

Non-Violent Communication: The Four Steps

The idea of nonviolent communication comes from a book by Marshall Rosenberg. In the introduction of the book there is a quote from him that says:

*What I want in my life is compassion,
a flow between myself and another based
on a mutual giving from the heart.*
— Marshall Rosenberg

The secret to healthy relationships is healthy communication. In all the systems of communication I've tried, the best by far is Non-Violent Communication (NVC). This is the reason I share this beautiful practice with you.

REMEMBER — You communicate to connect and NVC provides a simple-to-use and effective process.

It is made up of four simple steps. I like to think of them as dance steps and the person I'm communicating with is my dance partner. Like in a dance, I so deeply connect with my partner that we flow together in harmony with each other and life. There is no awkwardness and we don't step on each others toes.

To learn any dance you must learn the steps. So let's jump in and learn the four simple steps of NVC.

Express Honestly — The Four Steps to the NVC Process

1. The concrete actions we are *observing* that are affecting our well-being.
2. How we *feel* in relation to what we are observing.
3. The *needs, values, desires, etc.* that are creating our feelings.
4. The concrete actions we *request* in order to enrich our lives.

An Example of How to Use the Four Steps

Let's say your partner said he'd do the dishes and he didn't.

1. Speak only of what you observed — *I noticed you said you'd do the dishes last night and this morning I noticed there is a sink full of dishes.*
2. Share how you feel about what you noticed — *I feel frustrated.*

3. Speak of what you need — *I need to trust you.*
4. Lastly, ask for what you need — *Would you be willing to clean up the dishes and would you be willing to honor your commitments?*

Now, here you prepare yourself for a “yes” answer or a “no” answer.

If the answer is “yes” — Great! Say thanks and move on.

If the answer is “no” — You could ask, *would you mind reflecting on my request and get back to me in ten minutes?* Or you could get your need met in another way — ask someone else to help clean up the kitchen or clean it up yourself. You can consider why you are with someone who won’t keep his/her word but once you’ve made a decision to meet your need in another way. You let this situation go!

Why the Four Steps Work

Step 1 is said without judgment, criticism, or control. If you speak of only what you see and notice you are in neutral territory and you are more likely to be listened to.

Step 2 is stating your feelings. When you speak only of what you feel without elaborating on them, you are more likely to be heard.

Step 3 is owning your needs. When you speak only of what you need you claim responsibility for yourself and what you need.

Step 4 is your opportunity to ask for your needs to be met.

Receive Empathetically

Equally as important as it is to speak it is important to listen. A basic core need of every one on this planet is to be heard and understood. The only way to fulfill this need is to listen with empathy.

What is Empathy?

I like this definition of empathy — *a respectful understanding of what others are experiencing.*

So how do we listen with empathy?

1. Release all judgment.
2. Listen from your heart.
3. Be present.
4. Listen for what the person is (1) observing, (2) feeling, (3) needing, and (4) requesting.
5. Paraphrase what you've heard back to the speaker by asking questions until you get it right.
6. Give empathy to ourselves. We must be filled up with compassion in order to give compassion to others.

A Few Things that Have Helped Me

Once you've found a way to meet your need that created the desire to connect — then drop any resentments, judgments, criticisms, desire to control you may be experiencing. Life is so much easier if we communicate with a clean and clear slate each time.

Allow yourself to be human and make mistakes.

Keep all communication simple and requests clear.

Don't do the word "But".

Become a student of feelings and needs.

Understand the reason to communicate is to connect.

I highly recommend reading Marshall Rosenberg's book [Nonviolent Communication](#). It is an invaluable tool to go deeper into the NVC process.