

## Little guide to communicate compassionately



based on Nonviolent Communication  
from Marshall B. Rosenberg

The guide is not intended for chronological reading only. The individual points refer to each other and you can also always scroll forth or back to understand the attitude and processes of the Nonviolent Communication.



This Small Guide to Nonviolent Communication (NVC) according to Marshall B. Rosenberg can help you to understand yourself and others better and to act compassionately.

So Nonviolent Communication supports you to communicate effectively and constructively with each other.

It consists of four steps that help you express your feelings and needs clearly, and better understand what others need.

And although the four steps are quite simple, it takes time and practice to internalize them, because when facing difficult situations or having conflicts we are mostly used to perceive each other through blame or judgment.

Marshal Rosenberg used the jackal and the giraffe as symbols to distinguish a judgmental and compassionate attitude. The giraffe stands for a communication that serves life - the jackal for an alienating communication. Let us now take a closer look at these two attitudes.

## basic mindset of "Giraffe" and "Jackal"



### Life-Serving

- I am okay and you are okay.
- What do you need?
- What do I need?
- Listening and speaking from the heart.
- I see us as human beings with feelings and needs.
- My intention is understanding and connection and caring for solutions that match all.



### Life alienating

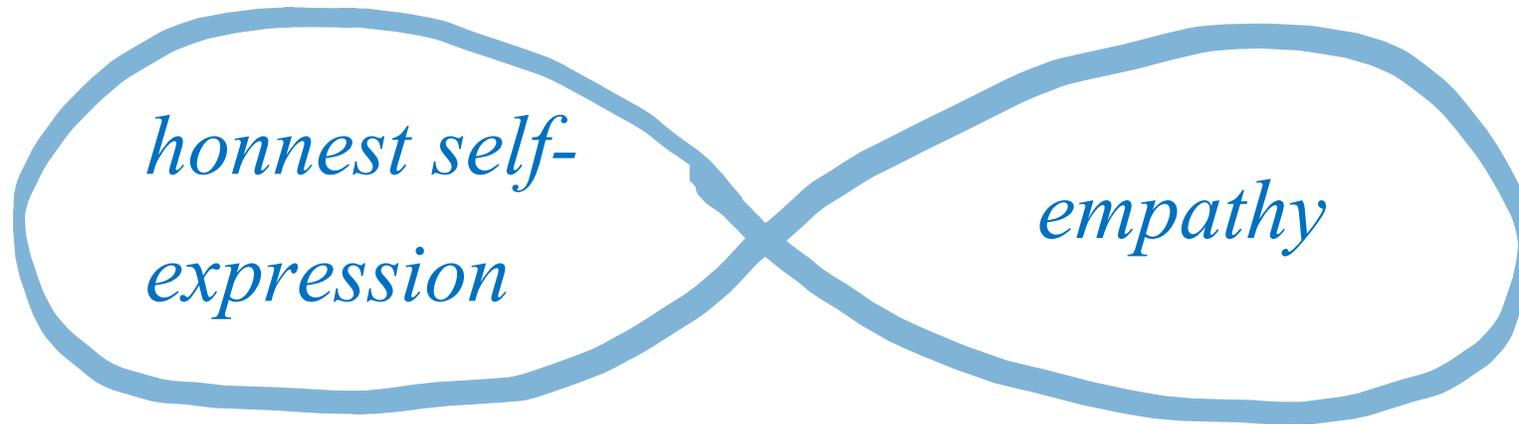
- I think, that something is wrong with you or with me.
- I judge and compare.
- I think in terms of better/worse or right and wrong.
- I apply the images such as victim, enemy or hero.
- My intention is to be right and to get others to do what I want.

# Stand by yourself and keep the connection

In NVC there two ways to support connection and understanding:

1. Self-expression: vulnerably expressing your own feelings and needs
2. Empathetic listening: empathetically listening to the feelings and needs of the other.

These two choices are very different from habitual behavior when being in conflict such as blaming, fighting, submitting, withdrawing, avoiding or running away.



**I stand by myself**

**I hold the connection to you**



**Relationship at eye level**



Now we will take a look at how the four steps of NVC can be applied to both self-expression and empathic listening

# The four steps of NVC

## Self Expression

## Empathetic Listening

my world:

your world:

1. **Observation:** When I see/ hear...

When you see/ hear...

2. **Feeling:** ..., then I feel...

Do you feel...?

my dreams:

your dreams:

3. **Need:**...., because X is important to me

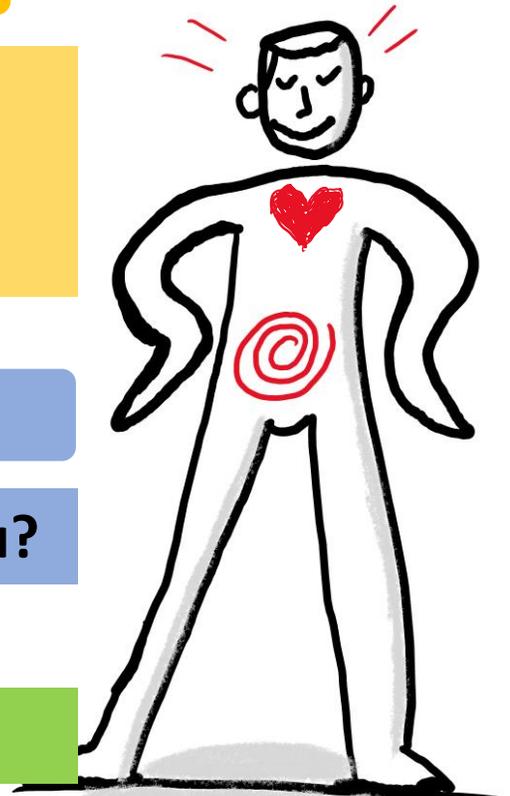
...because X is important to you?

my requests:

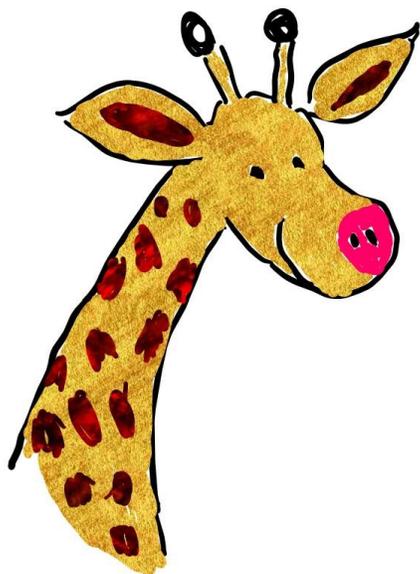
your requests:

4. **Request:** Are you willing to...?"

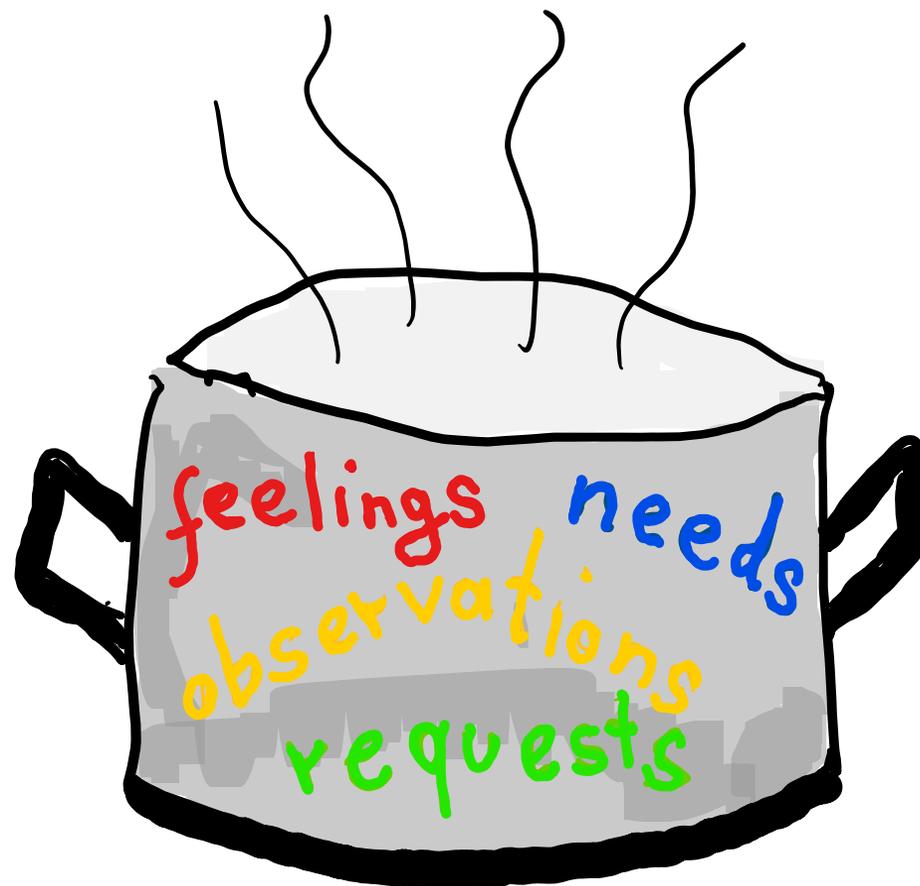
What would you like to happen?



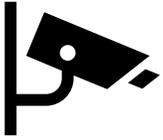
In communication, the four steps do not necessarily occur one after the other. Often, some of the steps are only performed internally. In difficult situations, the first thing you can do is to apply them to yourself. With the help of the four steps you can give yourself empathy and gain clarity about how you really feel right now, what you are actually about and what you would like to happen.



You can think of the four steps as ingredients for successful communication.



Let's take a deeper look at the four steps now!



# 1. OBSERVATION

A situation has stimulated you. Before you seek a clarifying conversation, check if you are ready to listen to your counterpart with an open heart. If this is not the case, first take a deep breath and time for self-empathy.

**Tell the other person(s) what situation you are referring to.**

The aim is to objectively describe a situation or behavior without judging or interpreting it.

An observation is specific and understandable by everyone.

**Some suggestions how to start:**

**“When I see... – When I hear... – When I recall seeing/hearing... – When I imagine seeing/hearing...”**

- **Could your observation be recorded by a video camera or a tape recorder?**
- **Make sure there is no evaluation.**
- **Make sure you´re talking about a „shared reality“ and clarify differences (what someone said and what someone heard).**
- **Make sure there is no generalization like: always – never – often – most of the time.**

Observations are mostly mixed with evaluations. It takes some practice to separate observations from evaluations. In a conversation it is useful to express only the observation. Because even if the evaluation is separated from the observation and labeled as one's own opinion, it is more likely that the other person will hear it as blame. Here are some examples:

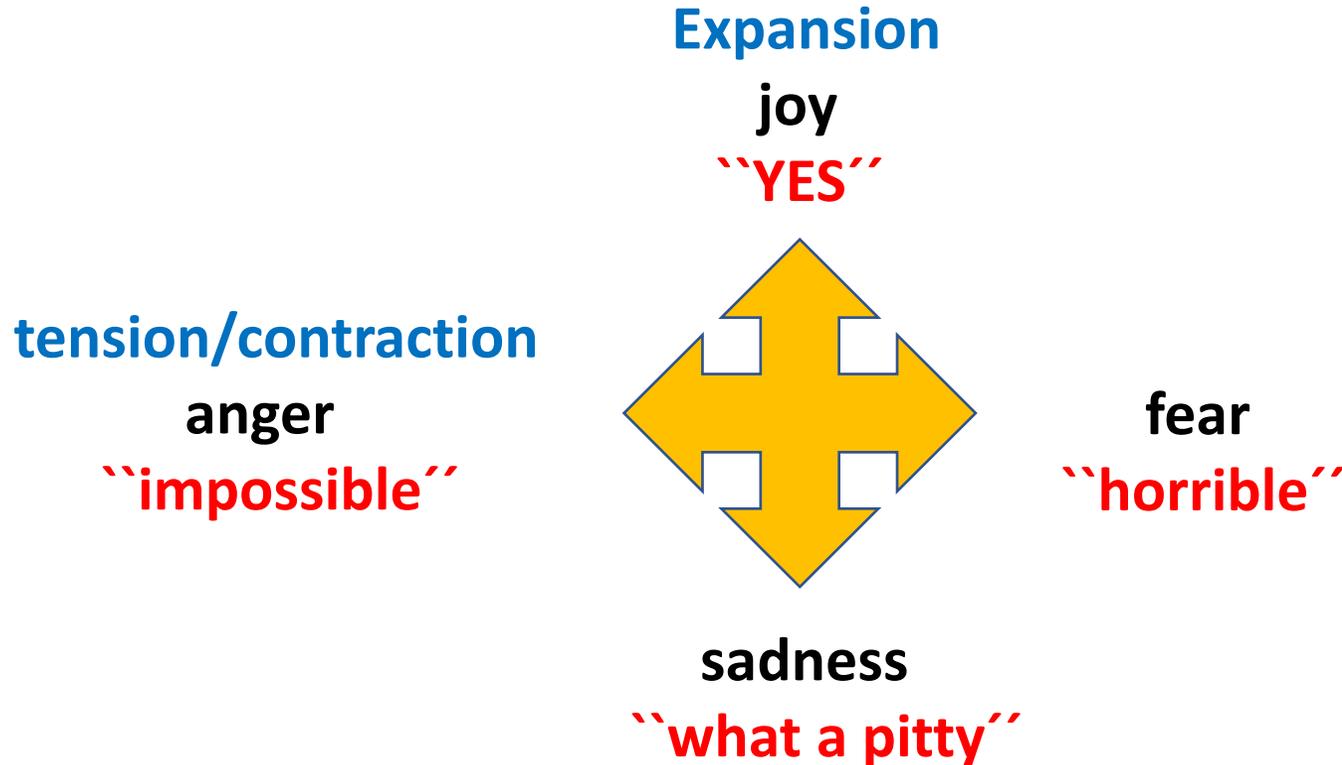
Observation mixed with evaluations	Observation (O.) separated from evaluation (E.)
Maria is constantly ignoring Anna. She is so rude!	O.: Maria Maria has not spoken to Anna for two weeks.
Paul is so stingy. He hasn't shared any of his candy.	O.: I see that Paul had a big bag of candy today and has not given you any of his candy . E.: I think he is so stingy
That annoying dog has been barking all night. I didn't get a wink of sleep.	O.: The dog barked three times last night for about 5 minutes. Every time I woke up and it took me about 30 minutes to go back to sleep.
David is so generous, a wonderful man!	O.: David paid the restaurant bill for his four friends last night. E.: I think he is very generous.

**Suggestion:** Keep a diary and write down your experiences in the evening. Then mark all the evaluations in your notes and try to turn them into observations.

# 1. FEELINGS



The compass of Feelings (according to Vivian Dittmar)



For the most part, the various feelings can be categorized into four basic feelings. Our natural feelings are fundamental to our aliveness. Anger for example can be a useful energy to find the power to stand up for your dreams and visions and pursue actions in order to realize them.

# Feelings

- show that certain needs are met or unmet
- can be felt inside the body
- are universal
- Their intensity can be differentiated: a little/ very/ totally/ really

## It is not a feeling if you:

- express a supposition or a thought (I feel this place is really comfortable.)
- use a comparison or metaphore (I feel like a butterfly.)
- diagnose, analyse or interpret someone else's behaviour (I feel that 50% of our students have psychological problems.)

We usually evaluate feelings as good and bad. But feelings actually refer to whether your needs are met or unmet. On the following list you will find some feelings.

## Some feelings, when your needs are satisfied...

loving	amazed	warm
open-hearted	delighted	awake
tender	lively	optimistic
warm	passionate	hopeful
compassionate	motivated	encouraged
happy	surprised	rejuvenated
empowered	vibrant	refreshed
confident	eager	relaxed
safe	proud	content
joyful	amused	calm
energetic	blissfull	comfortable
inspired	radiant	peaceful
curious	thrilled	trusting
enchanted	pleased	centered
interested	restored	fulfilled
intrigued	moved	serene
involved	grateful	relieved
fascinated	touched	jubilant

## or when not satisfied

scared	uneasy	guarded
terrified	disgusted	exhausted
panicked	hate	depleted
shocked	horrified	devastated
worried	repulsed	heartbroken
dread	hesitant	regretful
afraid	lost	miserable
mistrustful	ambivalent	lonely
petrified	numb	fragile
frustrated	distracted	sad
annoyed	withdrawn	depressed
displeased	uninterested	hopeless
irritated	detached	dispair
impatient	jealous	brokenhearted
angry	restless	unhappy
furious	ashamed	nervous
outraged	guilty	overwhelmed
upset	embarrassed	helpless

We easily mix thoughts with feelings. It is important to differentiate them because thoughts about you or others put you in a victim position



I feel betrayed, ignored and abused

Do you feel angry, alone and upset?



The following words rather express thoughts than feelings:

To differentiate them you can ask: *"How do I feel when I think that I am....?"*

- |           |            |               |                   |               |
|-----------|------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------|
| abandoned | cheated    | interrupted   | overworked        | threatened    |
| abused    | coerced    | intimidated   | patronized        | unappreciated |
| attacked  | co-opted   | let down      | pressured         | unheard       |
| betrayed  | cornered   | manipulated   | provoked          | unseen        |
| boxed-in  | diminished | misunderstood | put down          | unsupported   |
| bullied   | distrusted | neglected     | rejected          | unwanted      |
|           |            |               | taken for granted | used          |

## Here are some questions to help you distinguish feelings from thoughts:

- What can I sense in my body?
- What is the adjective for this body sensation.
- Do I talk about what another person did to me?
- Is it a judgement about a situation?
- Is it a thought about myself?

It's not an original feeling.  
I construct victims and perpetrators.

### **Suggestion:**

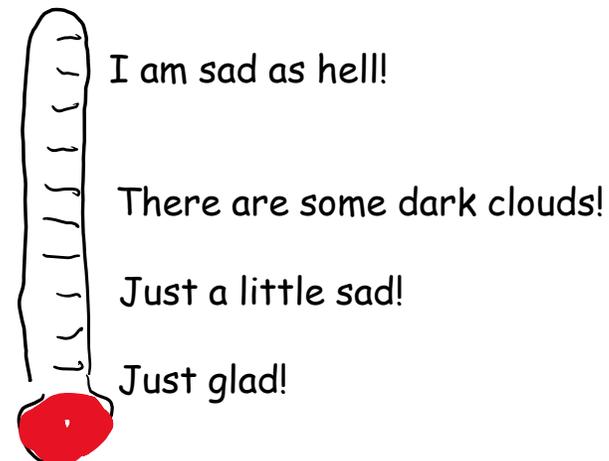
Use Mood-o-Meters to track how you've been recently feeling. It is interesting to mark the Mood-o-Meters for different settings such as: AT SCHOOL – AT HOME – WITH FRIENDS.

You can also create your own Mood-o-Meters for other feelings you might have...

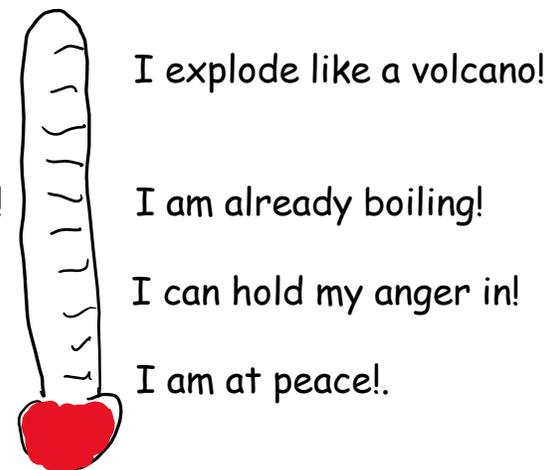
#### **Happiness Mood-o-Meter**



#### **Sadness Mood-o-Meter**



#### **Anger Mood-o-Meter**



#### **Anxiety Mood-o-Meter**



## 3. NEEDS

- are universal qualities to which all people can say yes.
- apply to all people of all cultures and at all times.
- are resources that humans need to maintain their (well-being) life (physical, psychological, emotional, ...).  
safety, joy, community, learning, participation, rest, creativity, belonging, sense, exploring, intimacy, recognition....

### It is important to distinguish needs and strategies:

A need can be fulfilled with many possible actions. These actions or strategies are specific and bound to e.g.:  
a person(s), time, place, objects (what? when? with whom? where? with what?).

**Example:** Eva has been feeling lonely lately. She realizes that she longs for community, belonging, and fun (needs).  
She makes a list of strategies to help her meet these needs:

- join a choir
- start a meetup cooking group
- participate in the sports program at the park
- take a salsa class

Making requests to ourselves or others helps us implement our strategies.  
You can find more information about requests on page 17-18.

Knowing we all have the same needs and the positive assumption below helps you to find connection with another person even when not appreciating their actions.

**“With every action we try to match a need.”**

**I can understand (the need)  
without agreement (to the strategies)!**

- autonomy
- community
- creativity
- participation

- self-care
- fun
- learning
- trust

**Example:**  
Max very much wants recognition and belonging. (need)  
In the city, Max steals a cell phone from the pocket of a person passing by and shows it to his friends (strategy).

In everyday communication, it is very helpful to translate needs into questions.

Here are some examples:

**Would you like...? Do you need....? Is it very important to you that...? Do you wish...?**

<b>autonomy/freedom/ self- determination</b>	<b>that you can say for yourself what is good for you? what you want do now you can decide do you have something to say?</b>
<b>to be an adult</b>	<b>that you are taken seriously? that you understand that you can make your own decisions?</b>
<b>respect</b>	<b>that someone is listening to you? that people respect each other?</b>
<b>detachment</b>	<b>that you can shape your life on your own? that you are independent?</b>
<b>belonging</b>	<b>that you belong to someone or to a group?</b>
<b>fun</b>	<b>that people laugh and have fun?</b>
<b>friendship</b>	<b>that you have friends you can count on?</b>
<b>community</b>	<b>that we stick together and do something together?</b>
<b>"to be normal"</b>	<b>that you're okay the way you are and belong?</b>
<b>recognition</b>	<b>that others see how hard you try? Appreciate what you've done?</b>
<b>experiment/discover</b>	<b>that you can try and examine yourself? that you can figure things out on your own?</b>
<b>excitation</b>	<b>Ideas, inspiration, what to do now?</b>
<b>honesty</b>	<b>that you can trust someone to tell the truth?</b>
<b>movement</b>	<b>to get your body moving?</b>
<b>exchange</b>	<b>share with others what happened or what interests you?</b>
<b>contribution</b>	<b>that you can help? that others are fine?</b>
<b>gratitude</b>	<b>show how happy you are about something?</b>
<b>protection</b>	<b>you feel safe and comfortable?</b>
<b>relationship on an equal footing</b>	<b>that everyone takes responsibility for themselves and their actions? that we respect each other?</b>
<b>shared reality</b>	<b>that everyone starts from the same facts?</b>

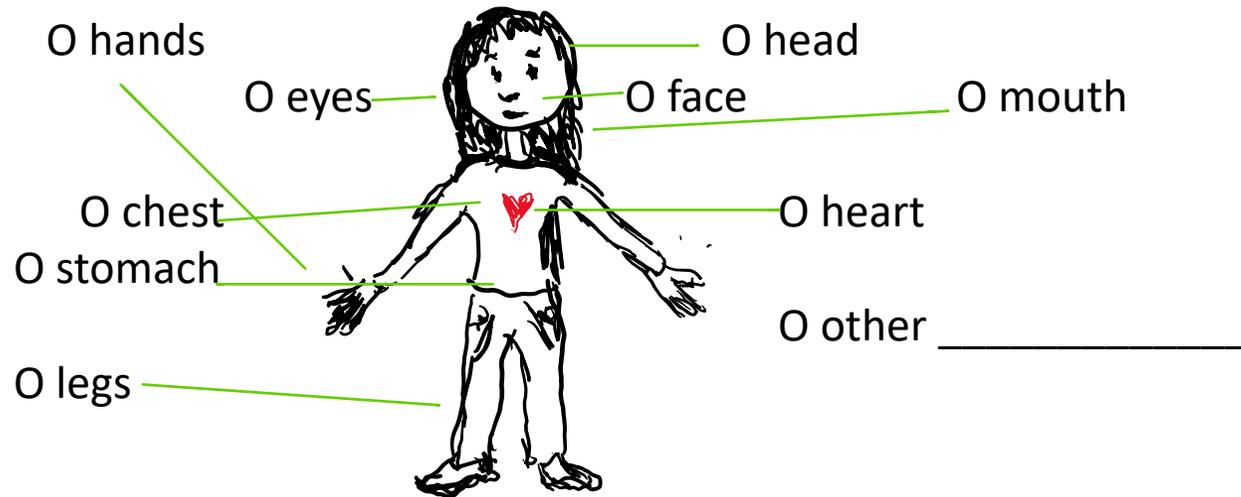
Feelings are important signposts to indicate that needs are met or unmet.

You can feel your feelings inside your body and it is helpful to regularly check in with your body reactions and sensations:

**Suggestion:** Sit quietly (you might want to close your eyes) and focus on your body. What can you feel right now?

Does your body feel tense, relaxed, warm, cold, sweaty, numb, tight, light, weak, strong, shaky, drained...

Where do you feel it most? Can you name the feeling?



**My feeling:**

I am \_\_\_\_\_.

**Finding your need might still not always be easy. Here are some questions that might help:**

- What does it mean to me, when the other person responds to me?
- What would be fulfilled for me then?
- How would it make my life more beautiful?
- **When naming the need make sure not to refer to a specific person, action, place or time.**

**EXAMPLE:**

When my brother would play basketball with me now, my need for fun, movement and connection would be met.

## 4. REQUEST – DEMAND or WISH?

Requests are most likely to be successful:

- formulated positively
- short
- specific and realistic actions (when, how, with whom, where)
- respecting the freedom of choice,
- a `NO´ can be accepted

Requests are less successful:

- Requesting feelings [I want you to be happy!]
- Being abstract [I want you to accept me!]
- Requests with comparisons [I want you to be as structured as Marie!]
- Saying, what I don't want [I don't want you to stay in the office that long!]

There are different types of requests. Your request has more chance of being heard if you first make sure you are connected to the person you are talking to. You can do this by placing request to enhance connection first. Below are some suggestions.

# Different types of requests

- Requests that enhance the quality of connection

## Focus on me:

- Would you be willing to hear what is going on with me/what I need/ ...
- Could you say again what you just heard me say?
- What did you understand that is important to me right here?

## Focus on the other person:

- What is it like for you to hear this?
- What is going on with you right now?
- Would you tell me how this makes you feel?

- Requests that enhance supporting the connection to find a solution
  - Would you tell me what info you need (what else you need) to agree with my request?
  - Would you tell me what would help you now so we can find a solution together?
  - Would you tell me what is stopping you from saying yes to my request?
  - Are you willing to work together to come up with ideas on how we can find a solution that works for both of us?
- Requests to take action - Request to myself or the other person!
  - I will...
  - Would you like me to...?
  - Are you willing to do ...
  - Would/could you please...?

## Using jackal language and judging yourself or others can easily upset you and put you in a negative circle.

### Negative Circle

Your friend went to the movies with her sister and didn't call you and ask if you wanted to join her.

Your friend reacts by saying you acted rudely and doesn't talk to you anymore.



You think she that she doesn't like you anymore.

The next time you see her you don't say anything and stomp away.

The first step to replace the negative with a positive circle is to understand that your friend is not responsible for your feelings but your own unfulfilled needs. By applying the four steps of Nonviolent Communication you can support connection.

By the way: There are lots of other strategies to fulfill the need for inclusion and belonging. For example you could help in an animal shelter or join a choir.

### Supporting Connection

Your friend went to the movies with her sister and didn't call you and ask if you wanted to join her.

Your friend tells you that you are really important to her. Same time she needed some alone time with her sister and that she thinks friends can do things separately and still like each other...



You are quite angry and sad. Thoughts such as "I am not likeable" come up. You give yourself a lot of empathy and also think of all possible good reasons, why your friend didn't call.

The next time you see her you tell her: "I felt quite sad, when you went to the movies without asking if I wanted to come because being included and belonging are quite important to me. What is it like for you to hear this?"

Learning new ways of communication needs time and practise.

In many situations specially when you are quite stimulated you might want to use the four steps for silent self empathy.

Also in conversations you often don't need to express all four steps. Connection also happens through silent empathy and is also only possible on one level, e.g. the strategies.

**Example:** Nina is sitting alone with her head down in the schoolyard.

You suspect that she feels lonely and wants community and interaction (needs).

You ask her if she would like to join you and your friends (strategy).

So hopefully this little Guide can help you when things get tough.

If you want to learn more you can check out the links below:

**The NVC Steps made simple:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYkgbrZSAY0>

**Nonviolent communication in a nutshell:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dm1aHU4SXKs>

**The Center for Nonviolent Communication:**

<https://www.cnvc.org/>

BOOK: Rosenberg, Marshall: Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life: Life-Changing Tools for Healthy Relationships (Nonviolent Communication Guides) (English Edition) 3rd Edition. PuddleDancer Press, 2015.