Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life

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Giving From the Heart

- ❏ NVC guides us in reframing how we express ourselves and hear others. Instead of habitual, automatic reactions, our words become conscious responses based firmly on awareness of what we are perceiving, feeling, and wanting.
- ❏ We are led to express ourselves with honesty and clarity, while simultaneously paying others a respectful and empathic attention.
- ❏ NVC trains us to observe carefully, and to be able to specify behaviors and conditions that are affecting us. We learn to identify and clearly articulate what we are concretely wanting in any given situation.
- ❏ As NVC replaces our old patterns of defending, withdrawing, or attacking in the face of judgment and criticism, we come to perceive ourselves and others, as well as our intentions and relationships, in a new light.
- ❏ When we focus on clarifying what is being observed, felt, and needed rather than on diagnosing and judging, we discover the depth of our own compassion.
- ❏ There is a story of a man on all fours under a street lamp, searching for something. A policeman passing by asked what he was doing. “Looking for my car keys,” replied the man, who appeared slightly drunk. “Did you drop them here?” inquired the officer. “No,” answered the man, “I dropped them in the alley.” Seeing the policeman’s baffled expression, the man hastened to explain, “But the light is much better here.”
- ❏ First, we observe what is actually happening in a situation: what are we observing others saying or doing that is either enriching or not enriching our life? The trick is to be able to

articulate this observation without introducing any judgment or evaluation—to simply say what people are doing that we either like or don't like. Next, we state how we feel when we observe this action: are we hurt, scared, joyful, amused, irritated? And thirdly, we say what needs of ours are connected to the feelings we have identified.

- ❏ Four components of NVC:
  - ❏ observations
  - ❏ feelings
  - ❏ needs
  - ❏ requests
- ❏ NVC Process The concrete actions we observe that affect our well-being How we feel in relation to what we observe The needs, values, desires, etc. that create our feelings The concrete actions we request in order to enrich our lives
- ❏ NVC helps us connect with each other and ourselves in a way that allows our natural compassion to flourish. It guides us to reframe the way we express ourselves and listen to others by focusing our consciousness on four areas: what we are observing, feeling, and needing, and what we are requesting to enrich our lives.

Communication That Blocks Compassion

- ❏ One kind of life-alienating communication is the use of moralistic judgments that imply wrongness or badness on the part of people who don't act in harmony with our values.
- ❏ The Sufi poet Rumi once wrote, "Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right-doing, there is a field. I'll meet you there." Life-alienating communication, however, traps us in a world of ideas about rightness and wrongness—a world of judgments.
- ❏ When we speak this language, we judge others and their behavior while preoccupying ourselves with who's good, bad, normal, abnormal, responsible, irresponsible, smart, ignorant, etc.
- ❏ In the world of judgments, our concern centers on "who is what."
- ❏ Our attention is focused on classifying, analyzing, and determining levels of wrongness rather than on what we and others need and are not getting.
- ❏ If my colleague is more concerned about details than I am, he is "picky and compulsive." On the other hand, if I am more concerned about details than he is, he is "sloppy and disorganized."
- ❏ Analyses of others are actually expressions of our own needs and values.
- ❏ All of us make value judgments as to the qualities we value in life; for example, we might value honesty, freedom, or peace. Value judgments reflect our beliefs of how life can best be served.

- ❏ We make moralistic judgments of people and behaviors that fail to support our value judgments;
- ❏ The relationship between language and violence is the subject of psychology professor O.J. Harvey's research at the University of Colorado. He took random samples of pieces of literature from many countries around the world and tabulated the frequency of words that classify and judge people. His study shows a high correlation between frequent use of such words and frequency of incidents.
- ❏ There is considerably less violence in cultures where people think in terms of human needs than in cultures where people label one another as "good" or "bad" and believe that the "bad" ones deserve to be punished.
- ❏ In 75 percent of the television programs shown during hours when American children are most likely to be watching, the hero either kills people or beats them up. This violence typically constitutes the "climax" of the show. Viewers, having been taught that bad guys deserve to be punished, take pleasure in watching this violence.
- ❏ Classifying and judging people promotes violence.
- ❏ He suggests that if readers have a sincere desire to make life miserable for themselves, they might learn to compare themselves to other people.
- ❏ Comparisons are a form of judgment.
- ❏ Denial of Responsibility Another kind of life-alienating communication is denial of responsibility. Communication is life-alienating when it clouds our awareness that we are each responsible for our own thoughts, feelings, and actions. The use of the common expression have to, as in "There are some things you have to do, whether you like it or not," illustrates how personal responsibility for our actions can be obscured in speech.
- ❏ Our language obscures awareness of personal responsibility.
- ❏ We deny responsibility for our actions when we attribute their cause to factors outside ourselves:
    - ❏ Vague, impersonal forces—"I cleaned my room because I had to."
    - ❏ Our condition, diagnosis, or personal or psychological history—"I drink because I am an alcoholic."
    - ❏ The actions of others—"I hit my child because he ran into the street."
    - ❏ The dictates of authority—"I lied to the client because the boss told me to."
    - ❏ Group pressure—"I started smoking because all my friends did."
    - ❏ Institutional policies, rules, and regulations—"I have to suspend you for this infraction because it's the school policy."
    - ❏ Gender roles, social roles, or age roles—"I hate going to work, but I do it because I am a husband and a father."
    - ❏ Uncontrollable impulses—"I was overcome by my urge to eat the candy bar."
- ❏ We are dangerous when we are not conscious of our responsibility for how we behave, think, and feel.
- ❏ Communicating our desires as demands is yet another form of language that blocks compassion. A demand explicitly or implicitly threatens listeners with blame or punishment

if they fail to comply. It is a common form of communication in our culture, especially among those who hold positions of authority.

- ❏ We can never make people do anything.
- ❏ The concept that certain actions merit reward while others merit punishment is also associated with life-alienating communication.
- ❏ I believe it is in everyone's interest that people change, not in order to avoid punishment, but because they see the change as benefiting themselves.
- ❏ Thinking based on "who deserves what" blocks compassionate communication.
- ❏ Life-alienating communication has deep philosophical and political roots.
- ❏ Life-alienating communication both stems from and supports hierarchical or domination societies, where large populations are controlled by a small number of individuals to those individuals, own benefit.
- ❏ The language of wrongness, should, and have to is perfectly suited for this purpose: the more people are trained to think in terms of moralistic judgments that imply wrongness and badness, the more they are being trained to look outside themselves—to outside authorities—for the definition of what constitutes right, wrong, good, and bad.

Observing Without Evaluating

- ❏ The first component of NVC entails the separation of observation from evaluation. We need to clearly observe what we are seeing, hearing, or touching that is affecting our sense of well-being, without mixing in any evaluation.
- ❏ When we combine observation with evaluation, we decrease the likelihood that others will hear our intended message. Instead, they are apt to hear criticism and thus resist whatever we are saying.
- ❏ Semanticist Wendell Johnson pointed out that we create many problems for ourselves by using static language to express or capture a reality that is ever changing: "Our language is an imperfect instrument created by ancient and ignorant men. It is an animistic language that invites us to talk about stability and constants, about similarities and normal and kinds, about magical transformations, quick cures, simple problems, and final solutions. Yet the world we try to symbolize with this language is a world of process, change, differences, dimensions, functions, relationships, growths, interactions, developing, learning, coping, complexity. And the mismatch of our ever-changing world and our relatively static language forms is part of our problem."
- ❏ When we combine observation with evaluation, people are apt to hear criticism.

- ❏ The Indian philosopher J. Krishnamurti once remarked that observing without evaluating is the highest form of human intelligence.

Identifying and Expressing Feelings

- ❏ The first component of NVC is to observe without evaluating; the second component is to express how we are feeling.
- ❏ Expressing our vulnerability can help resolve conflicts.
- ❏ Distinguish feelings from thoughts.
- ❏ Conversely, in the English language, it is not necessary to use the word feel at all when we are actually expressing a feeling: we can say, “I’m feeling irritated,” or simply, “I’m irritated.”
- ❏ Distinguish between what we feel and what we think we are.
- ❏ Distinguish between what we feel and how we think others react or behave toward us.
- ❏ Words like ignored express how we interpret others, rather than how we feel. Here is a sampling of such words: abandoned, abused, attacked, betrayed, boxed-in, bullied, cheated, coerced, co-opted, cornered, diminished, distrusted, interrupted, intimidated, let down, manipulated, misunderstood, neglected, overworked, patronized, pressured, provoked, put down, rejected, taken for granted, threatened, unappreciated, unheard, unseen, unsupported, unwanted, used
- ❏ How we are likely to feel when our needs are being met: absorbed, adventurous, affectionate, alert, alive, amazed, amused, animated, appreciative, ardent, aroused, astonished, blissful, breathless, buoyant, calm, carefree, cheerful, comfortable, complacent, composed, concerned, confident, contented, cool, curious, dazzled, delighted, eager, ebullient, ecstatic, effervescent, elated, enchanted, encouraged, energetic, engrossed, enlivened, enthusiastic, excited, exhilarated, expansive, expectant, exultant, fascinated, free, friendly, fulfilled, glad, gleeful, glorious, glowing, good,humored, grateful, gratified, happy, helpful, hopeful, inquisitive, inspired, intense, interested, intrigued, invigorated, involved, joyous, joyful, jubilant, keyed-up, loving, mellow, merry, mirthful, moved, optimistic, overjoyed, overwhelmed, peaceful, perky, pleasant, pleased, proud, quiet, radiant, rapturous, refreshed, relaxed, relieved, satisfied, secure, sensitive, serene, spellbound, splendid, stimulated, surprised, tender, thankful, thrilled, touched, tranquil, trusting, upbeat, warm, wide-awake, wonderful, zestful
- ❏ How we are likely to feel when our needs are not being met: afraid, aggravated, agitated, alarmed, aloof, angry, anguished, annoyed, anxious, apathetic, apprehensive, aroused, ashamed, beat, bewildered, bitter, blah, blue, bored, brokenhearted, chagrined, cold, concerned, confused, cool, cross, dejected, depressed, despairing, despondent, detached,

disaffected, disappointed, discouraged, disenchanted, disgruntled, disgusted, disheartened, dismayed, displeased, disquieted, distressed, disturbed, downcast, downhearted, dull, edgy, embarrassed, embittered, exasperated, exhausted, fatigued, fearful, fidgety, forlorn, frightened, frustrated, furious, gloomy, guilty, harried, heavy, helpless, hesitant, horrible, horrified, hostile, hot, humdrum, hurt, impatient, indifferent, intense, irate, irked, irritated, jealous, jittery, keyed-up, lazy, leery, lethargic, listless, lonely, mad, mean, miserable, mopey, morose, mournful, nervous, nettled, numb, overwhelmed, panicky, passive, perplexed, pessimistic, puzzled, rancorous, reluctant, repelled, resentful, restless, sad, scared, sensitive, shaky, shocked, skeptical, sleepy, sorrowful, sorry, spiritless, startled, surprised, suspicious, tepid, terrified, tired, troubled, uncomfortable, unconcerned, uneasy, unglued, unhappy, unnerved, unsteady, upset, uptight, vexed, weary, wistful, withdrawn, woeful, worried, wretched.

- ❏ By developing a vocabulary of feelings that allows us to clearly and specifically name or identify our emotions, we can connect more easily with one another. Allowing ourselves to be vulnerable by expressing our feelings can help resolve conflicts.
- ❏ NVC distinguishes the expression of actual feelings from words and statements that describe thoughts, assessments, and interpretations.

Taking Responsibility for Our Feelings

- ❏ People are disturbed not by things, but by the view they take of them. —Epictetus
- ❏ NVC heightens our awareness that what others say and do may be the stimulus, but never the cause, of our feelings.
- ❏ What others do may be the stimulus of our feelings, but not the cause.
- ❏ When someone gives us a negative message, whether verbally or nonverbally, we have four options as to how to receive it.
    - ❏ Option 1: Blame ourselves. One option is to take it personally by hearing blame and criticism. We accept the other person's judgment and blame ourselves. We choose this option at great cost to our self-esteem, for it inclines us toward feelings of guilt, shame, and depression.
    - ❏ Option 2: Blame others. Second option is to fault the speaker. When we receive messages this way, and blame the speaker, we are likely to feel anger.
    - ❏ Option 3: Sense our own feelings and needs. Our third option would be to shine the light of consciousness on our own feelings and needs. Thus, we might reply, "When I hear you say that I am the most self-centered person you've ever met, I feel hurt, because I need some recognition of my efforts to be considerate of your preferences."
    - ❏ Option 4: Sense others' feelings and needs. a fourth option on receiving a negative message is to shine the light of consciousness on the other person's feelings and

needs as they are currently expressed. We might for example ask, “Are you feeling hurt because you need more consideration for your preferences?”

- ❏ We accept responsibility for our feelings, rather than blame other people, by acknowledging our own needs, desires, expectations, values, or thoughts.
- ❏ The basic mechanism of motivating by guilt is to attribute the responsibility for one’s own feelings to others.
- ❏ Distinguish between giving from the heart and being motivated by guilt.
- ❏ Judgments, criticisms, diagnoses, and interpretations of others are all alienated expressions of our needs.
- ❏ When we express our needs indirectly through the use of evaluations, interpretations, and images, others are likely to hear criticism. And when people hear anything that sounds like criticism, they tend to invest their energy in self-defense or counterattack.
- ❏ If we wish for a compassionate response from others, it is self-defeating to express our needs by interpreting or diagnosing their behavior. Instead, the more directly we can connect our feelings to our own needs, the easier it is for others to respond to us compassionately.
- ❏ If we express our needs, we have a better chance of getting them met.
- ❏ Unfortunately, most of us have never been taught to think in terms of needs. We are accustomed to thinking about what’s wrong with other people when our needs aren’t being fulfilled.
- ❏ Here were people who had come together to build trust and harmony, but after only one interchange, matters were worse than before they began. This happens often when people are used to analyzing and blaming one another rather than clearly expressing what they need.
- ❏ It has been my experience over and over again that from the moment people begin talking about what they need rather than what’s wrong with one another, the possibility of finding ways to meet everybody’s needs is greatly increased.
- ❏ The following are some of the basic human needs we all share:
    1. **Autonomy** to choose one’s dreams, goals, values to choose one’s plan for fulfilling one’s dreams, goals, values
    2. **Celebration** to celebrate the creation of life and dreams fulfilled to celebrate losses: loved ones, dreams, etc. (mourning)
    3. **Integrity** authenticity creativity meaning self-worth
    4. **Interdependence** acceptance appreciation closeness community consideration contribution to the enrichment of life (to exercise one’s power by giving that which contributes to life) emotional safety empathy honesty (the empowering honesty that enables us to learn from our limitations) love reassurance respect support trust understanding warmth
    5. **Play** fun laughter
    6. **Spiritual Communion** beauty harmony inspiration order peace

7. **Physical Nurturance** air food movement, exercise protection from life-threatening forms of life: viruses, bacteria, insects, predatory animals rest sexual expression shelter touch water

- ❏ For centuries, the image of the loving woman has been associated with sacrifice and the denial of one's own needs to take care of others. Because women are socialized to view the caretaking of others as their highest duty, they often learn to ignore their own needs.
- ❏ If we don't value our needs, others may not either.
- ❏ **Stage 1: Emotional slavery.** We see ourselves responsible for others' feelings. In this stage, which I refer to as emotional slavery, we believe ourselves responsible for the feelings of others. We think we must constantly strive to keep everyone happy. If they don't appear happy, we feel responsible and compelled to do something about it. This can easily lead us to see the very people who are closest to us as burdens.
- ❏ Taking responsibility for the feelings of others can be very detrimental to intimate relationships. I routinely hear variations on the following theme: "I'm really scared to be in a relationship. Every time I see my partner in pain or needing something, I feel overwhelmed. I feel like I'm in prison, that I'm being smothered—and I just have to get out of the relationship as fast as possible." This response is common among those who experience love as denial of one's own needs in order to attend to the needs of the beloved. In the early days of a relationship, partners typically relate joyfully and compassionately to each other out of a sense of freedom. The relationship is exhilarating, spontaneous, wonderful. Eventually, however, as the relationship becomes "serious," partners may begin to assume responsibility for each other's feelings.
- ❏ **Stage 2: The obnoxious stage.** In this stage, we become aware of the high costs of assuming responsibility for others' feelings and trying to accommodate them at our own expense. When we notice how much of our lives we've missed and how little we have responded to the call of our own soul, we may get angry. I refer jokingly to this stage as the obnoxious stage because we tend toward obnoxious comments like, "That's your problem! I'm not responsible for your feelings!" when presented with another person's pain. We are clear what we are not responsible for, but have yet to learn how to be responsible to others in a way that is not emotionally enslaving. Second stage: T We feel angry; we no longer want to be responsible for others' feelings.
- ❏ **Stage 3: Emotional liberation.** We take responsibility for our intentions and actions. At the third stage, emotional liberation, we respond to the needs of others out of compassion, never out of fear, guilt, or shame. Our actions are therefore fulfilling to us, as well as to those who receive our efforts. We accept full responsibility for our own intentions and actions, but not for the feelings of others.
- ❏ Judgments, criticisms, diagnoses, and interpretations of others are all alienated expressions of our own needs and values. When others hear criticism, they tend to invest their energy in self-defense or counterattack. The more directly we can connect our feelings to our needs, the easier it is for others to respond compassionately.

Requesting That Which Would Enrich Life

- ❏ Use positive language when making requests.
- ❏ In addition to using positive language, we also want to word our requests in the form of concrete actions that others can undertake and to avoid vague, abstract, or ambiguous phrasing.
- ❏ Making requests in clear, positive, concrete action language reveals what we really want.
- ❏ Vague language contributes to internal confusion.
- ❏ Depression is the reward we get for being "good."
- ❏ My theory is that we get depressed because we're not getting what we want, and we're not getting what we want because we have never been taught to get what we want. Instead, we've been taught to be good little boys and girls and good mothers and fathers. If we're going to be one of those good things, better get used to being depressed. Depression is the reward we get for being "good." But, if you want to feel better, I'd like you to clarify what you would like people to do to make life more wonderful for you.
- ❏ A woman might say to her husband, "I'm annoyed you forgot the butter and onions I asked you to pick up for dinner." While it may be obvious to her that she is asking him to go back to the store, the husband may think that her words were uttered solely to make him feel guilty.
- ❏ When we simply express our feelings, it may not be clear to the listener what we want them to do.
- ❏ Even more often, we are simply not conscious of what we are requesting when we speak. We talk to others or at them without knowing how to engage in a dialogue with them. We toss out words, using the presence of others as a wastebasket.
- ❏ The clearer we are on what we want back from the other person, the more likely it is that our needs will be met.
- ❏ To make sure the message we sent is the message that's received, ask the listener to reflect it back.
- ❏ When we address a group without being clear what we are wanting back, unproductive discussions will often follow. However, if even one member of a group is conscious of the importance of clearly requesting the response that is desired, he or she can extend this consciousness to the group.
- ❏ In a group, much time is wasted when speakers aren't certain what response they're wanting.
- ❏ Our requests are received as demands when others believe they will be blamed or punished if they do not comply. When people hear a demand, they see only two options: submission or rebellion.

- ❏ When the other person hears a demand from us, they see two options: to submit or to rebel.
- ❏ The more we have in the past blamed, punished, or "laid guilt trips" on others when they haven't responded to our requests, the higher the likelihood that our requests will now be heard as demands.
- ❏ To tell if it's a demand or a request, observe what the speaker does if the request is not complied with.
- ❏ It's a demand if the speaker then criticizes or judges.
- ❏ The more we interpret noncompliance as rejection, the more likely our requests will be heard as demands.
- ❏ This leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy, for the more people hear demands, the less they enjoy being around us. It's a demand if the speaker then lays a guilt trip.
- ❏ It's a request if the speaker then shows empathy toward the other person's needs.
- ❏ The objective of NVC is to establish a relationship based on honesty and empathy.

Receiving Empathically

- ❏ Empathy is a respectful understanding of what others are experiencing.
- ❏ Empathy with others occurs only when we have successfully shed all preconceived ideas and judgments about them.
- ❏ "The capacity to give one's attention to a sufferer is a very rare and difficult thing; it is almost a miracle; it is a miracle," asserts French philosopher Simone Weil.
- ❏ Instead of offering empathy, we tend instead to give advice or reassurance and to explain our own position or feeling. Empathy, on the other hand, requires us to focus full attention on the other person's message.
- ❏ Believing we have to "fix" situations and make others feel better prevents us from being present.
- ❏ The key ingredient of empathy is presence: we are wholly present with the other party and what they are experiencing.
- ❏ This quality of presence distinguishes empathy from either mental understanding or sympathy.
- ❏ No matter what others say, we only hear what they are (1) observing, (2) feeling, (3) needing, and (4) requesting.
- ❏ Listen to what people are needing rather than what they are thinking.
- ❏ If we have accurately received the other party's message, our paraphrasing will confirm this for them. If, on the other hand, our paraphrase is incorrect, we give the speaker an opportunity to correct us.
- ❏ Reflect back messages that are emotionally charged.
- ❏ Paraphrase only when it contributes to greater compassion and understanding.

- ❏ When we paraphrase, the tone of voice we use is highly important. When hearing themselves reflected back, people are likely to be sensitive to the slightest hint of criticism or sarcasm.
- ❏ Recommend allowing others the opportunity to fully express themselves before turning our attention to solutions or requests for relief. When we proceed too quickly to what people might be requesting, we may not convey our genuine interest in their feelings and needs; instead, they may get the impression that we're in a hurry to either be free of them or to fix their problem. Furthermore, an initial message is often like the tip of an iceberg; it may be followed by as yet unexpressed, but related—and often more powerful—feelings.
- ❏ By maintaining our attention on what's going on within others, we offer them a chance to fully explore and express their interior selves.
- ❏ We know a speaker has received adequate empathy when (1) we sense a release of tension, or (2) the flow of words comes to a halt.
- ❏ It is impossible for us to give something to another if we don't have it ourselves. Likewise, if we find ourselves unable or unwilling to empathize despite our efforts, it is usually a sign that we are too starved for empathy to be able to offer it to others.
- ❏ We need empathy to give empathy.
- ❏ At other times, it may be necessary to provide ourselves with some "emergency first aid" empathy by listening to what's going on in ourselves with the same quality of presence and attention that we offer to others.
- ❏ If we become skilled at giving ourselves empathy, we often experience in just a few seconds a natural release of energy that then enables us to be present with the other person.

The Power of Empathy

- ❏ Carl Rogers described the impact of empathy on its recipients: "When … someone really hears you without passing judgment on you, without trying to take responsibility for you, without trying to mold you, it feels damn good! … When I have been listened to and when I have been heard, I am able to reperceive my world in a new way and to go on. It is astonishing how elements that seem insoluble become soluble when someone listens, how confusions that seem irremediable turn into relatively clear flowing streams when one is heard."
- ❏ We "say a lot" by listening for other people's feelings and needs.
- ❏ Rather than put your "but" in the face of an angry person, empathize.
- ❏ When we listen for feelings and needs, we no longer see people as monsters.
- ❏ To bring a conversation back to life: interrupt with empathy.
- ❏ What bores the listener bores the speaker too.
- ❏ Speakers prefer that listeners interrupt rather than pretend to listen.
- ❏ One of the hardest messages for many of us to empathize with is silence.

- ❏ At such times, it's easy to project our worst fears onto the lack of response and forget to connect with the feelings and needs being expressed through the silence.

Connecting Compassionately With Ourselves

- ❏ When we are internally violent toward ourselves, it is difficult to be genuinely compassionate toward others.
- ❏ An important area where this violence can be replaced with compassion is in our moment-to-moment evaluation of ourselves. Since we want whatever we do to lead to the enrichment of life, it is critical to know how to evaluate events and conditions in ways that help us learn and make ongoing choices that serve us.
- ❏ Even when we sometimes do "learn a lesson" from mistakes for which we judge ourselves harshly, I worry about the nature of the energy behind that kind of change and learning. I'd like change to be stimulated by a clear desire to enrich life for ourselves or for others rather than by destructive energies such as shame or guilt.
- ❏ Shame is a form of self-hatred, and actions taken in reaction to shame are not free and joyful acts. Even if our intention is to behave with more kindness and sensitivity, if people sense shame or guilt behind our actions, they are less likely to appreciate what we do than if we are motivated purely by the human desire to contribute to life.
- ❏ It is the word should, as in "I should have known better" or "I shouldn't have done that." Most of the time when we use this word with ourselves, we resist learning, because should implies that there is no choice. Human beings, when hearing any kind of demand, tend to resist because it threatens our autonomy—our strong need for choice. We have this reaction to tyranny even when it's internal tyranny in the form of a should.
- ❏ A basic premise of NVC is that whenever we imply that someone is wrong or bad, what we are really saying is that he or she is not acting in harmony with our needs.
- ❏ Our challenge then, when we are doing something that is not enriching life, is to evaluate ourselves moment by moment in a way that inspires change both (1) in the direction of where we would like to go, and (2) out of respect and compassion for ourselves, rather than out of self-hatred, guilt or shame.
- ❏ Self-judgments, like all judgments, are tragic expressions of unmet needs.
- ❏ we can train ourselves to recognize judgmental self-talk and to immediately focus our attention on the underlying needs.
- ❏ Mourning in NVC is the process of fully connecting with the unmet needs and the feelings that are generated when we have been less than perfect.
- ❏ It is an experience of regret, but regret that helps us learn from what we have done without blaming or hating ourselves.

- ❏ When our consciousness is focused on what we need, we are naturally stimulated toward creative possibilities for how to get that need met.
- ❏ An important aspect of self-compassion is to be able to empathically hold both parts of ourselves—the self that regrets a past action and the self that took the action in the first place. The process of mourning and self-forgiveness frees us in the direction of learning and growing. In connecting moment by moment to our needs, we increase our creative capacity to act in harmony with them.
- ❏ What do you do in your life that you don't experience as playful? List on a piece of paper all those things that you tell yourself you have to do.
- ❏ After completing your list, clearly acknowledge to yourself that you are doing these things because you choose to do them, not because you have to. Insert the words "I choose to … " in front of each item you listed.
- ❏ After having acknowledged that you choose to do a particular activity, get in touch with the intention behind your choice by completing the statement, I choose to … because I want ….
- ❏ With every choice you make, be conscious of what need it serves.
- ❏ For some items on your list, however, you might uncover one or several of the following motivations:
    - ❏ For money: Money is a major form of extrinsic reward in our society.
    - ❏ For approval: As adults, we easily trick ourselves into believing that life consists of doing things for reward; we are addicted to getting a smile, a pat on the back, and people's verbal judgments that we are a "good person," "good parent," "good citizen," "good worker," "good friend," and so forth. We do things to get people to like us and avoid things that may lead people to dislike or punish us.
    - ❏ I find it tragic that we work so hard to buy love and assume that we must deny ourselves and do for others in order to be liked.
    - ❏ In fact, when we do things solely in the spirit of enhancing life, we will find others appreciating us.
    - ❏ To escape punishment, to avoid shame
    - ❏ To avoid guilt: There is a world of difference between doing something for others in order to avoid guilt and doing it out of a clear awareness of our own need to contribute to the happiness of other human beings. The first is a world filled with misery; the second is a world filled with play.
- ❏ Be conscious of actions motivated by the desire for money or approval, and by fear, shame, or guilt. Know the price you pay for them.
- ❏ The most dangerous of all behaviors may consist of doing things "because we're supposed to."

Expressing Anger Fully

- ❏ Hitting, blaming, hurting others—whether physically or emotionally—are all superficial expressions of what is going on within us when we are angry.
- ❏ The process we are describing, however, does not encourage us to ignore, squash, or swallow anger, but rather to express the core of our anger fully and wholeheartedly.
- ❏ The first step to fully expressing anger in NVC is to divorce the other person from any responsibility for our anger.
- ❏ Earlier we saw that the behavior of others may be a stimulus for our feelings, but not the cause.
- ❏ We are never angry because of what others say or do.
- ❏ In such cultures, it becomes important to trick people into thinking that we can make others feel a certain way.
- ❏ Where guilt is a tactic of manipulation and coercion, it is useful to confuse stimulus and cause.
- ❏ To motivate by guilt, mix up stimulus and cause.
- ❏ Anger is generated when we choose the second option: whenever we are angry, we are finding fault—we are choosing to play God by judging or blaming the other person for being wrong or deserving punishment.
- ❏ When we judge others, we contribute to violence.
- ❏ Thus anger can be valuable if we use it as an alarm clock to wake us up—to realize we have a need that isn't being met and that we are thinking in a way that makes it unlikely to be met.
- ❏ To fully express anger requires full consciousness of our need. In addition, energy is required to get the need met. Anger, however, co-opts our energy by directing it toward punishing people rather than meeting our needs.
- ❏ Violence comes from the belief that other people cause our pain and therefore deserve punishment.
- ❏ Four Steps to Expressing Anger
- ❏ The first step is to stop and do nothing except to breathe. We refrain from making any move to blame or punish the other person. We simply stay quiet. Then we identify the thoughts that are making us angry.
- ❏ We know that all judgments like these are tragic expressions of unmet needs, so we take the next step and connect to the needs behind those thoughts.
- ❏ Steps to expressing anger:
    - ❏ Stop
    - ❏ Breathe
    - ❏ Identify our judgmental thoughts
    - ❏ Connect with our needs
    - ❏ Express our feelings and unmet needs.
- ❏ Stay conscious of the violent thoughts that arise in our minds, without judging them.
- ❏ Practice translating each judgment into an unmet need.
- ❏ Take your time.

Conflict Resolution and Mediation

- ❏ In NVC-style conflict resolution, creating a connection between the people who are in conflict is the most important thing.
- ❏ The parties also need to know from the start that the objective is not to get the other side to do what they want them to do. And once the two sides understand that, it becomes possible—sometimes even easy—to have a conversation about how to meet their needs.
- ❏ In short, how we ask for change reflects the value system we're trying to support. When we see the difference between these two objectives, we consciously refrain from trying to get a person to do what we want. Instead we work to create that quality of mutual concern and respect where each party thinks their own needs matter and they are conscious that their needs and the other person's well-being are interdependent.
- ❏ When that happens, it's amazing how conflicts that otherwise seem irresolvable are easily resolved.
- ❏ When you make the connection, the problem usually solves itself.
- ❏ There are five steps in this process. Either side may express their needs first, but for the sake of simplicity in this overview, let's assume we begin with our needs.
- ❏ First, we express our own needs.
- ❏ Second, we search for the real needs of the other person, no matter how they are expressing themselves. If they are not expressing a need, but instead an opinion, judgment, or analysis, we recognize that, and continue to seek the need behind their words, the need underneath what they are saying.
- ❏ Third, we verify that we both accurately recognize the other person's needs, and if not, continue to seek the need behind their words. Fourth, we provide as much empathy as is required for us to mutually hear each other's needs accurately. And fifth, having clarified both parties' needs in the situation, we propose strategies for resolving the conflict, framing them in positive action language.
- ❏ Avoid the use of language that implies wrongness.
- ❏ Fundamentally, needs are the resources life requires to sustain itself. We all have physical needs: air, water, food, rest. And we have psychological needs such as understanding, support, honesty, and meaning. I
- ❏ It is important, when resolving conflicts, that we can clearly recognize the difference between needs and strategies.
- ❏ Many of us have great difficulty expressing our needs: we have been taught by society to criticize, insult, and otherwise (mis)communicate in ways that keep us apart. In a conflict, both parties usually spend too much time intent on proving themselves right, and the other party wrong, rather than paying attention to their own and the other's needs. And such verbal conflicts can far too easily escalate into violence—and even war.
- ❏ In order not to confuse needs and strategies, it is important to recall that needs contain no reference to anybody taking any particular action.
- ❏ On the other hand, strategies, which may appear in the form of requests, desires, wants, and "solutions," refer to specific actions that specific people may take.

- ❏ As mentioned earlier in this book, analyses that imply wrongness are essentially tragic expressions of unmet needs.
- ❏ I once worked with a company where both morale and productivity took a dive due to a very disturbing conflict. Two factions in the same department were fighting over which software to use, generating strong emotions on both sides. One faction had worked especially hard to develop the software that was presently in use, and wanted to see its continued use. The other faction had strong emotions tied up in creating new software. I started by asking each side to tell me what needs of theirs would be better fulfilled by the software they advocated. Their response was to offer an intellectual analysis that the other side received as criticism. A member on the side that favored new software said: "We can continue to be overly conservative, but if we do that, I think we could be out of work in the future. Progress means that we take some risks, and dare to show that we are beyond old-fashioned ways of doing things." A member of the opposing faction responded, "But I think that impulsively grabbing for every new thing that comes along is not in our best interest." They acknowledged that they had been repeating these same analyses for months and were getting nowhere other than increasing tension for themselves.
- ❏ Intellectual analysis is often received as criticism.
- ❏ For example, in the middle of a conversation, if I ask the other person something about what they've just said, and I am met with "That's a stupid question," I hear them expressing a need in the form of a judgment of me. I proceed to guess what that need might be—maybe the question I asked did not fulfill their need to be understood.
- ❏ Or if I ask my partner to talk about the stress in our relationship and they answer, "I don't want to talk about it," I may sense that their need is for protection from what they imagine could happen if we were to communicate about our relationship.
- ❏ Learn to hear needs regardless of how people express them.
- ❏ Criticism and diagnosis get in the way of peaceful resolution of conflicts.
- ❏ People often need empathy before they are able to hear what is being said.
- ❏ It's important to avoid moving hastily into strategies, as this may result in a compromise that lacks the deep quality of authentic resolution that is possible. By fully hearing each other's needs before addressing solutions, parties in conflict are much more likely to adhere to the agreements they make to each other.
- ❏ The use of a present language request that begins with "Would you be willing to …" helps foster a respectful discussion.
- ❏ The other side answers that they are not willing, it invites the next step of understanding what prevents their willingness.
- ❏ One way to determine that someone is actually listening is to have that person reflect back what had been said: we ask the person to take an action that we ourselves can see or hear. If the other party can tell us what was just said, we know that person heard and was indeed listening to us.
- ❏ Maintaining respect is a key element in successful conflict resolution.

- ❏ Listening carefully to the message behind the “no” helps us understand the other person’s needs: When they say “no,” they’re saying they have a need that keeps them from saying “yes” to what we are asking.
- ❏ The objective is not to get the parties to do what we want them to do.
- ❏ As mediator, I stress my intention for both parties to be fully and accurately understood. Despite that, as soon as I express empathy toward one side, it is not unusual for the other side to immediately accuse me of favoritism. At this time, what’s called for is emergency first-aid empathy. This might sound like “So you’re really annoyed, and you need some assurance that you’re going to get your side on the table?”

The Protective Use of Force

- ❏ The intention behind the protective use of force is to prevent injury or injustice. The intention behind the punitive use of force is to cause individuals to suffer for their perceived misdeeds.
- ❏ Ignorance includes (1) a lack of awareness of the consequences of our actions, (2) an inability to see how our needs may be met without injury to others, (3) the belief that we have the right to punish or hurt others because they “deserve” it, and (4) delusional thinking that involves, for example, hearing a voice that instructs us to kill someone.
- ❏ Children’s fear of corporal punishment may obscure their awareness of the compassion that underlies parental demands.
- ❏ If a worker’s performance is prompted by fear of punishment, the job gets done, but morale suffers; sooner or later, productivity will decrease.
- ❏ If children brush their teeth because they fear shame and ridicule, their oral health may improve but their self-respect will develop cavities.
- ❏ Furthermore, as we all know, punishment is costly in terms of goodwill. The more we are seen as agents of punishment, the harder it is for others to respond compassionately to our needs.
- ❏ When we fear punishment, we focus on consequences, not on our own values. Fear of punishment diminishes self-esteem and goodwill.
- ❏ Often children clean their rooms motivated by obedience to authority (“Because my Mom said so”), avoidance of punishment, or fear of upsetting or being rejected by parents.
- ❏ NVC, however, fosters a level of moral development based on autonomy and interdependence, whereby we acknowledge responsibility for our own actions and are aware that our own well-being and that of others are one and the same.

Liberating Ourselves and Conseling Others

- ❏ We can apply NVC to resolve the internal conflicts that often result in depression. In his book The Revolution in Psychiatry, Ernest Becker attributes depression to “cognitively arrested alternatives.” This means that when we have a judgmental dialogue going on within, we become alienated from what we are needing and cannot then act to meet those needs. Depression is indicative of a state of alienation from our own needs.
- ❏ The ability to hear our own feelings and needs and empathize with them can free us from depression.
- ❏ When we are entangled in critical, blaming, or angry thoughts, it is difficult to establish a healthy internal environment for ourselves.
- ❏ NVC helps us create a more peaceful state of mind by encouraging us to focus on what we are truly wanting rather than on what is wrong with others or ourselves.
- ❏ NVC enhances inner communication by helping us translate negative internal messages into feelings and needs. Our ability to distinguish our own feelings and needs and to empathize with them can free us from depression. By showing us how to focus on what we truly want rather than on what is wrong with others or ourselves, NVC gives us the tools and understanding to create a more peaceful state of mind.

Expressing Appreciation in Nonviolent Communication

- ❏ I define judgments—both positive and negative—as life-alienating communication.
- ❏ Compliments are often judgments—however positive-of others.
- ❏ Recipients of such praise do work harder, but only initially. Once they sense the manipulation behind the appreciation, their productivity drops. What is most disturbing for me, however, is that the beauty of appreciation is spoiled when people begin to notice the lurking intent to get something out of them.
- ❏ Express appreciation to celebrate, not to manipulate.
- ❏ NVC clearly distinguishes three components in the expression of appreciation: the actions that have contributed to our well-being the particular needs of ours that have been fulfilled the pleasureful feelings engendered by the fulfillment of those needs
- ❏ For many of us, it is difficult to receive appreciation gracefully. We fret over whether we deserve it. We worry about what’s being expected of us—especially if we have teachers or managers who use appreciation as a means to spur productivity. Or we’re nervous about living up to the appreciation.
- ❏ Nafez’s expression of gratitude showed me a different way to receive appreciation. Usually it is received from one of two polar positions. At one end is egotism, believing ourselves to be superior because we’ve been appreciated. At the other extreme is false humility, denying the importance of the appreciation by shrugging it off: “Oh, it was nothing.”
- ❏ Nafez showed me that I could receive appreciation joyfully, in the awareness that God has given everyone the power to enrich the lives of others.

- ❏ If I am aware that it is this power of God working through me that gives me the power to enrich life for others, then I may avoid both the ego trap and the false humility.
- ❏ Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
- ❏ You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you.
- ❏ We tend to notice what's wrong rather than what's right.