

How to Practice Nonviolent Communication

Nonviolent Communication (NVC) includes a simple method for clear, empathic communication, consisting of four steps: **Observations, Feelings, Needs, Requests.**

NVC aims to find a way for all present to get what really matters to them without the use of guilt, humiliation, shame, blame, coercion, or threats. It is useful for resolving conflicts, connecting with others, and living in a way that is conscious, present, and attuned to the genuine, living needs of yourself and others.

1 State: the observations that are leading you to feel the need to say something. These should be purely factual observations, with no component of judgment or evaluation.

For example, "It's 2:00 a.m. and I hear your stereo playing" states an observed fact, while "It's way too late to be making such an awful racket" makes an evaluation. People often disagree about evaluations because they value things differently, but directly observable facts provide a common ground for communication.

2 State: the feeling that the observation is triggering in you. Or, guess what the other person is feeling, and ask.

Naming the emotion, without moral judgment, enables you to connect in a spirit of mutual respect and cooperation. Perform this step with the aim of accurately identifying the feeling that you or the other person are experiencing in that moment, not with the aim of shaming them for their feeling or otherwise trying to prevent them from feeling as they do.

For example, "There's half an hour to go before the show starts, and I see that you're pacing (observation). Are you nervous?" Or, "I see your dog running around without a leash and barking (observation). I'm scared."

Feelings are sometimes hard to put into words

3 State: the need that is the cause of that feeling. Or, guess the need that caused the feeling in the other person, and ask.

When our needs are met, we have happy, pleasant feelings; when they are not met, we have unpleasant feelings. By tuning into the feeling, you can often find the underlying need. Stating the need, without morally judging it, gives you both clarity about what is alive in you or the other person in that moment.

For example, "I see you looking away while I'm talking, and you've been speaking so quietly, I can't hear you (observation). I'm feeling uncomfortable (feeling) because I'm needing connection right now."

4 State: Make a concrete request for action to meet the need just identified.

Ask clearly and specifically for what you want right now, rather than hinting or stating only what you don't want.

For example, "I notice that you haven't spoken in the last ten minutes (observation). Are you feeling bored(feeling)?" If the answer is yes, you might bring up your own feeling and propose an action: "Well, I'm bored, too. Hey, how would you like to go to the Exploratorium?" or perhaps, "I'm finding these people really interesting to talk with. How about we meet up in an hour when I'm done here?" For the request to really be a request—and not a demand—allow the other person to say no or propose an alternative. You take responsibility for getting your own needs met, and you let them take responsibility for theirs. When you do something together, you want it to be because you both voluntarily consent to it, as a way of fulfilling your own genuine needs and desires, not out of guilt or pressure. Sometimes you can find an action that meets both your needs, and sometimes you just have to amiably go your separate ways. If you're not ready to ask in this spirit, that's OK, you probably just need some more empathy yourself.



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