

Nonviolent communication (NVC)

is a process developed by [Marshall Rosenberg](#) and others which people use to [communicate](#) with greater [compassion](#) and clarity. It focuses on two things: *honest self-expression* — exposing what matters to oneself in a way that's likely to inspire compassion in others, and *empathy* — listening with deep compassion. Formal NVC self-expression includes four elements: *observations* (distinguished from interpretations/evaluations), *feelings* (emotions separate from thoughts), *needs* (deep motives) and *requests* (clear, present, doable and without demand).

Those who use nonviolent communication (also called "compassionate communication") describe all actions as motivated by an attempt to meet [human needs](#). However, in meeting those needs, they seek to avoid the use of [fear](#), [guilt](#), [shame](#), [blame](#), [coercion](#) or threats. The ideal of NVC is to get one's own needs met while also meeting others' needs. A key principle of nonviolent communication that supports this is the capacity to express oneself without use of good/bad, right/wrong judgment, hence the emphasis on expressing feelings and needs, instead of criticisms or judgments.

Honest self-expression

The self-expression process described in the model consists of four steps:

1. To [observe](#) without evaluation, judgement, or analysis;
2. To look for [feelings](#) behind words that are expressed;
3. To look for unmet [needs](#), connected to these feelings; evaluating which needs are not (yet) being met instead of evaluating actions in "right" and "wrong";
4. Make a [request](#) how another person could enrich [life](#). Essential in this is that the other person is to be left free to honour or decline the request.

In this recipe, offering an observation serves to give the listener a reference as to the subject. Offering a feeling (uncontaminated by interpretation and blame) tends to increase connection. Offering a need provides connection and meaning. Finally, a request offers clarity as to what the speaker wants.

It is observed that demands (for which there is only one "acceptable" response) do not meet the recipient's need for autonomy and tend to produce either submission or rebellion. Typically, neither of these responses is enjoyable for both parties. Both responses foster resentment and strain the relationship. In contrast, it is felt that the consistent use of requests (for which no answer will trigger retaliation of any kind) leads to people experiencing the joy of giving. People will often say "yes" to a request out the desire to contribute to one another, which NVC practitioners maintain is a stronger and more universal motivation than is commonly recognized.

If a request yields a "no," the suggestion is to interpret that as information that a need exists that the requester was not aware of and may want to investigate. The need that originally motivated the request is more likely to be met through a strategy that respects all needs.

Empathy

[Empathy](#), as practiced in NVC, is a somewhat subtle concept involving understanding the essential core of an individual's experience and a kindly "energy" of connection and "presence." The explicit empathy process offered by NVC is often itself referred to as "giving empathy." It is more accurately a procedure that supports the development of true empathy. This process involves guessing the feelings and needs of another (empathy for another), or sensing one's own feelings and needs (self-empathy). The empathy process for another may be conducted out loud, as an interaction with that person, or silently, as an inner approach to awareness of that person's experience.

Empathy brings about understanding of the needs of the one "receiving" empathy, and also relieves emotional charge. Emotional charge is often uncomfortable and is a barrier to being able to hear others clearly and respond in a flexible fashion. Thus, empathy may be used to relieve distress and increase understanding and readiness for hearing.

Rosenberg gave the following definition of nonviolent communication at [Lausanne, Switzerland](#), in September, 2003:

"Language, thoughts, communication skills and means of influence that serve my desire to do three things:

- to liberate myself from cultural learning that is in conflict with how I want to live my life.
- to empower myself to connect with myself and others in a way that makes compassionate giving natural.
- to empower myself to create structures that support compassionate giving."

Expression

1. Observation

When I (see / hear / remember / imagine) _____

2. Feeling

I feel _____

3. Need

Because I would have liked _____

Because I was (hoping / wishing / wanting) _____

... and that would meet my need for _____.

4. Request

And right now would you be willing to:

- Tell me what you heard me say;
- Tell me how you feel about what I said;
- Tell me if you'd be willing to _____.

Empathy

(Primary focus is on feelings and needs.)

1. Observation

When you see, hear _____,

2. Feeling

Are you feeling _____?

3. Need

Because you would have liked _____

Because you were needing _____

4. Request

So now, are you wanting _____?

And now would you like me to _____?