

Four Components of NVC

The four components of Nonviolent Communication are the tools that help us communicate more effectively. Once you are familiar with these tools and how to use them, you will be in a position to shift your communication dramatically.

We will start by looking at each one of the components separately.

Observation

The first component of Nonviolent Communication is *observation*. Observations are simply the facts of a situation. What you heard someone say or what you saw someone do, without adding any evaluations or judgments. For instance, if someone said, "I like the red dress better," the observation is, "You said that you liked the red dress better" because the speaker is simply repeating back what the other person said. An observation that is mixed with evaluations or judgments might be "You said that you don't like me in the blue dress" because the speaker is interpreting what the other person *meant* by the statement. Do you notice the difference?

This distinction is important because most of us would argue with someone who repeated the second sentence. The argument would be about our interpretation of what the other person meant by their statement, or the other person defending their statement, rather than what is really important- gaining clarity about their intention or being heard about our hurt feelings that were stimulated by the statement.

Another form of observation is when we state the facts of what we saw or experienced, such as "You came home at 5:30," where the speaker simply states the actual event. An evaluation would be "You were late *again*. You're always late." How do you think you would respond to this? Most of us would defend ourselves by arguing about our lateness this time or we might reflect on all the times we were on time starting with February 2, 1972. Can you relate?

The observation, then, helps us stay focused on what was actually said or done and it helps us avoid needless arguments that serve to cover up the primary issue.

Feeling

The second component of Nonviolent Communication is *feelings*. We state how we feel about the situation directly after we have clarified the observation. This may seem like an unimportant step because many people think that their feelings should be obvious to the other person.

Unfortunately, what we are feeling isn't always obvious. Fear and excitement have the exact same physiological effects on our bodies and hurt and anger often look the same: heavier breathing, red face, elevated voice and tone, and increased pace in speech. Why take the chance that the other person will understand how we feel about the

situation when we can tell them? Expressing how something affects us improves our opportunities for connection, understanding and ultimately resolution.

The following is a partial list of feelings:

happy, sad, joyful, scared, angry, ticked off, ecstatic, absorbed, involved, comfortable, cozy, calm, contented, peaceful, affectionate, loving, energetic, enthusiastic. Here's a more complete list of [feelings](#).

Sometimes we confuse our feelings with our judgments about other people. This comes out when we say things like, "I feel like you're manipulating me." Or, "I feel that you don't care." Both these statements are emotionally charged and sound like feelings, yet no emotion is actually expressed. Instead, the speaker is saying what he thinks the other person is doing- manipulating or that she doesn't care.

Because these statements are emotionally charged, they will likely ignite the conversation. Often the argument will not move beyond this point because one person is arguing that the other is manipulative and the other person is arguing that she isn't manipulative. The argument becomes a verbal tug of war that rarely leads to peaceful resolution. In the end one of you is dragged through the mud leaving both people feeling like losers. One way to avoid these exceedingly frustrating moments is to clearly state your feelings, rather than your judgments about the other person, such as "I feel angry", or, "I feel hurt."

Here are a few additional examples of statements that sound like feelings, but are really thoughts about the other person:

I feel like you are ignoring me.

I feel you are spending too much time at work.

I feel disrespected.

I feel judged.

Notice that many of these statements start out either, "I feel like?", or "I feel you." Whenever you catch yourself starting a sentence in this way, be aware that you are probably about to state a thought instead of a feeling!

Being clear about our feelings can help us and the other people in our life gain clarity.

Need

The third component of Nonviolent Communication is *needs*. Needs are anything that a person needs to sustain life no matter their race, religious preference, financial status,

location or culture. Needs then are the basic things all people need to support life. The following are a few examples of needs:

love, food, shelter, caring, collaboration, support, appreciation, to be heard, comfort

Here's a [more complete list of needs](#).

Another important distinction about needs is that everything someone does or says is an attempt to meet their needs. Therefore, it is an attempt to sustain life in some way.

For example, say that your teenage son mowed the lawn as you asked but didn't complete the project as well as you would have liked. Can you imagine what need or needs motivated his behavior? Could he have been trying to meet his need for autonomy, fun, relief, or ease?

Can you imagine the underlying needs that drive a parent to respond to his son by saying, "How is it that you can never finish a job?!?" Is it possible he has a need for completion, trust (that his son will complete a project without more intervention), order or maybe beauty (wanting the yard to look a certain way).

The son and parent both choose specific methods to meet their needs. Neither of them are bad people, they are simply employing the methods they have learned to meet their needs.

The tragic thing is that many times we try to get our needs met by using methods that will guarantee our failure! The parent and son both illustrate how this can happen. For instance, is it likely that the son's needs for ease, autonomy, fun, or relief will be met if he doesn't finish the lawn as agreed upon and then has to deal with his parent's disappointment later on? He may meet some of these needs in the moment but none of them long-term. His behavior, then, actually prevents him from meeting his underlying needs.

Similarly, the parent isn't likely to meet his needs for order, beauty, trust or completion if he says, "How is it that you can never finish a job?!?"

When we understand that our behaviors are an attempt to meet our needs, we can become more skilled at choosing behaviors that will help us succeed at this. The result is more ease, fun, depth, and joy in our relationships and in our lives.

Request

The fourth component of Nonviolent Communication is making a *request*. Where the need is general (everyone has the same needs), the request is specific. It is the strategy we would like to use to help us meet our unmet needs.

For instance, say that you said to someone:

1st Component - Observation: "When I see you kick the dog

2nd Component - Feelings: I feel worried and scared

3rd Component - Needs: because I value respect for all beings."

The 4th component clarifies what you would like the other person to do to meet your need for respect for all beings. Do you have an idea of what you might like to ask? How about this:

4th Component - Request: "Would you be willing to sit with the dog for a minute to make sure she's okay?"

Once we have clarified our unmet need, there are literally countless ways to meet that need. The request, then, becomes the way that seems to fit best with us. In this case some additional requests could have been: Would you please tell me why you kicked the dog? Would you go outside and play catch with the dog for a half-hour? Would you please take a few minutes to write down five other ways that you could release your tension that would also meet my need for respecting all beings?

The request is the specific action you'd like done to help you meet your need. There are two kinds of request a person could make. They are:

1. Action Request - where you ask someone to do a specific task, such as pet the dog, go to the store and buy milk, call the babysitter, or write a 10-page report.
2. Connection Request - where you ask someone to do something that will help you connect with them or that will help them connect to you. This usually comes up when one person wants to be heard or understood, or when someone wants to know how another person feels about what he said.

Effective requests have a few basic parts to them:

They are specific - If you want your teenage son to mow the lawn before 7:00 p.m., be specific. Don't ask him to mow the lawn and assume (or hope) that he'll mow it by 7:00 p.m.

They use positive language - Ask for what you want, not what you don't want. This adds clarity and positive energy to your request.

They use present language - Ask for something in the present that the other person could do or say right now. If the agreement you want will happen in the future, ask the other person if they are willing to make an agreement on that item now. In the next section you will learn how to use the four components of NVC to enhance and enrich your communication and relationship with other people.