

International Affairs Week  
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# COMPASSIONATE COMMUNICATION

## A Source of Hope in Difficult Times

Workshop based on the Principles of Nonviolent  
Communication of Marshall Rosenberg

[www.cnvc.org](http://www.cnvc.org)

*led by*

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We will share practices that help us establish empathic connection with ourselves and others in a way that reduces conflict and violence in our personal relationships and in the wider community, deepening our understanding of ourselves and others.

*There is a field beyond right and wrong, I will meet you there.*

*- Rumi*

## **The Core of NVC Consciousness: “What is the Need here?”**

At the core of NVC is the awareness of the life energy that is stirring in us in this moment. We see this life energy related to a quality we cherish which sustains life. It may be expressed as a particular dream, need, want, or desire whose fulfillment or lack of fulfillment causes our feelings.

In NVC, we try to identify the “universal needs” that are common to all human beings – qualities which sustain life which we all cherish. Besides essential requirements for physical survival such as air, food sleep, etc., all human beings across all cultures share some basic needs (e.g. connection, autonomy, purpose, safety, respect, etc.) in order to thrive or to fulfill and realize themselves. We clearly distinguish these basic needs from more specific (time-place-person-action specific) wants and desires which constitute strategies to fulfill basic needs. These strategies and solutions are understood as “requests” rather than “needs” – a crucial distinction in NVC.

The following lists of needs provided for your reference is neither exhaustive nor definitive; while needs are universal, the words are simply words and different people may use different words to convey a perceived need. The expression of needs is not a science, but an art that we each cultivate for ourselves. As we develop our vocabulary of needs, our objective is not to achieve correctness, but to deepen awareness.

## **NEEDS: Universal Resources required to sustain and enrich life.**

Needs make no reference to any specific person doing any specific action.

### **Autonomy**

- Choice
- Empowerment
- Power with
- Creativity
- Freedom

### **Empathy**

- Acceptance
- Appreciation
- Connection
- Respect Love
- Understanding
- Affection
- Compassion
- Consideration
- Reassurance
- Warmth

### **Honesty**

- Authenticity
- Integrity
- Self- Connection
- Clarity
- Learning
- Self-Expression

### **Interdependence**

- Closeness
- Connection
- Inclusion
- Support
- Community
- Cooperation
- Mutuality
- Trust

### **Meaning**

- Purpose
- Competence
- Contribution
- Wholeness

### **Protection**

- Emotional Safety
- Respect
- Security
- Justice
- Safety

### **Regeneration**

- Celebration
- Leisure
- Play
- Sexual Expression
- Gratitude
- Mourning
- Rest

### **Survival**

- Air, Food, Water
- Shelter
- Water
- Movement, exercise
- Sensual Stimulation

### **Transcendence**

- Beauty
- Inspiration
- Peace
- Harmony
- Order
- Space

## What Game Do You Want to Play?

### - The Game of Giving and Receiving

#### Goal

- To make life wonderful
- To meet everyone's needs
- To create community and have power with others

#### Motivation

- Joy
- Meeting Needs

#### Strategies

- **Speak Compassionately**
- Observe: see and hear
- Share my feelings and needs
- Make requests
- Listen with Empathy**
- Hear feelings and needs

### - The Game of Naming and Blaming

- To be right
- To get what I want
- To create a hierarchy and have power over others

- Fear, Guilt, Shame
- Obligation, Duty

#### **Speak without Compassion**

- Judge and analyze
- Blame and criticize
- Make demands and use punishments and rewards

#### **Listen without Empathy**

- Agree or disagree, advise, lecture, scold, argue, sympathize, divert

## The Language of Compassion

### Compassionate Listening/Empathy

I make my best guesses about Your Observations, Feelings, Needs, and Requests.

<b>Observations:</b>	I guess what you see and hear. <i>"When you see/hear. . ."</i>
<b>Feelings:</b>	I guess your feelings. <i>"do you feel . . ."</i>
<b>Needs:</b>	I guess your needs. <i>"because you need . . .?"</i>
<b>Requests:</b>	I guess what might help you meet your needs. <i>"Right now would you like . . .?"</i>

### Compassionate Expression

I say as honestly as I can: My Observations, Feelings, Needs, and Requests

<b>Observations:</b>	I say what I see and hear. <i>"When I hear. . ."</i>
<b>Feelings:</b>	I say how I feel <i>"I feel. . ."</i>
<b>Needs:</b>	I say what I need <i>"because I need. . ."</i>
<b>Requests:</b>	I ask for what I predict will meet my needs <i>"Right now I would like. . ."</i> <i>"If you are willing. . ."</i>

## Inner Work for Relationships The Path to Compassionate Consciousness

Think of a difficult conversation, relationship, or incident that evoked strong, uncomfortable feelings (e.g. anger, guilt, fear) in you. What happened?

1. **OBSERVATION:** Describe the stimulus (what you and the other person said or did) as an observation and not as a judgment.

2. **FEELINGS:**

What were you feeling?

Guess what the other person was feeling

3. **NEEDS:**

a. What **unmet needs** correspond to or underlie these feelings?

For you:

For the other person:

b. Take time for **self empathy** by writing: / Give the other person **empathy**:

No wonder I feel \_\_\_\_\_ / No wonder they feel \_\_\_\_\_

Because I need \_\_\_\_\_ / Because they need \_\_\_\_\_

c. Sense the positive value of why this need is important to you, see the beauty of these needs for you and the other person \_\_\_\_\_

4. **REQUESTS:**

a. Write some ways you or someone else could “fix the problem:”

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b. Enjoy knowing there are different strategies to meet your needs, and that your particular strategy is an optional strategy.

Now, with no sense of demand, what request might you make of yourself?

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With no sense of demand, what request might you make of the other person?

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You might describe the positive behavior you would prefer and express it in a statement that begins with "I really feel at ease (or whatever feeling you experience when your needs are met) when I experience consideration (or whatever action the person might do which you would enjoy or appreciate)

You get in touch with your feelings and needs and give yourself empathy for beautiful, unmet, needs. Frame a reply that expresses your positive feelings and make a request such as: I really feel happy when I experience consideration, next time you are going to be late, would you be willing to call so that I can adjust my expectations?

## Outer Work for Relationships The Path to Compassionate Listening/Empathy

1. **OBSERVATIONS**
2. **FEELINGS**
3. **NEEDS**
4. **REQUESTS**

Practice: Think of a difficult conversation or incident that still evokes strong feelings in you, make your best guesses about the other person's observations, feelings, needs, and requests:

### 1. **Observation**

When you hear \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

or

When you see \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### 2. **Feelings**

Are you feeling \_\_\_\_\_ ?

### 3. **Needs**

Because you need \_\_\_\_\_ ?

You might pause here for a response which would help you and the other person explore strategies to meet these feelings and needs.

Or you might make a guess about what might help the other person meet their needs:

### 4. **Requests**

Right now would you like \_\_\_\_\_ ?

FEELINGS LIKELY WHEN OUR NEEDS ARE BEING MET

Absorbed	Adventurous	Affectionate	Alert
Alive	Amazed	Amused	Animated
Appreciative	Ardent	Aroused	Astonished
Blissful	Breathless	Buoyant	Calm
Carefree	Cheerful	Comfortable	Complacent
Composed	Concerned	Confident	Contented
Cool	Curious	Dazzled	Delighted
Eager	Ebullient	Ecstatic	Effervescent
Elated	Enchanted	Encouraged	Energetic
Engrossed	Enlivened	Enthusiastic	Excited
Exhilarated	Expansive	Expectant	Exultant
Fascinated	Free	Friendly	Fulfilled
Glad	Gleeful	Glorious	Glowing
Good-humored	Grateful	Gratified	Happy
Helpful	Hopeful	Inspired	Interested
Intrigued	Invigorated	Involved	Joyous
Loving	Mellow	Merry	Mindful
Moved	Optimistic	Overjoyed	Peaceful
Pleased	Proud	Quiet	Radiant
Refreshed	Relaxed	Relieved	Satisfied
Secure	Splendid	Stimulated	Surprised
Tender	Thankful	Thrilled	Touched
Tranquil	Trusting	Upbeat	Warm
Wide-awake	Zestful		

FEELINGS LIKELY WHEN OUR NEEDS OUR NOT BEING MET

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

## Common Expressions That Can Be Blocks to a Compassionate Response

My feelings exist because I have a met or unmet need NOT because you said or did something. Simply using “because I” after any expression of “I feel” increases the possibility of being heard. As soon as you cross an “I” with a “you” as “I feel . . . because you,” or “Do you feel . . . because I,” the chance of getting your needs met is less likely. Keeping an “I” with an “I” and a “you” with a “you” allows some safety from hearing blame.

Words that seem to express feelings yet imply that someone else is responsible:

Cornered	reprimanded	victimized
Intimidated	betrayed	pressured
Rejected	manipulated	guilty
Bullied	picked-on	singled-out
Inadequate	dumped-on	invalidated
Distrusted	let-down	unaccepted
Ignored	threatened	misunderstood
Unheard	trampled	put-down
Boxed-in	insignificant	expendable
Unappreciated	abused	unimportant
Isolated	used	unwanted
Overworked	abandoned	neglected
Sabotaged	ganged-up on	interrogated
Unseen	overpowered	jerked around
Washed away	shut out	underpaid

Feelings follow wants

I feel because I was hoping for . . .

Are you feeling . . . . because you were hoping . . .

Empathy allows people to connect and heal.

Empathy must occur before solutions can be reached

## Self-Empathy

Both expression of our own feelings and needs and empathic guesses of others' feelings and needs are grounded in a particular consciousness which is at the heart of NVC. This consciousness is nurtured by the practice of self-empathy.

In self-empathy, we bring the same compassionate attention to ourselves that we give to others when listening to them using NVC. This means listening through any interpretations and judgments we are making to clarify how we are in terms of our own feelings and needs. This inner awareness and clarity supports us in choosing our next step: expressing ourselves to others, or receiving them with empathy. This next step is our request to ourselves about where we want to focus our attention.

The practice of NVC entails an intention to connect compassionately with ourselves and with others, and an ability to keep our attention in the present moment – which includes being aware that sometimes in this present moment we are recalling the past, or imagining a future possibility.

Often self-empathy comes easy, as we access our sensations, emotions and needs, to attune to how we are. However, in moments of conflict or reactivity to others, we may find ourselves reluctant to access an intention to connect compassionately, and we may falter in our capacity to attend to the present moment. Self-empathy at times like this has the power to transform our disconnected state of being and return us to our compassionate intention and present-oriented attention.

With practice, many people find that self-empathy alone sometimes resolves inner conflicts and conflicts with others as it transforms our experience of life.

## Empathy

Expressing our observations, feelings, needs and requests to others is one part of Compassionate Communication. The second part is **empathy: the process of connecting with another by guessing their feelings and needs**; placing our full intention, our complete presence on the other.

Empathic connection can sometimes happen silently, but in times of conflict, communicating to another person that we understand their feelings and that their needs matter to us can be a powerful turning point in problem situations. Demonstrating that we have such understanding is not the same as agreeing to act in ways that don't meet our own needs.

Connecting empathically with another person is a way to meet our own needs – for understanding, connection, and contributing to another person's life through compassion. At the same time, we hope that the empathy would meet the person's needs as well, and would aid both of us in finding strategies that would meet our needs.

The heart of empathy is in our ability to compassionately connect with our own and others' humanity. Offering our empathic presence in this sense is one strategy (or request) through which we can meet our own needs. It is a gift to another person and to ourselves of our full presence.

When we use compassionate communication to connect empathically, we use the same four components in the form of a question, since we can never know what is going on inside the other. The other person will always be the ultimate authority on what is going on for them. Our empathy may meet other people's needs for understanding or it may spark their own self discovery.

We may ask something like: When you [see, hear, . . .] are you feeling . . . ? because you need . . . and would you like . . . ?

More often, in an ongoing process of dialogue, there is no need to mention either the observation (it is usually clear in the context of communication) or the request (since we are acting on an assumed request for empathy). We might get to guessing a request when we have connected more and are ready to explore strategies.

In the process of empathy between two people, if both parties are able to connect at the level of feelings and needs, a transformation often happens in which one or both parties experience a shift in intention and attention. This can lead to new

reserves of kindness and generosity, or open us to creative solutions that were difficult when clouded by disconnection. These are moment of deep human connection, satisfaction and hope.

### **Practice: Transforming Judgments and Enemy Images**

#### **KEYS:**

- a. Judging someone is an indication that a need of ours is not met. The first step in transforming judgments is to recognize and connect with our unmet needs.
- b. The action we're judging is itself an attempt to meet needs. The second step is connecting with the needs of the person we're judging so we can open our hearts with compassion.
- c. When we experience challenge in transforming our judgments, we can reflect on what needs we might be trying to meet by holding on to our judgments. Connecting with this set of needs may be essential to enable the previous two steps to proceed.

#### **EXERCISE:**

1. Write down a strong, negative, judgment you have of someone else that you would like to explore. This may be something you think about that person that you completely believe is true. You may pick someone in your personal life, or someone who is in some position of political or economic power whose actions affect you.
2. Think of a time or situation when you are likely to have this judgment come up, and write an observation of what this person is actually saying or doing at that time.
3. What needs of yours are not met in relation to that person's action? How do you feel when these needs are not met? Explore this sufficiently to experience the relief of self-connection.
4. Explore the possibility of opening your heart to this other person. What needs do you imagine this person might be trying to meet by taking this action? How might this person be feeling? Explore this sufficiently to experience the relief of compassion.
5. Check in with yourself about your original judgment. Is it still alive? If yes, return to connecting with your own needs or with the other person's needs – wherever you're experiencing a "charge." If the judgment is still alive after that, consider: What needs might you be trying to meet by holding on to this judgment?

What feelings arise in relation to this? Again, connect with yourself sufficiently about these needs to experience some relief.

6. Check in with yourself again about the judgment. If it's still alive, consider the following set of questions:

a. Is there any way in which you believe the judgment to be “the truth”? If so, explore what needs might be met by this belief, and what needs might be met by letting go of this belief.

b. Are you afraid to express this judgment? If yes, what needs are you afraid would not be met by sharing it, and what needs might be met?

c. Are you judging yourself for having this judgment? If yes, explore any way in which you're telling yourself that you should not have this judgment. Connect with your choice about whether or not to work any further on transforming this judgment, and explore any needs that might be met by continuing to work on transforming the judgment, or letting go of working on it.

d. Reflect on your feelings, needs, and any requests you have of yourself or of the other person in this moment.

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## **JUST LIKE ME**

### The Compassion Exercise

By Harry Palmer

Honesty with one's self leads to compassion for others.

Objective: To increase the amount of compassion in the world.

Expected result: Increase in understanding and a personal sense of peace.

Instructions: This exercise can be done anywhere people congregate (airports, events, beaches, etc.) It should be done on strangers, unobtrusively and from some distance. Try to do all five steps on the same person.

Step 1: With your attention on the person, repeat to yourself:

"just like me, this person is seeking some happiness for his/her life."

Step 2: With your attention on the person, repeat to yourself:

"Just like me, this person is trying to avoid suffering in his/her life."

Step 3: With your attention on the person, repeat to yourself:

"Just like me, this person has known sadness, loneliness, and despair."

Step 4: With your attention on the person, repeat to yourself:

"Just like me, this person is seeking to fill his/her needs."

Step 5: With your attention on the person, repeat to yourself:

"Just like me, this person is learning about life."

### **Variations of the Just Like Me process:**

Done by couples to increase understanding of each other.

Done on old enemies and antagonists still present in one's memories.

Done on alien life forms.

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## **10 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO CONTRIBUTE TO INTERNAL, INTERPERSONAL, AND ORGANIZATIONAL PEACE**

1. Spend some time each day quietly reflecting on how you would like to relate to yourself and others.
2. Remember that all human beings have the same needs.
3. Check your intention to see if you are as interested in others getting their needs met as you are your own.
4. When asking someone to do something, check first to see if you are making a request or a demand.
5. Instead of saying what you DON'T want someone to do, say what you DO want the person to do.
6. Instead of saying what you want someone to BE, say what action you'd like the person to take that you hope will help the person be that way.
7. Before agreeing or disagreeing with anyone's opinions, try to tune in to what the person is feeling and needing.
8. Instead of saying "No," say what need of yours prevents you from saying, "Yes."
9. If you are feeling upset, think about what need of yours is not being met, and what you yourself could do to meet it, instead of thinking about what's wrong with others or yourself.
10. Instead of praising someone who did something you like, express your gratitude by telling the person what need of yours that action met.