



## This issue...

Non Violent Communication (or NVC) ...An age-old way of communicating brings assertiveness to a deeper and more peaceful level.

## Want to share your story?

Do you have a story that you would like to share? A life experience you want to talk about? I want to hear! I'm looking for life stories – sad, funny or just food for thought. So many people are isolated from others and don't realize that their stories are the stories of many others. I believe that both telling and hearing stories can be very healing.

## Want to receive these by email?

Simply send an email to Cindy Trevitt at [cindy@mycounsellor.ca](mailto:cindy@mycounsellor.ca) and write "subscribe" in the subject line.

## Want to hear about a certain topic?

Email your suggestions or questions – I'd love to hear from you.



## New hours

**I am now open Tuesdays through Saturdays!**



Cindy Trevitt, Registered Professional Counsellor

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Web page [www.mycounsellor.ca](http://www.mycounsellor.ca)

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"Unless we become the change we wish to see in the world,  
No change will ever take place." - Mahatma Gandhi

What is Nonviolent Communication (NVC) and what has this got to do with you? I think it takes assertiveness to a whole new level and is a powerful and poignant way of communicating with everyone around us. It identifies our needs, expresses our feelings, respects those of others and never judges or evaluates. While the idea has been around for centuries, it has been brought to the forefront by Marshall B. Rosenberg, PhD who wrote "Nonviolent Communication, a Language of Life". This article is based on these concepts. I've tried to keep this as brief as possible without losing the spirit of the idea. I hope you find this helpful.

If you and I are having a single thought of violence or hatred against anyone in the world at this moment, we are contributing to the wounding of the world. - Deepak Chopra

The basic idea is to replace judging or automatic reactions with conscious responses based on what we perceive, feel, and want. This helps us to replace old patterns of defending, withdrawing, or attacking even when we are faced with judgement and criticism.

The two main principles are **expressing honesty** and **receiving empathically**. Seems simple, right? Not necessarily. This requires a little more of us but has a profound impact on our relationships with others. How do you express yourself honestly? If your partner ticks you off, do you judge? Point fingers? Yell? Defend? Pout? Or are you able to state your needs and feelings clearly?

**The four basic components of NVC are:**

- \* **Observing**
- \* **Feeling**
- \* **Needs**
- \* **Requests**

Let's start with **empathy**. What is it? How do you know when it's being offered or how to give it to others? To begin with, instead of reacting to the words or actions of another, we are trying to

understand the underlying emotions. At the same time, rather than blaming or attacking, we are looking to understand our own feelings and needs. Let me be clear here, empathy *is not about agreeing or disagreeing* – just simply understanding what the other person is saying to you and sending the message that you are listening. So, for example, if your partner says, 'I think that you take me for granted. I wonder how you would manage without me', you could respond with, 'That's not true! I don't take you for granted!'

But, here's the thing, your partner didn't actually tell you what they wanted or felt and you didn't express understanding – you went straight to denial. Denying is disconnecting from the other. Now both of you are unhappy. This is very common though so don't despair! We all do this. Where in our lives have we been taught to feel and express our needs? No one asked us how we are feeling in school. At work, no one asks us if our needs are being met. Imagine a boss who comes up and asks if all your needs are being met! We have very little education and support in this realm. So, what should you have done about your partner? Well, you could have started with recognizing the underlying feeling being expressed (empathizing), "Are you feeling angry because you would like me to appreciate you more?" – that's empathy. You may get a resounding, "Yes!" in response and then more talking. Just listen. Also, acknowledge your feelings. You may have been feeling exasperated. Have compassion for feeling the way you do. The conversation could end with you being asked to recognize the efforts of your partner more and, conversely, for you to receive credit for the good things you do.

An empathic statement might be: "**Do you feel sad [feeling] because we haven't spent quality time together recently [need]?"** or "**You must feel so lonely right now.**"

Now, let's take **observation**. When we interact with people or observe them, we are rich with our own ideas and projections about what or why they are doing or saying the things they do. We are the great interpreters and philosophers putting our own meaning and value on others' actions because how we see the world is always correct – right? Let's review. If you say, "The boss procrastinates", are you observing or evaluating? We all see things differently – and to make life more interesting – how we see things depends on how we feel and how we think and vice versa. Instead, an *observation without evaluation could be*, 'The boss told us she would announce the decision by last week, but we still haven't heard.' Do you see the difference? What we see isn't necessarily all there is. "My husband hardly expresses any affection", is an *evaluation*. An *observation* might be, 'My husband hasn't kissed me for two weeks.' Just the facts! That's where we should stop but often we go on to judge or interpret. Throw in a pre-existing bad mood and we have the makings for a feud. When we combine observation with evaluation, people are apt to hear criticism. NVC is based on specific observations – not judging.



"Observing without evaluating is the highest form of human intelligence" - J. Krishnamurti, Indian philosopher

"You never do what I want", doesn't express specific facts. Generalizations or exaggerations such as *always, never, ever, whenever*, etc. are often used to make a point but in fact they are observations and evaluations combined. An observation could be: "The last three times I initiated an activity, you said you didn't want to do it." Observations should be made specific to time and context, e.g. "Steve has not scored a goal in 20 games" rather than "Steve is a poor soccer player". We're more inclined to stay connected with someone when we simply *observe*.

## Feelings

We are trained to look outward for answers rather than inward to how we feel and what we need.

"I am not easily frightened. Not because I am brave but because I know that I am dealing with human beings, and that I must try as hard as I can to understand everything that anyone ever does." -  
Etty Hillesum, Prisoner in a German Concentration Camp

A common view is that people don't want to say how they feel because it will leave them vulnerable to others – as if they will be attacked or their words used against them. But if we speak authentically, genuinely and express how we feel clearly, people are inclined to respond to us in a different way. If we deliver our message from an intellectual stance with underlying currents of anger, hurt and so forth, people will sense that a duplicitous message is being sent and react defensively. Expressing our vulnerability can help resolve conflicts. Being candid about our feelings is key. Personally, I believe that being honest about our feelings is a sign of respect for both our selves and others. It says that you trust others to be able to handle the truth and that you wish to have a genuine relationship with them.

Some of the subtle ways we confuse our message is by using the word *feel* without actually expressing a feeling. Statements like, "I feel you're not listening" or "I feel you're being irresponsible and insensitive" do not say how we're feeling but evaluate the listener. It's important to distinguish between what we feel and what we think.

"I feel unimportant to the people with whom I work." The word *unimportant* describes how I think others are *evaluating* me, rather than an actual feeling which in this situation might be, "I feel sad" or "I feel discouraged". It's important to try to distinguish between words that describe how we interpret others and our actual feelings. Words that describe how we interpret others include:

Abandoned, Abused, Attacked, Betrayed, Bullied, Cheated, Cornered, Diminished, Distrusted, Interrupted, Intimidated, Let down, Manipulated, Misunderstood, Neglected, Overworked, Patronized, Pressured, Provoked, Put down, Rejected, Taken for granted, Threatened, Unappreciated, Unheard, Unsupported, Used

Let's look at **needs**. What are your needs? Now, don't run away. This is another word that's slightly abused. In our society a person with needs can be considered weak. It's not a positive image. But let's have another look. In my example about a partner complaining that her husband isn't affectionate, what needs did she have? Perhaps a need to feel connected, or loved, or to have a meaningful dialogue with her partner. What do you need right now? How often do you know what you need? Think about the last argument that you had with your partner, what *need* did you have? I'm serious, try and nail it down. I double-dog dare you! I'll bet you really struggle with it. And don't say you had a need for your partner to be quiet or respectful or get a hobby. Those aren't needs. Often times when we're feeling a certain so-called negative emotion, this is a signal that a need of ours is going unmet. When our needs are *not* being met we are likely to feel things such as:

Afraid, Aloof, Anxious, Apathetic, Apprehensive, Ashamed, Beat, Bewildered, Bitter, Bored, Blue, Brokenhearted, Confused, Depressed, Disappointed, Discouraged, Displeased, Embarrassed, Exasperated, Forlorn, Guilty, Helpless, Hostile, Hurt, Impatient, Indifferent, Jealous, Lazy, Lonely, Mean, Miserable, Mournful, Nervous, Overwhelmed, Panicky, Passive, Pessimistic



For example, I might come home and observe that my partner has left dishes on the counter. My thought process goes a little like this: when I saw those dishes I assumed that they were left there intentionally for me to take care of. That's my *interpretation*. My *feeling*, which *results from my thinking*, is to immediately get angry. My next action might be to judge, lecture or point fingers. And at this point, even if my partner defends himself (which he will) I am not listening. I just *think* I'm not being heard and that makes me angrier. *Or more candidly, I'm right and he's wrong – so I think.*

**What could this poor guy do to save himself, you ask?** Well, good for you for showing some empathy! That's exactly what's needed in these situations – particularly when

they're emotionally charged. Empathy. Hearing the feelings underlying the message. He could say, "Do you feel angry [feeling] because you need to relax [need] but don't think you can because of these dishes?" That would be an empathic statement. I might respond emphatically, 'Yes! I'm angry about this mess.', then go on to explain myself further – now I feel my needs are being valued.

It is important to be specific about our feelings and to avoid vague words such as *good* or *bad*.

When our needs *are getting met* we are likely to feel things such as:

Absorbed, Affectionate, Amazed, Appreciative, Aroused, Blissful, Calm, Carefree, Cheerful, Comfortable, Confident, Eager, Encouraged, Energetic, Engrossed, Enthusiastic, Friendly, Good-humoured, Grateful, Helpful, Interested, Loving, Mirthful, Optimistic, Proud, Pleased, Relieved, Satisfied, Secure, Trusting

To recap, we take the **concrete actions we are observing**. We **see how we feel** in relation to what we are observing. We **identify needs**, values, desires, etc. that are creating our feelings and to go one last step, we **identify the concrete actions we want to request** in order to fulfill those needs.

The whole sentence goes something like this:

"When I see \_\_\_\_\_[observation], I feel \_\_\_\_\_because I need\_\_\_\_\_, and would you be willing to\_\_\_\_\_ [request]?"

So, I could say, "When I see all these dishes needing cleaning, I feel angry because I perceive that these have been left here for me but I need to relax. Would you be willing to do these dishes?"

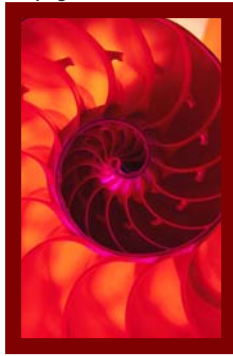
Another example might be, "I want you to understand me." 'Understand' does not clearly express a specific action being requested. Instead, we could say, "I want you to tell me what you heard me say."

Or, "Be honest with me" does not describe a specific action. It is actually very vague and general and almost implies that the speaker might believe that the listener will lie. Instead

we could say, "I want you to tell me how you feel about what I did and what you'd like me to do differently."

## Judgement & Responsibility

When we use moralistic judgements that imply wrong-doing to people who don't act in harmony with our values we are in a sense attacking others. Statements such as, "The problem with you is that you're too selfish", "She's lazy", "They're prejudiced" and "It's inappropriate" are blame, insults, put-downs, labels, criticism, comparisons, and diagnoses – all forms of judgement. And this judgement does nothing to convey how we are truly feeling.



"Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing, there is a field. I'll meet you there." - Rumi, Sufi poet

In essence, this is focusing on "who is what". Our attention is focused on who's good, bad, normal, abnormal, responsible, irresponsible, smart, ignorant, etc. *rather than what we and others need and are not getting.* When we express our needs and values through judgement we increase defensiveness and resistance from others. If they do agree to change their behaviour in response to our evaluation, they may do so out of fear, guilt or shame rather than a desire to give from the heart. If we continue to treat people in these evaluative ways, they will increasingly associate us with being judgemental and we decrease the likelihood that they will respond compassionately to our needs and values in the future.

If you want to reach a state of bliss, then go beyond your ego and the internal dialogue. Make a decision to relinquish the need to control, the need to be approved, and the need to judge. Those are the three things the ego is doing all the time. It's very important to be aware of them every time they come up.  
- Deepak Chopra

In cultures where people think in terms of human needs rather than labeling one another as bad or good, there is far less violence. In western culture, children are watching programs where the *hero* either kills people or beats them up. Viewers have been taught that bad guys deserve to be punished and to take

pleasure in watching the violence. At the root of much violence is thinking about the wrongness of the adversary and the inability to express one's own vulnerabilities. During the Cold War, leaders viewed Russians as an "evil empire" bent on destroying the American way and Russian leaders saw the U.S. people as "imperialist oppressors" who were trying to subjugate them. Neither side acknowledged the fear behind such labels.

Another form of judgement is to make comparisons. Compare yourself to others. Compare others to each other. Measure them. Who's better? Who's more attractive? Less attractive? Compare yourself to a model in a magazine. Dwell on the differences and see how you feel. This type of thinking blocks compassion both for our selves and for others.

Denying our **responsibility** for our own thoughts, feelings, and actions is another way of disconnecting from others. When we say we "have to" or "should" or "you make me feel guilty" – this shows our denial of responsibility for our own feelings. One powerful example of this kind of language is, "I was only following orders". We are dangerous when we are not conscious of our responsibility for how we behave, think, and feel.

We can replace language that implies lack of choice with language that acknowledges choice.

Another form of communication that denies our connection with one another is *demanding*. We can never make people do anything. Thinking based on "who deserves what" blocks compassionate communication. Change should be sought by each individual but only because they see the change benefiting themselves.

**What's important to understand is that what others say and do may be the stimulus but never the cause of our feelings.** Our feelings result from how we choose to receive what others say and do as well as our particular needs and expectations in that moment.

When someone gives us a negative message, whether verbally or nonverbally, we have four options as to how to receive it: *Blaming*

ourselves. *Blaming others. Sensing our own feelings and needs. Sensing others' feelings and needs.*

"People are disturbed not by things,  
but by the view they take of them." - Epictetus

Notice the difference in the following statements:

A: "You disappointed me by not coming over last evening"

B: "I was disappointed when you didn't come over, because I wanted to talk over some things that were bothering me"

Speaker A places responsibility solely on the action of the other. Speaker B claims responsibility for his/her own feelings and articulates which need was not met.

Distinguish between giving from the heart and being motivated out of guilt. On the surface, feeling responsible for others' feelings can easily be mistaken for positive caring. "It hurts Mommy and Daddy when you get poor grades in school" is implying that the child's actions are the cause of the parent's happiness or unhappiness. If we change our behaviour in accordance to others' wishes, we are acting to avoid guilt rather than from the heart.

Remember, **disconnecting** from people includes:

- \* Diagnosis, judgement, analysis, criticism, comparison.
- \* Denial of responsibility
- \* Demands
- \* "Deserve" – oriented language.

So, to recap, the principles are:

**Observe** – describe your specific observation.

**Feeling** – identify and express your feeling.

**Need** – identify and express your need.

**Request** – make your request respectfully. Make sure it is positive, concrete and doable.

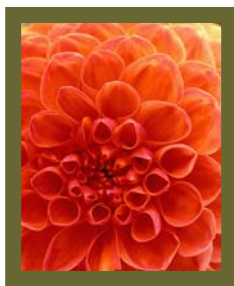
If you are having a 'negative' feeling – acknowledge it, honour it and then ask yourself what need you have that is going unmet.

One last thing....saying thank-you:

"This is what you did; this is what I feel; this is the need of mine that was met."

Example: "When you took the time to listen to my feelings, I felt loved, because my need to be heard without judgement was met."

If you venture down this road - practice taking your time when you are responding to your family, friends, and co-workers. Remember, it took a lifetime to build your communication style and it may take a while to change. I, myself, have found this concept very challenging – but deeply rewarding.



## Furthermore:

I recommend educating yourself in the art of living consciously and in keeping with your authentic self. Find self-help books that truly speak to your unique sensibilities. Here's this edition's recommendation:

🕒 **Nonviolent communication, A language of life, by Marshall B. Rosenberg, Ph.D.**

## Upcoming workshops:

### \* **Non Violent Communication (NVC) – by Cindy Trevitt, RPC**

Learn an ancient method of communication used by Gandhi and others. Strengthen your ability to inspire and respond compassionately. Express yourself and hear others by focusing on what you observe, feel, need, and request rather than judge. NVC fosters respect, attentiveness and empathy. Excellent for those wishing to improve conflict resolution or improve on identifying and expressing their own needs.

**When: Tuesday, January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007 and Tuesday, January 30, 2007**  
**7:00 – 9:00 pm**

**Cost: \$42.40**

### \* **Anger Management – by Cindy Trevitt, RPC**

The goal of anger management is to understand what your triggers are, what your attitudes are about your feelings and to learn how to express yourself in a way that is healthy for both you and the people in your life. You can't get rid of, or avoid, the things or the people that enrage you, nor can you change them, but you can learn to control your reactions. This course is intended to help you understand and manage your anger and express yourself more constructively.

**When: Tuesday, January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2007**  
**7:00 – 9:00 pm**

**Cost: \$21.20**

**Where: Trout Lake Community Centre**  
**3350 Victoria Drive**

### How to register:

Register on line, phone-in, or in person:

- **By Phone:** 604.257.6958 with Visa or Mastercard
- **In person:** 3350 Victoria Drive with Cash, Interact, Visa or Mastercard
- **On-line:** [www.vancouverparks.ca](http://www.vancouverparks.ca) (Client ID numbers take 24 hours to process and are required for on-line registration)

Alice came to a fork in the road. "Which road do I take?" she asked.  
"Where do you want to go?" responded the Cheshire cat.  
"I don't know," Alice answered.  
"Then," said the cat, "it doesn't matter."  
~Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*