Non Violent Communication (NVC) At-a-Glance

- All human beings have the same universal needs and have the capacity for compassion, whether we know how to access it or not.
- All behavior is an attempt to meet need, whether conscious or not.
- Our feelings are messengers of met and unmet needs, providing valuable data points in the communications process. Learning how to recognize and describe those feelings is essential.
- Disconnections are tragic expressions of unmet needs and can cause friction, misunderstanding and conflict.
- We are each responsible for meeting our own needs and have different strategies to do so.
- By focusing on needs & differentiating them from the strategies used to meet them, we can better prevent, reduce and resolve conflicts. (Strategies include people, action, time, etc. E.g., “I really need to clean my house” is a strategy to meet a need. The need might be ‘I need harmony and order.”)

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**Observations:** A description of what is seen or heard without added interpretations or judgment.

**Feelings:** Emotions, without judgment. TIP: Avoid phrases like “I feel like...” and “I feel that...” because such openers are usually followed by thoughts, not feelings.

**Needs:** Feelings are caused by needs. State your needs rather than the other’s person’s actions as the cause. E.g., “I feel annoyed because I need support” rather than “I feel annoyed because you don’t support me.”

**Requests:** Clearly and concretely ask for what you want, not what you don’t want. E.g., “Would you be willing to come back at the time we’ve agreed” rather than “Would you make sure that you are not late again?” Note that, by definition, when we make requests, we need to be open to hearing “no” as the response, and take it as an opportunity for further dialogue on what would work for both parties.

**Steps to Transform Anger (our own or another’s):**

**STOP** to slow down and use language skillfully:

- **Stimulus:** Identify the observable stimulus. What is causing your negative emotions?
- **Translate:** Switch to NVC thinking and go underneath your distress to recognize the feelings and unmet needs
- **Open:** Be open to feelings: get out of the ‘thinking’ mode and feel the real emotions
- **Plea:** “Help me understand my anger” or “Help me listen for the unspoken need of the other person”. Follow with plea with a request that will meet that unmet need.

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OBSTACLES TO EMPATHETIC LISTENING

Adapted from Robert Gonzales, Living Compassion Organization

Another name for Non Violent Communication (NVC) is ‘compassionate communication’ because it strives to understand and relate to unmet needs. It includes communicating the message and empathetically listening to others, seeking to understand their unmet needs. To listen empathetically to what the other person is trying to communicate:

1. DON’T give advice or try to ‘fix it’, e.g.,
   “I think you should…”
   “If I were you, I’d…”
   “There’s a great book about…”

2. DON’T explain it away, e.g.,
   “I would have called but…”
   “She only said that because you…”
   “But I/s/he didn’t mean that!”

3. DON’T correct the story, e.g.,
   “That’s not how it happened…”
   “But you were the one who…”
   “Wait! I/s/he never said that!”

4. DON’T console, e.g.,
   “It wasn’t your fault…”
   “You did the best you could…”
   “It could’ve been a lot worse…”

5. DON’T tell your story, e.g.,
   “That reminds me of the time…”
   “That happened to me once…”

6. DON’T shut down their feelings, e.g.,
   “Cheer up. Don’t be so mad!”
   “Quit feeling sorry for yourself…”
   “There’s no reason to be upset…”

7. DON’T sympathize/commiserate, e.g.,
   “Oh you poor thing…”
   “How can people do that?”
   “You must feel awful!”

8. Don’t investigate/interrogate, e.g.,
   “How come you did that?”
   “Why didn’t you…”

9. DON’T evaluate/educate, e.g.,
   “You’re been unrealistic…”
   “The trouble with them is…”
   “If you weren’t so defensive…”

10. DON’T “one-up”, e.g.,
    “That’s nothing: listen to this!”

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