clear exactly what the person is feeling and needing. Still, it is important to reflect back what we have heard and make a guess about what is going on with the other person. If we are completely at a loss and we need to ask for more information, it is important to first express our

own feelings and needs, as well (pg. 97). Remember, empathy is about being present, not about worrying about making sure that the next thing we say will be the right thing. As long as we maintain an intention to connect with what is alive in the speaker, NVC will be able to enrich our lives and the lives of those around us. This is especially true in emotionally charged situations, because it allows us to slow down and really connect with what is alive in the moment. And, believe it or not, taking this time to reflect what we have heard can actually *save* time in the end (pg. 100)!

Exercise (From *Companion Workbook*, pg. 110)

The following dialogue takes place between two persons who share a house:

Housemate A: “*You never remember to turn off the lights.*”

Housemate B: “*Are you irritated and would like more awareness about how we use resources...?*”

Repeat the role of Housemate B with in the following tones of voice:

- a. with a little edge of sarcasm.
- b. in a declarative way
- c. in an empathic (sensing) way

What do you notice about tone of voice when we are empathizing?

Of course, paraphrasing is not always going to be helpful, and our attempts might be received as attacks that elicit blame and criticism. But again, as long as we remain present and committed to hearing the feelings and needs *behind* the words without blame and criticism, we can see this as an opportunity to enrich someone else’s life through empathy (pg. 100). Remember, life-alienating communication is a tragic expression of our needs. Using NVC, we now have the opportunity to see through the tragedy and hear exactly what is going on for those people about whom we care so much.

### *Patience*

Empathizing with another person is not a simple process that we can just apply to each situation. Although we have a model to follow, it is important not to fall into a mechanistic routine when listening to others. We have the tools to sustain our empathy and do not have to revert to looking for solutions that might fix each problem. Instead, we can maintain our focus

on what is alive in the moment. Being patient and staying with feelings and needs allows our speaker to connect more deeply with what is going on, and begin to get to the source of the pain. We will know that a person has received enough empathy by sensing a release of body tension and hearing the flow of words come to a halt. If we are still unsure, we can always ask, “Is there more that you would like to say?” or “Is there anything else that comes up for you about this?” (pgs. 102-103).

Of course, dealing with highly emotional situations is not an easy task, and sometimes our attempts to stay present with someone else’s pain are thwarted by our own unmet needs. This is because we need empathy, too. Here, we can openly acknowledge that we are not able or willing to continue empathizing, expressing ourselves of course in terms of our own feelings and needs. Or, we can silently give ourselves empathy by listening and acknowledging the voice inside our own heads. To do this, all we have to do is stop, breathe, and observe how we are feeling and needing (pg. 103). Just taking a few seconds to notice and express what is going on for us can enrich not only our own experience, but also the experience of those with whom we are empathizing.

Empathy is a powerful tool that can enrich our lives. Rather than distancing ourselves from other people by projecting our own values and our own stories onto a situation in order to find simple solutions, our goal becomes to stay present with those around us whose needs are not met. This week, take special notice of those people in your life that you know best. How do we know what they are feeling? What cues do you take from them to anticipate their needs? Pick one person and imagine a situation in which you have felt especially connected. Take note of your needs and feelings as well as his or hers. Allow yourself to connect with his or her feelings and needs, and feel what it is like to really empathize with someone on a very deep level. It may be helpful to write a description of what this experience is like. In the future, when you are having difficulty connecting with what is alive in someone else, you can think back to this experience of deep empathy and use it as a guide for empathizing even in the most difficult of situations.

### *Individual Practice*

-Exercise 4: Receiving Empathically

(From Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life, pg. 109)

Does person B respond empathically to what is going on with

person A? Why, or why not?

Example:

Person A: How could I do something so stupid?

Person B: Nobody is perfect; you're too hard on yourself.

*Person B is reassuring Person A, rather than empathizing*

a. Person A: If you ask me, we ought to ship all these immigrants back to where they came from.

Person B: Do you really think that would solve anything?

b. Person A: You aren't God!

Person B: Are you feeling frustrated because you would like me to admit that there can be other ways of interpreting this matter?

c. Person A: I think that you take me for granted. I wonder how you would manage without me.

Person B: That's not true! I don't take you for granted.

d. Person A: How could you say a thing like that to me?

Person B: Are you feeling hurt because I said that?

e. Person A: I'm furious with my husband. He's never around when I need him.

Person B: You think he should be around more than he is?

f. Person A: I'm disgusted with how heavy I'm getting.

Person B: Perhaps jogging would help

g. Person A: I've been a nervous wreck planning for my daughter's wedding. Her fiancé's family is not helping. About every day they change their minds about the kind of wedding they would like.

Person B: So you're feeling nervous about how to make arrangements and would appreciate it if your future in-laws could be

more aware of the complications their indecision creates for you?

- h. Person A: When my relatives come without letting me know ahead of time I feel invaded. It reminds me of how my parents used to disregard my needs and would plan things for me.

Person B: I know how you feel. I used to feel that way too.

- i. Person A: I'm disappointed with your performance. I would have liked your department to double your production last month.

Person B: I understand that you're disappointed, but we have had many absences due to illness.

-Exercise (From Companion Workbook, pgs. 107): Recall two situations where you responded to someone else's words by "doing" rather than by empathizing (examples of "doing" are *advising, one-upping, educating, consoling, story-telling, shutting down, sympathizing, interrogating, explaining, and correcting*). Briefly write out a 2-line dialogue for each situation.

a. what the person said (expressing pain)

b. what you said in response (name the behavior)

Now, go back and change your response (b) into a verbalized empathic response (in real life, of course, your empathy might be silent.) Remember, empathy entails sensing or guessing, rather than knowing, the other person's feelings and needs. In offering verbal empathy, we take the risk of guessing incorrectly, with the hope that the response to our incorrect guess will lead both of us closer to an accurate understanding of what feelings and needs are present.

- Consider the need for empathy (link). Write the word on an index card or piece of paper and put it in a place where you will see it at least twice each day, perhaps on your bathroom mirror. In the morning, connect with your need for empathy and consider how you might enjoy meeting that need during the day. In the evening, before bed, consider how you did or did not meet your need for empathy without self-judgment.

-Suggested practice—Companion Workbook, pgs. 106-108.

*Group Practice*—Review Chapter 7 in Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life

- Review answers to individual exercises
- Companion Workbook pgs. 109-112.