

KEY CONCEPT 1:

Intention

Description: The intention of NVC is to develop a quality of connection that allows us to understand and value one another's needs, and then together explore how to meet both of our needs. We hold this intention to connect heart-to-heart—even when we are angry or “don't feel like connecting”—by remembering that connection is the value we are choosing to live from in this moment. On the other hand, if we are invested only in getting certain results, and have no intention to connect human to human, heart to heart, then no matter how strictly our speech adheres to the NVC model, we are not expressing NVC consciousness.

Toolkit exercises in this section stress how intention is constantly present as we move through daily life. They support us in noticing what our moment-to-moment intention might be, and provide practice in consciously cultivating the intention to connect.

Tips for Facilitators: Without a strong emphasis on intention, NVC practice can become simply a technique. We urge facilitators to introduce reminders at every session to ground practice in NVC consciousness. Facilitators are powerful models. How we lead the practice, relate to participants, connect to our own needs, and handle conflict are all opportunities to demonstrate the NVC intention, which is connection. In any moment we can recommit to this intention by slowing the pace of the group process or by taking a few moments of silence with the group. We recommend doing these, as well as the activities in this section, on a regular basis.

AWARENESS EXERCISE 1.1

Cultivating Awareness of Intention

AIM OF EXERCISE:

1. To deepen awareness that every word and every action is a choice behind which lies an intention
2. To cultivate awareness of the intention behind my choices

INSTRUCTIONS FOR GUIDING AWARENESS EXERCISE: Read the following slowly, leaving space between each statement for the participant to engage in the guided process:

- a. Sit comfortably. Straighten your spine. Make any necessary adjustments.*
- b. Focus your attention inward by closing your eyes or gently dropping your gaze to the floor in front of you.*
- c. Notice whether you chose to keep your eyes open or closed. Are you aware of the intention behind your choice?*
- d. Where did you sit at dinner? Are you aware of the intention behind that choice?*
- e. Recall something you said or did today. What was your intention?*
- f. Remember your choice to come here today. What was your intention?*
- g. When you are ready, open your eyes and look around the room, aware of each person here being conscious of their intention in coming here today.*

SHARING CIRCLE:

- My name is _____ .
- My intention in coming here today is _____ .

SUGGESTIONS FOR PRACTICE IN DAILY LIFE:

- Before opening your mouth or taking action, ask yourself, “What’s my intention here?”
- Every day approach someone with the conscious intention of connecting with them.

REFERENCES: Chapters 1, 13

ACTIVITY 1.2

Grounding Our Intention to Connect

PURPOSE OF ACTIVITY: To practice connecting to others out of a consciousness of our fundamental commonality as fellow human beings

BRIEF DESCRIPTION: Participants sit in a circle and look at one another in silence for 1 to 2 minutes. After a pause for reflection and debrief, they repeat the process, but this time with conscious awareness of their shared humanity.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- ☐ A bell and timer would be helpful, but not necessary.

TIME REQUIRED: 30 minutes

GROUP SIZE: Any

SPACE REQUIRED: Adequate for everyone to be seated in circle (either one large circle or several smaller circles)

LITERACY LEVEL REQUIRED: None

PROCEDURE:

1. Invite participants to join this activity saying that the group will have an opportunity to discuss its purpose at the end.
2. Arrange seating in one large circle or several smaller circles so that each person is able to see everyone in the circle.
3. **Part I**—Give the following instructions:

Please close your eyes and bring your attention inside. In a minute or two you will hear a bell. At that time, open your eyes and look around at the people sitting in your circle. Simply look at each other. Keep looking without speaking, gesturing, smiling, or otherwise communicating with each other. Simply notice what comes up for you. [Use a bell to signal the beginning and end of this 1–2 minute period.]

Consider giving participants an opportunity to reflect quietly on the following debrief questions before initiating discussion:

- a. *What feelings and needs came up for you?*
- b. *Did anyone notice judgmental thoughts of other people? Of yourself?*
- c. *When you became aware of judging, what feelings and needs came up for you?*

4. Part II—Give the following instructions:

- a. *We'll take a few moments to work in silence now.*
- b. *Ask yourself if any unmet needs got triggered by looking and being looked at in silence.*
- c. *Pick the one that is most prominent for you.*
- d. *If there were no unmet needs, identify a need that was met either during the silence or is being met in this moment.*
- e. *Take whatever need you picked and create a blessing to offer yourself. For example, if the need you chose was "acceptance," a phrase of blessing might be "May I experience full acceptance." If the need was for "belonging," a phrase might be "May I feel completely at home." For "safety," "May I be safe." Create only one phrase.*

Check to see that everyone is clear about the task. After a minute or so, ask participants to go around and say out loud the blessing phrase they created.

5. Part III—Give the following instructions:

Once again close your eyes and bring your attention inside. [Pause] Take a moment to see if you can connect with the innate beauty of who you are, your essence as a living human being in this moment. [Pause] Perhaps it's a physical sensation in your body, such as the steady beat of your heart? Perhaps it's a phrase that speaks to you, such as "child of God." Perhaps it's an image—ocean waves, being alone in the forest—that reminds you of your essential nature and your place in the universe. Whatever it is, take a moment to feel connected to your own basic humanity or oneness with life.

- *Now take the blessing you created and offer it to yourself. For example: "May I be safe." "May I be at ease." "May I know that I am accepted just as I am." Whatever blessing you created, offer the words to yourself with sincerity. Do this for a few moments. [Pause]*

I will soon ring the bell as a signal for you to open your eyes. At that time, once again look around the room at the other people. As you do so, take your blessing and offer it to the individuals seated in the circle. So instead of 'May I be safe,' change the word 'I' to 'you' and silently repeat, 'May you be safe.' Or 'May you know you are accepted just as you are.' Use the same phrase and continue to offer your silent blessing to each person as you look around the circle." [1–2 minutes]

Stop. Close your eyes, come home to yourself. [Pause] In this last minute of the exercise, take your blessing and change the wording so that it includes both yourself and others. Use the words "we all" instead of

"I" or "you." For example, "May we all be safe." As you repeat this new phrase silently, imagine it spreading to embrace everyone in the circle.

[30 seconds]

- *As we end this exercise, gently open your eyes and look around the room, being aware that each person here is extending to all of us a blessing based on a need that came alive in this circle.*

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS:

1. Was the second round of silent looking different from the first time? If so, describe the differences and what might have caused them.
2. What do you think was the purpose of this activity?
3. Was it successful for you?
4. What would have made it more effective?

REFERENCES: Chapters 1, 13

ACTIVITY 1.3

What's My Intention?

PURPOSE OF ACTIVITY:

1. To deepen awareness of the intention behind our words or silence, our actions or non-actions
2. To practice choosing our intention

BRIEF DESCRIPTION: Working in small groups, participants reflect on the intention(s) behind something they did or said. They are invited to look at how a deeper awareness of intention might affect the situation.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Individual Handout: What's My Intention?

TIME REQUIRED: 30 minutes

GROUP SIZE: Any size

SPACE REQUIRED: Enough for small groups to work without mutual interference

LITERACY LEVEL REQUIRED: One person in each group needs to be able to read if facilitator chooses to use the handout with guiding statements

PROCEDURE:

Part I—Demonstration

1. Introduce the concept of intention:

There is an intention behind everything we choose to do or not do, say or not say. This activity is designed to develop our awareness of intention. When we are aware of our intention, we then have the freedom to stay with our intention or change our intention.

2. Give an example of how we are sometimes unaware of our intention, and how awareness of intention gives us more choices.

For example: I decide to wash the dishes that someone has left in the sink. My intention might be to make that person feel guilty and teach them a lesson on how things "should" be done. If I become aware of my intention, I can choose to follow through on it or choose not to. And, if I do decide to wash the dishes, I might then do so because I want to contribute to a cleaner and more pleasant living space.

3. Give a second example.

Another example: I decide to go up to someone whose radio is blaring. An unconscious intention behind my action might be to let that person know who is boss on the range. With awareness, I might choose to change my intention, approaching them with the intention to support them in finding a safer way to live in prison.

4. Give an example of the use of force, distinguishing the intention behind the protective use of force from the intention behind the punitive use of force. NOTE: in the example below, the narrator discovers the subtle intention to punish in an act that was taken with the apparent intention to protect.

When we use force, sometimes our intention is to inflict harm or pain on another person. At other times our intention may be to protect the person. For example, I am grabbing a child who has run out on the road. Annoyed, I squeeze his arm hard while dragging him roughly back to the sidewalk. I am thinking that if it hurts enough, maybe he won't run out again. If asked to state the intention behind my action, I might say it is to protect the child from traffic harm. If asked to reflect further, I might add that my intention was also to impress upon him that running into the street brings unpleasant consequences. Only by looking even more deeply might I see that, in my annoyance, I also intended for him to feel some pain as a form of punishment for what he did.

Part II—Instructions

1. Ask participants to work in groups of three or four.
2. Ask participants to recall something they did or said. Distribute handout if desired.

Bring to mind something you did or did not do, something you said or did not say. If you have difficulty doing this, try recalling something specific you did that involves:

- *The use of force*
- *Offering someone “negative feedback” or “constructive criticism”*
- *Agreeing to do something someone asks of you*
- *Saying no to someone*
- *“Being good,” “being nice”*
- *Telling a joke, “being funny,” saying something humorous*
- *Attending this and other trainings (“programming”)*

3. Ask participants to take turns sharing what they did or said and to state the intention behind it.
4. Ask participants to reflect on whether there were deeper layers of intention beneath the one just named and to take turns sharing whatever they discover.
5. Ask participants,

When you became aware of an intention, did you want to change your intention? Did you want to change your action? Share with the group any changes you wanted to make in either intention or action.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS:

1. What did you discover about the power of intention?
2. How might you apply this learning in your life?

SUGGESTIONS FOR PRACTICE IN DAILY LIFE: Several times each day, stop and ask yourself:

1. “What was my intention in what I did or said?”
2. “What is my intention in what I am doing or saying right now?”
3. “What is my intention in what I am planning to do or say?”

REFERENCES: Chapters 1, 13

INDIVIDUAL HANDOUT 1.3

What's My Intention?

BRING TO MIND one of the following, and share it with the group:

Something you chose **to do** or **not do** and what your intention was

Something you chose **to say** or **not say** and what your intention was

Something you are choosing **to do** or **not do** now and what your intention is

Something you are choosing **to say** or **not say** now and what your intention is

Something you are planning **to do** or **not do** and what your intention is
Something you are planning **to say** or **not say** and what your intention is

ASK YOURSELF:

1. Are there other intentions besides the one I gave? (If so, share them with your group.)
2. Given my awareness of the intention behind my words or action, would I want to change the intention? Would I want to change my words or action? (Share with the group any changes in intention, words, or action you would want to make.)

IF YOU HAVE DIFFICULTY RECALLING A SITUATION TO WORK WITH:

Reflect on something you did or said, are doing or saying, plan to do or say, that involves:

- The use of force
- Offering someone “negative feedback,” “constructive criticism”
- Agreeing to do something someone asks of you
- Saying no to someone
- “Being good,” “being nice”
- Telling a joke, “being funny,” saying something humorous
- Attending this and other trainings (“programming”)