

Essentials of Compassionate Communication

Sunil Joseph
June 19th, 2023



NVC - Key Distinctions

- Observations

- Feelings



- Needs

- Requests

- Evaluation, Judgement

- Thinking

- Strategies

- Demands

OBSERVATIONS



Observations

- Observation + evaluation = others are likely to hear criticism
- Neutral description of what is seen and heard without any interpretations
- What would a video camera record?
- The intention to take responsibility for our feelings instead of blaming others is more important than a perfect observation

Observation Examples

- **You are too generous.**
- When I see you give all your lunch money to others I think you being too generous.

- **Doug procrastinates**
- Doug only studies for exams the night before.

- **She won't get her work in.**
- I don't think she'll get her work in. *or* She said, "I won't get my work in."

Observation Examples

- If you don't eat balanced meals, your health will be impaired.
- If you don't eat balanced meals, I fear that your health may be impaired.

- Minorities don't take care
- I have not seen the minority family living at 1679 Ross shovel the snow on their sidewalk.

- Hank Smith is a poor soccer player.
- Hank Smith has not scored a goal in 20 games.

Exercise

1. Distinguishing between observation and evaluation
2. Write our observation

FEELINGS



Feelings

- Feelings are often devalued
- More important – what's the right way think?
- Feelings appropriate for women
- Feelings appropriate for men
- Vulnerability is equated with weakness
- Be rational, logical

Feelings Versus Non-Feelings

- “I feel *that* you should know better.”
- “I feel *like* a failure.”
- “I feel *as if* I’m living with a wall.”

- “I feel *I* am constantly on call.”
- “I feel *it* is useless.”

- “I feel *Amy* has been pretty responsible.”
- “I feel *my boss* is being manipulative.”

Feelings Versus Non-Feelings

- “I feel unimportant to the people with whom I work.”
- “I feel misunderstood.”
- “I feel *ignored*.”

Faux Feelings

- 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

Exercise

1. Distinguish between feelings and non-feelings
2. What did I feel when I observed ...? – Feelings list

NEEDS



Needs

- The needs, values, desires, etc. that are creating our feelings
- All humans share the same needs
- All actions are attempts to meet needs
- Strategies vs needs
- Needs consciousness helps us connect with humanity and fosters compassion

Taking Responsibility for our Feelings

“You disappointed me by not coming over last evening.”

“I was disappointed when you didn’t come over, because I wanted to talk over some things that were bothering me.”

Taking Responsibility for our Feelings

“Their cancelling the contract really irritated me!”

“When they cancelled the contract, I felt really irritated because I was thinking to myself that it was an awfully irresponsible thing to do.”

“When they cancelled the contract, I felt really irritated because I was hoping for an opportunity to re-hire the workers we had laid off last year.”

“When we understand the needs that motivate our own and other’s behavior, we have no enemies. “

Marshall Rosenberg

“Judgments of others are alienated expressions of our own unmet needs.”

Marshall Rosenberg

Exercise

1. What did I need? – Needs list

REQUESTS



Requests

- Positive Action Language
- Specific vs vague
- Do-able
- Connected to feelings and needs
- Request vs Demand
- **Holding everyone's needs equally**
- Hearing a “no”
- Vulnerable

Positive Action Language

- “I asked him not to spend so much time at work”
- “I wish I had told him that I would like him to spend at least one evening a week at home with the children and me.”
- Shifting our focus from what we don’t want to what we do want makes it easier for others to understand what we’re asking for

Positive Action Language

- Employer – “I want you to feel free to express yourself around me.”
- “I’d like you to *tell* me what I might *do* to make it easier for you to feel free to express yourselves around me.”

Specific vs Vague

- Concrete actions that others can take
- Cartoon of drowning man - “Lassie, get help!”
- Dog lying on psychiatrist’s couch
- “Fair treatment” example of students on pg 69
- “Help with the dishes” != supervision
- “I want you to let me be me,”
- “I do!” he retorted. “No, you don’t!” she insisted
- “I want you to give me the freedom to grow and be myself.”
- “I guess what I want is for you to smile and say that anything I do is okay”

What do we want?

- “Depression is the reward we get for being ‘good.’”
- Frustration and depression can arise when we are not clear what we want others to do to contribute to our needs

Requests

- It may not be clear to the listener what we want them to do when we simply express our feelings.
- *“I’m annoyed you forgot the butter and onions I asked you to pick up for dinner.”*
- We are often not conscious of what we are requesting.
- *“I HAVE NEVER SEEN A TRAIN GO SO SLOW IN ALL MY LIFE!”* – pg 73
- Requests unaccompanied by the speaker’s feelings and needs may sound like a demand.