

# **Pathway to Living Interdependence**

## *Fundamentals of Nonviolent Communication*



The Way of Community  
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# Pathway to Living Interdependence

## Fundamentals of Nonviolent Communication (NVC)

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### Key Assumptions and Intentions of NVC

#### Assumptions Underlying the Practice of Nonviolent Communication

Following are key assumptions that NVC practice is based on. Many traditions share these assumptions; NVC gives us concrete, powerful tools for putting them into practice. When we live based on these assumptions, self-connection and connection with others become increasingly possible and easy.

1. **All human beings share the same needs:** We all have the same needs, although the strategies we use to meet these needs may differ. Conflict occurs at the level of strategies, not at the level of needs.
2. **Our world offers sufficient resources for meeting everyone's basic needs:** The scarcity experienced by so many people arises because we have not designed our social structures to meet everyone's needs. We can attribute any apparent scarcity to a current systemic limitation, a crisis of imagination, or a lack of skills for fostering connection.
3. **All actions are attempts to meet needs:** Our desire to meet needs, whether conscious or unconscious, underlies every action we take. We only resort to violence or other actions that do not meet our own or others' needs when we do not recognize more effective strategies for meeting needs.
4. **Feelings point to needs being met or unmet:** Feelings may be triggered but not caused by others. Our feelings arise directly out of our experience of whether our needs seem to us met or unmet in a given circumstance. Our assessment of whether or not our needs are met almost invariably involves an interpretation or belief. When our needs are met, we may feel happy, satisfied, peaceful, etc. When our needs are not met, we may feel sad, scared, frustrated, etc.
5. **All human beings have the capacity for compassion:** We have an innate capacity for compassion, though not always the knowledge of how to access it. When we are met with compassion and respect for our autonomy, we tend to have more access to our own compassion for ourselves and for others. Growing compassion contributes directly to our capacity to meet needs peacefully.
6. **Human beings enjoy giving:** We inherently enjoy contributing to others when we have connected with our own and others' needs and can experience our giving as coming from choice.
7. **Human beings meet needs through interdependent relationships:** We meet many of our needs through our relationships with other people and with nature, though some needs are met principally through the quality of our relationship with ourselves and for some, with a spiritual dimension to life. When others' needs are not met, some needs of our own also remain unmet.

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8. **Human beings change:** By virtue of the constantly unfolding nature of needs and strategies to meet them, all of us are dynamic processes, not static entities.
9. **Choice is internal:** Regardless of the circumstances, we can meet our need for autonomy by making conscious choices based on awareness of needs.
10. **The most direct path to peace is through self-connection:** Our capacity for peace is not dependent on having our needs met. Even when many needs are unmet, meeting our need for self-connection can be sufficient for inner peace.

### Key Intentions for the Practice of Nonviolent Communication

We hold the following intentions when practicing NVC because we believe that they help us contribute to a world where everyone's needs are attended to peacefully.

#### A. Open-Hearted Living

1. **Self-compassion:** We aim to release all self-blame, self-judgments, and self-demands, and meet ourselves with compassion and understanding for the needs we try to meet through all our actions.
2. **Expressing from the heart:** When expressing ourselves, we aim to speak from the heart, expressing our feelings and needs, and making specific, do-able requests.
3. **Receiving with compassion:** When we hear others, we aim to hear the feelings and needs behind their expressions and actions, regardless of how they express themselves, even if their expression or actions do not meet our needs (e.g. judgments, demands, physical violence).
4. **Prioritizing connection:** We aim to focus on connecting open-heartedly with everyone's needs instead of seeking immediate and potentially compromised solutions, especially in challenging situations.
5. **Beyond "right" and "wrong":** We aim to transform our habit of making "right" and "wrong" assessments (moralistic judgments), and to focus instead on whether or not human needs appear met (need-based assessments).

#### B. Choice, Responsibility, Peace

1. **Taking responsibility for our feelings:** We aim to connect our feelings to our own needs, recognizing that others do not have the power to make us feel anything. This recognition empowers us to take action to meet our needs instead of waiting for others to change.
2. **Taking responsibility for our actions:** We aim to recognize our choice in each moment, and take actions that we believe will most likely meet our needs. We aim to

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avoid taking actions motivated by fear, guilt, shame, desire for reward, or ideas of duty or obligation.

3. **Living in peace with unmet needs:** We aim to work with our feelings when we experience our needs as unmet, connecting with the needs rather than insisting on meeting them.
4. **Increasing capacity for meeting needs:** We aim to develop our internal resources, particularly our NVC skills, so we can contribute to more connection and greater diversity of strategies for meeting needs.
5. **Increasing capacity for meeting the present moment:** We aim to develop our capacity to connect in each moment with our own and others' needs, and to respond to present stimuli in the moment instead of through static stories about who we and others are.

### C. Sharing Power (Partnership)

1. **Caring equally for everyone's needs:** We aim to make requests and not demands, thus staying open to the other's strategies to meet their needs. When hearing a "No" to our request, or when saying "No" to another's request, we aim to work towards solutions that meet everyone's needs, not just our own, and not just the other person's.
2. **Protective use of force:** We aim to use the minimum force necessary in order to protect, not to educate, punish, or get what we want without the other's agreement, and only in situations where we find that dialogue fails to meet an immediate need for physical safety. We aim to return to dialogue as soon as we have re-established a sense of physical safety.

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### Feelings and Needs Lists

#### Feelings Inventory

This list is neither exhaustive nor definitive. It is meant as a starting place to support anyone who wishes to engage in a process of deepening self-discovery and to facilitate greater understanding and connection between people.

#### PEACEFUL

tranquil  
calm  
content  
engrossed  
absorbed  
expansive  
serene  
loving  
blissful  
satisfied  
relaxed  
relieved  
quiet  
carefree  
composed  
fulfilled

#### PLAYFUL

energetic  
effervescent  
invigorated  
zestful  
refreshed  
impish  
alive  
lively  
exuberant  
giddy  
adventurous  
mischievous  
jubilant  
goofy  
buoyant

electrified

#### LOVING

warm  
affectionate  
tender  
appreciative  
friendly  
sensitive  
compassionate  
grateful  
nurtured  
amorous  
trusting  
open  
thankful  
radiant  
adoring  
passionate

#### GLAD

happy  
excited  
hopeful  
joyful  
satisfied  
delighted  
encouraged  
grateful  
confident  
inspired  
touched  
proud  
exhilarated

ecstatic  
optimistic  
glorious

#### INTERESTED

involved  
inquisitive  
intense  
enriched  
absorbed  
alert  
aroused  
astonished  
concerned  
curious  
eager  
enthusiastic  
fascinated  
intrigued  
surprised  
helpful

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### SAD

lonely  
heavy  
troubled  
helpless  
gloomy  
overwhelmed  
distant  
despondent  
discouraged  
distressed  
dismayed  
disheartened  
despairing  
sorrowful  
unhappy  
depressed  
blue  
miserable  
dejected  
melancholy

### MAD

impatient  
pessimistic  
disgruntled  
frustrated  
irritable,  
edgy  
grouchy  
agitated  
exasperated  
disgusted  
irked  
cantankerous  
animosity  
bitter  
rancorous  
irate, furious  
angry  
hostile  
enraged

violent

### SCARED

afraid  
fearful  
terrified  
startled  
nervous  
jittery  
horrified  
anxious  
worried  
anguished  
lonely  
insecure  
sensitive  
shocked  
apprehensive  
dread  
jealous  
desperate  
suspicious  
frightened

### TIRED

exhausted  
fatigued  
inert  
lethargic  
indifferent  
weary  
overwhelmed  
fidgety  
helpless  
heavy  
sleepy  
disinterested  
reluctant  
passive  
dull  
bored  
listless

blah

mopey  
comatose

### CONFUSED

frustrated  
perplexed  
hesitant  
troubled  
uncomfortable  
withdrawn  
apathetic  
embarrassed  
hurt  
uneasy  
irritated  
suspicious  
unsteady  
puzzled  
restless  
boggled  
chagrined  
unglued  
detached  
skeptical

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### Needs Inventory

The following list is neither exhaustive nor definitive. It is meant as a starting place to support anyone who wishes to engage in a process of deepening self-discovery and to facilitate greater understanding and connection between people.

acceptance	discovery	privacy
adventure	ease	protection
affection	effectiveness	purpose
aliveness	emotional safety	reciprocity
appreciation	empathy	relaxation
authenticity	equality	respect
awareness	equanimity	rest / sleep
balance	familiarity	safety
beauty	fellowship	safety
belonging	freedom	security
caring	fun	self-expression
celebration	growth	self-worth
challenge	harmony	sensitivity
choice	inclusion	shelter
clarity	independence	solidarity
closeness	inspiration	space
comfort	integrity	spiritual communion
communication	interdependence	spontaneity
community	intimacy	stability
companionship	joy	stimulation
compassion	learning	support
competence	love	thriving
confidence	mourning	to be known
congruence	movement / exercise	touch
consideration	mutuality	tranquility
consistency	mystery	transparency
continuity	nurturing	trust
contribution	order	understanding
cooperation	participation	warmth
creativity	partnership	wholeness
dignity	presence	wonder

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### Nonviolent Communication (NVC) Quick Reference Guide: The Form

Expression	Empathy
<b>Observation</b> <i>When I see/hear . . .</i>	[Observation] <i>[When you see/hear . . .]</i>
<b>Feeling</b> <i>I feel . . .</i>	<b>Feeling</b> <i>Are you feeling . . .</i>
<b>Need</b> <i>Because I need . . .</i>	<b>Need</b> <i>Because you need . . .</i>
<b>Request</b> <i>Would you be willing...?</i>	[Request] <i>[Would you like...?]</i>

- ✓ **Observations:** Description of what is seen or heard without added interpretations. For example, instead of “She’s having a temper tantrum,” you could say “She is lying on the floor crying and kicking.” If referring to what someone said quote as much as possible instead of rephrasing.
- ✓ **Feelings:** Our emotions rather than our story or thoughts about what others are doing. For example, instead of “I feel manipulated,” which includes an interpretation of another’s behavior, you could say “I feel uncomfortable.” Avoid the following phrasing: “I feel like . . .” and “I feel that...” —the next words will be thoughts, not feelings.
- ✓ **Needs:** Feelings arise due to our needs, which are universal and ongoing and not dependent on the actions of particular individuals. State *your need* rather than the other person’s actions as the cause. For example, “I feel annoyed *because I need support*” rather than “I feel annoyed *because you didn’t do the dishes.*”
- ✓ **Requests:** Asking concretely and clearly for what we want (instead of what we don’t want). For example, “Would you be willing to come back tonight at the time we’ve agreed?” rather than “Would you make sure not to be late again?” By definition, when we make requests we are open to hearing a “no,” taking it as an opportunity for further dialogue.
- ✓ **Empathy:** In NVC, we empathize with others by guessing their feelings and needs. Instead of trying to “get it right,” we aim to understand. The observation and request are sometimes dropped. When words are not wanted or are hard to offer, empathy can be offered silently.
- ✓ **Self-Empathy:** In self-empathy, we listen inwardly to connect with our own feelings and needs. It is that connection which enables us to choose our next step.

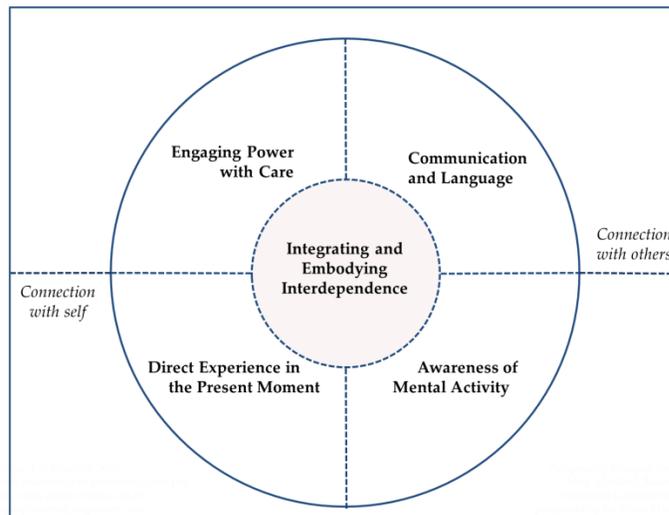
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### Nonviolent Communication (NVC): Essence and Practice

#### Living Interdependence: the Essence of NVC

NVC is an *awareness practice* which invites us to bring choice to where we place our attention in service of *integrating and embodying interdependence*. The following diagram illustrates the central aspects of this practice and four general areas where we might place our attention when connecting with ourselves and others. See the next page for a more detailed version of this diagram.



#### The Beginning Practice (Which is also the Advanced Practice)

The core practice of NVC is simple: whatever you say to me, I do my best to hear what is important to you in saying it, or what needs you are expressing. This is also the advanced practice, because you may express these needs in a way that is difficult for me to hear! Here is the basic practice:

*Start with Self-Connection and then Listen to Hear.* Notice your feet, the sensation of contact with the earth, and the sensation of breathing in your body. Just listen, maintaining awareness of your direct experience in your body, thoughts and impulses.  
*Offer a Reflection.* Tell the person what you heard them say, especially the essence or meaning, and any guesses about what is important to them in what they shared.  
*Check for Accuracy.* End your reflection with “Did I get it?” or “Was that accurate?” or some other question to confirm you heard what the other person intended you to.  
*Check before Expressing Yourself.* Ask “Are you complete?” or “Could I tell you what comes up for me?” or some other question before sharing what is important to you.