

Non-Violent Communication Practice Group

Exercises and Notes

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1 Non-Violent Communication Context

The start (and end) point of Non-Violent Communication is a Conscious Intention to be compassionate. Without this conscious intention, Non-Violent Communication skills can be used to manipulate people so that you get what you want. No matter how skillful you are, this is not Non-Violent Communication .

One aim of this course is to enable your use of Non-Violent Communication skills to be appropriate and effective. Appropriate use of Non-Violent Communication skills follows from your conscious intention to be compassionate to yourself and others. Effective use of the skills comes from practicing them. Especially by making mistakes in a safe and supportive space.

There is a paradox, in that Non-Violent Communication training focuses on the skills rather than the conscious intention. This is right and proper. Unless you practice the skills, you will not become fluent in Non-Violent Communication . But eventually you will reach a level of skill that allows you to forget about the skills and focus on your intent.

This reflects the four levels of learning for any skill:

1. Unconscious unknowing — you have not heard of Non-Violent Communication .
2. Conscious unknowing — you have heard of Non-Violent Communication but don't know how to apply it.
3. Conscious knowing — you deliberately think about and use Non-Violent Communication skills.
4. Conscious unknowing — you use Non-Violent Communication skills without having to think about them and can focus on your intent to be compassionate

2 Compassion

This is the starting point and aim of Non-Violent Communication . Marshall Rosenberg used the metaphor of the Giraffe to represent compassion as giraffes have very large hearts. By contrast, the Jackal does whatever it needs to survive and is the metaphor for non-compassionate communication. Imagine wearing a pair of ears, either giraffe shaped or jackal shaped. You can turn the ears pointing inwards towards yourself or outwards towards the other.

3 Exercise — Eye gazing (10 mins)

For this exercise you will be working in pairs without going to a breakout room. Identify who you will be working with and pin that person to your zoom window. You can do this by going to the gallery view then right clicking on your partner's image and selecting pin to screen.

When you have both paired your views, gaze into your partner's eyes with a soft focus for two minutes and silently repeat to yourself "Just like me, this person feels pain, sadness and fear."

Pause and rest your eyes.

Then look into you partner's eyes again and this time silently say to yourself "Just like me, this person feels love, joy and excitement."

Again pause to rest your eyes.

Finally look into your partner's eyes again and silently repeat to yourself "Just like me, this person is doing everything they can to meet their needs."

Unpin your views and share your experiences of this exercise with the group.

4 The four pillars of Non-Violent Communication

Given you have a conscious intention to be compassionate to yourself and others, there are four core practices or domains then enable Non-Violent Communication . Each one has a shadow. This and the next three sessions will look at each one in turn.

- Observations vs. Evaluations
- Feelings vs. Thoughts
- Needs vs. Strategies
- Requests vs. Demands

5 Exercise — Observation or Evaluation (10 mins)

For each statement decide if it is an observation or an evaluation or judgement.

1. She works too hard.
2. My new computer is three times faster than my last one.
3. My new boss wants me to work three times faster than my last one.
4. My new boss said they want me to work three times faster than my last one.
5. My neighbor is friendly.
6. My boss is a micromanager.
7. The consequences of Brexit are worse than predicted.
8. I parked my car in front of your house, blocking the drive.
9. I deliberately parked my car in front of your house, blocking the drive.
10. You deliberately parked your car in front of my house, blocking the drive.
11. You owe me ten pounds.
12. You owe me an apology.
13. Non-Violent Communication doesn't work on some people.
14. Brexit means Brexit.

6 Judgements and bracketing

When making observations it is almost impossible not to make judgements about them at the same time. In fact, in humans this has evolved into an automatic process. For example can you hear the observation that Russia invaded Ukraine without also having an opinion about whether that is good or bad? The process of putting aside our judgements in order to better notice what is around us is called bracketing and the practice of observing without judgement is called phenomenology.

There are several problems that come with taking a phenomenological approach to observations. One is that there are far more sensations happening at any one time than we can possibly notice so our attention gets focussed and that focussing largely happens out of our awareness and is driven by our judgement. (If we judge something to be dangerous we will

pay more attention to it.) Our attention can also get focussed or grabbed by something that someone says or does.

7 Awareness exercise — 10 minutes

In pairs in a break out room, the first person has five minutes to say what they notice. This could be an internal or an external sensation. If the person moves away from simply describing what they observe, their partner can challenge them by inviting them to describe the sensations. For example if someone says “I notice I am angry” they can be challenged with “What sensations do you notice that tell you you are angry?” or “Where in your body do you experience that anger?” Try not to get bogged down into arguing whether it is an observation or a judgement. After five minutes, swap roles.

8 Homework

Set aside a few minutes each day to practice noticing. Say to yourself “At this moment, I am aware of . . .” Also notice any judgements that you make about what you notice. As a hint, any description that uses an adjective or adverb is probably a judgement.

9 References

Phenomenology comes from the work of philosophers Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. A short introduction is available at <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ces/research/current/socialtheory/maps/phenomenology/>.

There is a chapter on Phenomenology and Awareness in *An Introduction to Gestalt* by Sills, Lapworth and Desmond (Sage Publications, 2012)

If you want to read about how two rational people can have apparently opposing views on what are “the facts”, try Jonathan Heidt’s book *The Righteous Mind* or <https://righteousmind.com/>