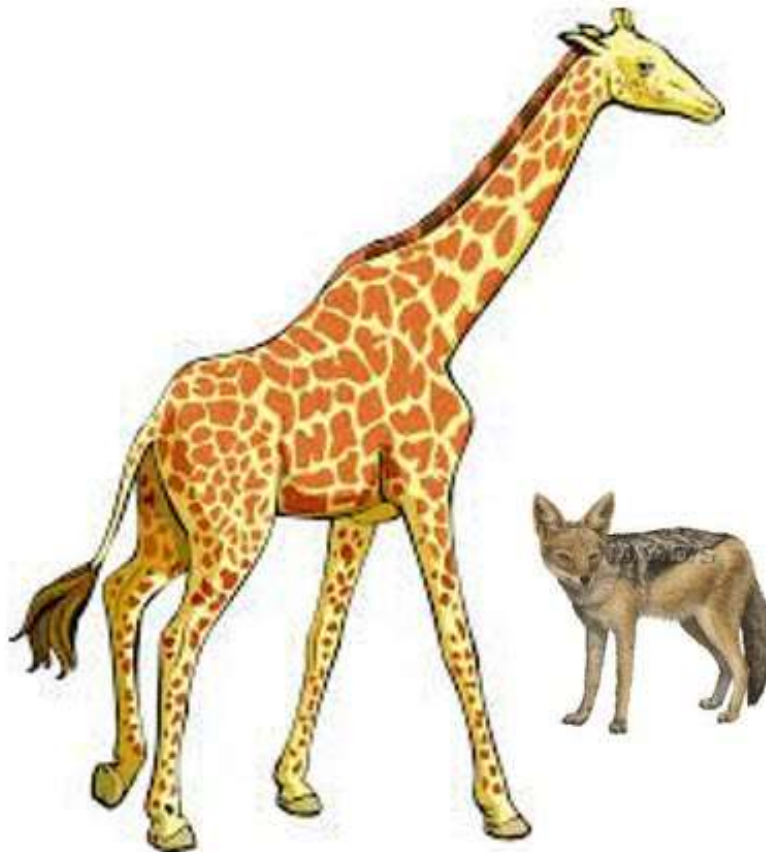


Getting Started with Non-violent Communication (NVC)



**By Steven R Unger
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Getting Started with Non-violent Communication

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to
the memory of Marshall Rosenberg, Ph.D., and
the Center for Non-violent Communication
(www.cnvc.org), and
my NVC teacher Sadie Scabarozi, and
the friends and family who have helped me
learn and practice NVC.

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Introduction

Be advised that this introduction to Non-violent Communication (or NVC for short) is by no means complete. At best, it is the beginning of a beginning. For further information refer to materials from the Center for Non-violent Communication at their website: www.cnvc.org.

The practice of non-violent (or non-aggressive) communication was developed by Marshall Rosenberg, Ph.D. His book “Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Compassion” is the NVC bible. There are also several other books available on Amazon, and audio and video materials available on YouTube as well as Training Workshops and post-workshop Practice Groups advertised on websites like www.nvctraining.com

NVC is based on a simple 4-step communication model developed by psychologist Marshall Rosenberg. The 4-step model is very straightforward:

When expressing yourself:

- When I see or hear ____.
- I feel ____.
- And because I have a need for ____.
- I request ____.

Alternatively, when responding to another person:

- When you see or here ____.
- Are you feeling ____?
- And, because you need ____?
- Would you like ____?

In this case, even if you got each of this wrong, at the very leaser the other person will probably feel that you are trying to understand their experience.

The NVC Challenges

Sounds simple, right? But not so fast. As we shall see, each of these four steps is much more subtle than they sound, and each involves a challenge.

Full Scope of NVC

- NVC can apply to individuals, couples, families, friends, small groups, organizations, social groups, and in cross-cultural interaction.
- Also, NVC applies not only to talking to others, but also how we talk to ourselves – self-talk.
- At a cultural level, NVC distinguishes between a punitive “power over” domination cultural (symbolized by a Jackal) and a “power with” culture of interdependence, compassion, and shared power (symbolized by a Giraffe).
- And, at its deepest level NVC is really about the shared reality common to all human beings that can bring us together. At this level NVC can be viewed as “spiritual”.

About Empathy

A key element of NVC involves empathic listening. Empathetic listening not only applies to interacting with others -- giving and receiving empathy -- but also to talking to yourself via “self-talk” -- self-empathy.

The Meaning of Empathy

NVC is based on empathetic listening and expression.

The dictionary defines empathy as: “Identification with and understanding of another's situation, feelings, and motives.”

In NVC “empathy” is how we stay connected to the feelings and needs of others and our self (in the form of self-empathy). Empathy means:

- giving your full attention to another by either silently or verbally connecting to their feelings and needs.
- being willing to set yourself aside and completely enter the other's world with acceptance and respect.

Empathetic communication means describing the feelings and needs that you sense the other person is expressing and experiencing.

The Empathy Challenge

The challenge is that many people mistake various non-empathetic behaviors for empathy. Non-empathetic communication will tend to disconnect us from feelings and needs. Here are some examples of “pseudo-empathy”:

- Offering **sympathy**: Bring attention back to yourself "Oh, I am so sorry, I feel terrible for you."
- Offering **advice**: We assume the person needs information. "Well, what you could do is. . .".

- **Explaining and analyzing:** We believe we know why someone feels the way we do and think knowing why will change their feeling state. "You're just feel bad because ..."
- **Correcting:** We try to point out someone's mistake in interpreting. "He didn't do that to hurt you, he was just in a hurry."
- **Consoling:** "It will be okay You're okay, everything will work out "
- **Telling a story:** "The same thing happened to me. This one time ..."
- **Pushing away feelings:** We might be uncomfortable so we tell others not to feel what they feel. "Come on smile, don't be sad." "Just calm down and take a deep breath"
- **Interrogating:** "Why did you do that? What made you feel that way?"
- **Evaluating:** We decide if another's emotional response is appropriate or not. "You are overreacting, This is no big deal."
- **Educating:** "What I see about the situation is . . . " "The reason you feel like that is ... "
- **One-upping:** "That's awful, but something even worse happened to me and I was devastated."
- **Diagnosing:** "Sounds like you had a panic attack I know some good herbs for anxiety."
- **Demanding:** "If you don't get control of your emotions, I'm leaving!"
- **Denial of Choice:** "It's a hard thing, but we all have to do it "

These behaviors are not “bad”; however, they do not help you connect with the other person – their feelings, needs and experience.

The Basic Premise

The basic premise of NVC is that our needs drive our feelings. This is to say that ...

- there are fundamental human needs common to all human beings

Examples of Human Needs:

*Rest, Connection, Authenticity, Predictability,
Harmony, Autonomy, Recognition*

- these underlying needs drive our emotions.

How do Needs Drive Emotions?

- When our needs are met, we feel “good” (positive emotions)

For example, when needs are met you may feel ...

*Affectionate, Confident, Engaged, Hopeful,
Grateful, Empowered, Peaceful*

- When our needs are not met we feel “bad” (negative emotions)

For example, when Needs are NOT met you may feel ...

*Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired, Sad, Confused,
Vulnerable, Longing, Embarrassed ...*

The Needs and Feelings Challenge

We all know that many people have difficulty expressing their feelings.

Even so, they can still usually tell you if they feel “good” or if they feel “bad”, even if they cannot fully describe or articulate their feelings.

However, most people receive little or no education in experiencing and describing their needs and are often relatively unconscious of the impact that their met and unmet needs have on their emotions.

At first, to discover their underlying needs, a person may try the following approach:

- when you feel “good” you can ask yourself “what need is being met?”
and
- when you feel “bad” you can ask yourself “what need is NOT being met?”

Overview of 4-part Model

This basic premise expresses itself in a 4-part communication model:

(1) Observation >>> (2) Feeling >>> (3) Need >>> (4) Request

In practice, these 4 steps represent one “cycle of empathy” in a process of communication that may include several such cycles, each focused on empathetic listening. One goal of NVC is for the parties involved to connect productively at the level of the human needs that underlie their feelings.

You can achieve a basic “intellectual understanding” of these four steps in less than 30 minutes. However, in order to fully understand, learn and integrate NVC into your life requires extensive practice over time.

On the surface each step is easy to understand intellectually. However, the successful practice of each step also requires learning new skills and a fundamental shift in consciousness that can be difficult to sustain – especially when you are in stressful situations where old conditioning takes over. As a result, participants in NVC Training Workshops often join a post-workshop “Practice Group”. These Practice Groups help them to integrate the principles of NVC into their day-to-day lives and, over time, achieve a fundamental shift in consciousness and an improved ability to communicate and connect with others.

Step 1 – Observation

Offer Non-judgmental Observations

The first step is to make an observation. Think of yourself as a video-recorder. What is it you saw or heard?

For example, “when I saw you walk across the room ...” or “when I heard you say that you were angry ...”.

The Step 1 Challenge

Sounds easy, doesn't it? But here's the challenge. You need to describe what you saw or heard in non-evaluative, non-judgmental language – with no interpretations, analysis, and attributions to the motives or intentions of others. So for example, rather than saying “when I heard you yell at me ...” you might instead say “when I heard you speak in a voice as loud as you did ...”. The word “yell” implies a judgment about the other person. The second form of expression strips out this evaluation.

The problem for most people is that we are taught early on in life to link evaluation and judgments to our observations. We sometimes call this critical thinking. It is a rare individual who naturally describes events in a non-judgmental, non-evaluative manner.

For example:

- ‘I’m embarrassed when you dress that way’ vs. “I feel disappointed when are dressed the way you are”.
- “You’re rude,” vs. ““When I saw you walk in and I didn’t hear you say hello to me,”
- “I felt frustrated when I saw you rush out of the room.” vs. “When you left the room, I felt frustrated.”

Step 2 – Feelings

Express Associated Feelings

In the second step you describe the feeling that is associated with the observation.

When I saw or heard _____, I felt _____

Again, it sounds easy, but the challenge is that you need to describe a simple direct human emotion as an “I statement”. For example, “I felt angry” or “I feel sad” or “I feel disappointed”. Try as much as possible to leave the other person out of the expression.

Examples of Positive Feelings

- Satisfied-Content-Energized
- Loved and Cared For
- Engaged-Connected
- Animated-Expressive
- Happy-Joyful
- Engaged-Active-Excited
- Confident-Competent
- Clear-Certain
- Purposeful-Motivated
- Empowered-Strong-Hopeful
- Recognized-Understood
- Connected-Safe
- Connected-Safe
- Happy-Flowing-Peaceful
- Accepting-Compassionate
- Grateful-Appreciative-Satisfied
- Connected-Complete-Whole

Sample of Negative Feelings

- Annoyed-Frustrated-Irritated-Angry
- Bored-Listless
- Confused
- Depressed-Numb-Bored
- Depressed-Powerless-Hopeless
- Depressed-Sad-Bored
- Depressed-Sad-Confused
- Frustrated-Confused-Surprised
- Frustrated-Hopeless-Helpless
- Hungry-Cold-Tired-Afraid
- Jealous-Envious-Longing
- Lonely-Isolated-Alienated-Detached
- Lonely-Isolated-Separate
- Lonely-Sad-Separate
- Sad-Disappointed-Confused
- Sad-Hopeless-Powerless-Alienated
- Stressed-Worried-Anxious-Afraid

The Challenge - Pseudo Feelings

As with observations, the feeling statement cannot include analysis, judgment, or interpretation. Often people say “I feel that ...” and then follow with an interpretation or analysis. For example, “I feel that you don’t like me” is a form of analysis rather than a description of an emotion.

Also, you cannot describe a feeling that is really an attribution of the motive or intention of another person. For example, you if you say “I feel rejected ...” you are suggesting the other person is trying to “reject” you. Or, for another example, rather than saying “I feel that you don’t appreciate me ...” you instead might say “I feel sad that you may not recognize my true intention ...”. In the second case, the feeling is “sadness”.

Here are some examples of such “pseudo-feelings”. These pseudo-feelings express interpretation, diagnosis, evaluation, criticism, judgment, or blame. As a result, using these words is not likely to result in the person you are communicating with to open up and connect with their needs. Instead, these words are likely to create feelings of separation or alienation in the other person.

Examples of “Pseudo-feelings”

| | | | |
|-----------|-------------|-------------------|---------------|
| abandoned | co-opted | misunderstood | threatened |
| abused | cornered | neglected | unappreciated |
| attacked | criticized | overworked | unheard |
| betrayed | diminished | patronized | unseen |
| boxed-in | interrupted | pressured | unsupported |
| bullied | intimidated | provoked | unwanted |
| cheated | let down | rejected | |
| coerced | manipulated | taken for granted | |

Step 3 – Needs

In the third step you associate the feeling with a universal human need:

- When I see or hear _____
- I feel _____, and
- because I have a need for _____

If the feeling is a “positive” emotion, you might say your need for _____ is being met.

If your feeling is a “negative” emotion, you might say your need for _____ is not being met.

A need may also be expressed as a value, for example, “because I value _____ ...”

Note that the description of the need must be a basic human need that could be experienced by any human being on the planet. You might have a need to be heard, a need to be understood, a need for love, connection or beauty, or perhaps a need for predictability. For example, “when I hear you say that you are not sure if you will attend the concert with me tomorrow night, I feel frustrated and sad, because my need for predictability is not being met and I am afraid that my need for connection won’t be met ...”

The Needs Challenge

One problem is that while some people may be educated in expressing their feelings, few are schooled in experiencing and expressing the deeper needs that underlie their feelings. Most NVC practice groups hand out a sheet listing possible human needs. It takes time to “feel these out” so they become part of your expressive repertoire.

Another problem is that people often substitute a strategy or action plan for a need. For example, “I need for you to clean up your room ...” is a strategy, not an expression of a human need. More about this in Step 4.

Step 4 – Requests

Make “Actionable” Requests

The fourth step in the model is make a request for action in the present moment – an “actionable request”.

When I hear or see _____, I feel _____,
and because I have a need for (or value) _____, I request _____ .

You might ask the other person to do something at the present moment: “I request that you speak in a softer voice.” Or, you might request that they agree now to do something in the future: “I request that you agree to clean the dishes by the end of the day.”

Another common request can be to ask the other person if they would be willing to tell you what they heard you say or tell you how they felt when they heard you speak. In the latter case, you can use their response to begin a new cycle of empathetic communication. Sometimes it takes several cycles of empathetic listening for two people to comprehend fully the feelings and needs of the other person.

One common exercise in NVC is to ask the other person “are you feeling _____ because you are needing _____?” Marshall points out that it is sufficient for you to make your best guess at what the other person might be feeling or needing and then let the other person correct you.

The Request Challenge

The request must be actionable in the present moment. Marshall also notes that an expression of need without an actionable request may be experienced as a demand.

Summary of the Steps

1. **When I hear or see _____**

Make a non-evaluative, non-judgmental observation

Think of yourself as a video recorder

Challenge: Learn to observe without judgment or evaluation

2. **I feel _____**

Express a simple direct feeling associated with observation

At minimum identify whether you feel good or bad.

Challenge: Learn to make simple “I statements” describing your direct emotions without analysis and attribution

3. **Because I need _____**

Identify a basic human need that underlies the emotion

Ask yourself, if I feel _____, what need is or is not being met?

Challenge: Learn to experience and express the basic human needs that drive emotions

4. **I request _____**

Make an “actionable request”

At minimum ask “what do you hear me saying?” Or ask, “the next time this happens, will you agree now to _____?”

Challenge: Focus on specific actions in the present moment and ensure that mutual understanding is achieved

A Broader Context

Marshall describes NVC as the “language of the heart” or “compassionate communication”.

He uses the image of the Giraffe to symbolize this more compassionate language that occurs in the context of true human partnership.

The giraffe language is named for the mammal with the biggest heart, taking the communicator out of the trees so they can see the whole forest. It is intended to address conflict without accusations, assumptions and attacks, and make good solutions more likely.

Hence, the giraffe symbolism came into being, given its metaphoric value as having the largest of hearts (of any land animal) and longest of necks (long-ranging perspective — in other words, grasping the long-term ramifications of how one opts to communicate).

In contrast, Marshall uses the image of the Jackal to symbolize the type of judgmental, evaluative, critical and blaming language to which most of us are more accustomed.

Jackal communications occur in the context of our “power-over” or “domination” culture that emphasizes making evaluations and judgments about who is right or wrong, who wins or loses, or who is good or bad.

Because NVC focuses on developing non-judgmental, non-evaluative connections with others and the commonality of needs among all human beings on the planet, there is also a spiritual aspect to NVC. This does not take the form of formal religion, but rather as a recognition of our common humanity and goodness.

Conclusion

Again, this is the most cursory introduction to NVC. There is much more to be said and learned. The best way to understand NVC is through direct experience and practice. Books, CDs and videos are available at the “official” NVC website of the Center for Non-violent Communication at www.cnvc.org. Training Workshops and Practice Groups are available in various locations in the United States and around the world. Additional training materials are available at the “unofficial” NVC Academy” website www.nvctraining.com.

As you learn the various skills required, and your consciousness begins to shift, speaking free flowing “Giraffe” becomes easier and more natural. Over time, your connection with your own needs and feelings and those of others improves and becomes deeper. Your communication with others is enhanced and you are more able to connect with others at a deeper level.

About Marshall Rosenberg

Marshall Rosenberg was born in Canton, Ohio in 1934. He received his Ph.D. in clinical psychology from the University of Wisconsin–Madison in 1961.

Rosenberg started out in clinical practice in Saint Louis, Missouri, forming Psychological Associates with partners. In making an analysis of problems of children in school with learning disabilities. He wrote his first book, *Diagnostic Teaching*, in 1968, reporting his findings.

In 1970 Thomas Shaheen, superintendent of schools in San Francisco, California and was charged with racially integrating the city's schools. He called on Rosenberg to help.

Over time, Rosenberg was called to many states, countries, and conflicts to provide his expertise in nonviolent communication. In 2004 he was visiting about 35 countries per year on his mission as a travelling peacemaker.[8] Rosenberg enjoyed success in his work:

From his home base at Albuquerque, Rosenberg supported his followers elsewhere with a Center of Nonviolent Communication in New Mexico. He died at home on February 7, 2015. The Center has continued, after Rosenberg's death, connecting people all over the world to certified NVC trainers nearby.

List of Positive Feelings

AFFECTIONATE

- Compassionate
- Friendly
- Loving
- Openhearted
- Sympathetic
- Tender
- Warm

CONFIDENT

- Empowered
- Open
- Proud
- Safe
- Secure

ENGAGED

- Absorbed
- Alert
- Curious
- Engrossed
- Enchanted
- Entranced
- Fascinated
- Interested
- Intrigued
- Involved
- Spellbound
- Stimulated

INSPIRED

- Amazed
- Awed
- Wonder

EXCITED

- Amazed
- Animated
- Ardent
- Aroused
- Astonished
- Dazzled
- Eager
- Energetic
- Enthusiastic
- Giddy
- Invigorated
- Lively
- Passionate
- Surprised
- Vibrant

EXHILARATED

- Blissful
- Ecstatic
- Elated
- Enthralled
- Exuberant
- Radiant
- Rapturous
- Thrilled

GRATEFUL

- Appreciative
- Moved
- Thankful
- Touched

HOPEFUL

- Expectant
- Encouraged
- Optimistic

JOYFUL

- Amused
- Delighted
- Glad
- Happy
- Jubilant
- Pleased
- Tickled

PEACEFUL

- Calm
- Clearheaded
- Comfortable
- Centered
- Content
- Equanimous
- Fulfilled
- Mellow
- Quiet
- Relaxed
- Relieved
- Satisfied
- Serene
- Still
- Tranquil
- Trusting

REFRESHED

- Enlivened
- Rejuvenated
- Renewed
- Rested
- Restored
- Revived

List of Negative Feelings

AFRAID

Apprehensive
Dread
Foreboding
Frightened
Mistrustful
Panicked
Petrified
Scared
Suspicious
Terrified
Wary
Worried

ANNOYED

Aggravated
Dismayed
Disgruntled
Displeased
Exasperated
Frustrated
Impatient
Irritated
Irk

ANGRY

Enraged
Furious
Incensed
Indignant
Irate
Livid
Outraged
Resentful

AVERSION

Animosity
Appalled
Contempt
Disgusted
Dislike
Hate
Horried
Hostile
Repulsed

CONFUSED

Ambivalent
Baffled
Bewildered
Dazed
Hesitant
Lost
Mystified
Perplexed
Puzzled
Torn

DISCONNECTED

Alienated
Aloof
Apathetic
Bored
Cold
Detached
Distant
Distracted
Indifferent
Numb
Removed
Uninterested
Withdrawn

DISQUIET

Agitated
Alarmed
Discombobulated
Disconcerted
Disturbed
Perturbed
Rattled
Restless
Shocked
Startled
Surprised
Troubled
Turbulent
Turmoil
Uncomfortable
Uneasy
Unnerved
Unsettled
Upset

EMBARRASSED

Ashamed
Chagrined
Flustered
Guilty
Mortified
Self-conscious

FATIGUE

Beat
Burnt out
Depleted
Exhausted
Lethargic
Listless
Sleepy
Tired
Weary
Worn out

PAIN

Agony
Anguished
Bereaved
Devastated
Grief
Heartbroken
Hurt
Lonely
Miserable
Regretful
Remorseful

SAD

Depressed
Dejected
Despair
Despondent
Disappointed
Discouraged
Disheartened
Forlorn
Gloomy
Heavy hearted
Hopeless
Melancholy
Unhappy
Wretched

TENSE

Anxious
Cranky
Distressed
Distraught
Edgy
Fidgety
Frazzled
Irritable
Jittery
Nervous
Overwhelmed
Restless
Stressed out

VULNERABLE

Fragile
Guarded
Helpless
Insecure
Leery
Reserved
Sensitive
Shaky

YEARNING

Envious
Jealous
Longing
Nostalgic
Pining
Wistful

List of Pseudo Feelings

A “pseudo-feeling” expresses an implied judgmental evaluation of the other person’s behavior.

When I feel _____ ...

abandoned

abused

attacked

betrayed

boxed-in

bullied

cheated

coerced

co-opted

cornered

criticized

diminished

interrupted

intimidated

let down

manipulated

misunderstood

neglected

overworked

patronized

pressured

provoked

rejected

taken for granted

threatened

unappreciated

unheard

unseen

unsupported

unwanted

List of Needs

Needs: Some of the basic human needs we all share

Autonomy

- to choose one's dreams, goals, values
- to choose one's plan for fulfilling one's dreams, goals, values

Celebration

- to celebrate the creation of life and dreams fulfilled
- to celebrate losses: loved ones, dreams, e (mourning)

Integrity

- authenticity
- creativity
- meaning
- self-worth

Interdependence

- acceptance
- appreciation
- closeness
- community
- consideration
- contribution
- emotional safety
- empathy
- honesty
- love
- reassurance
- respect
- support
- trust
- understanding

- warmth

Physical Nurturance

- air
- food
- movement, exercise
- protection from disease
- protection from predatory animals
- protection from predatory human beings
- rest
- sexual expression
- shelter
- touch
- water

Play

- fun
- entertainment
- joy
- relaxation

Spiritual Communion

- beauty
- harmony
- inspiration
- order
- peace

Feelings and Needs Worksheet

The purpose of this page is to help you identify the current state of your feelings and needs.

This list is suggestive, rather than comprehensive or exhaustive.

How would you rate your overall emotional state in the present moment?

| | Some Common Human Needs | Possible <u>Negative</u> Feelings When Needs is Not Met | Possible <u>Positive</u> Feelings When Need is Met |
|-----|---|--|---|
| 1. | Sustenance-Protection- Security-Safety Food-Shelter-Rest | Hungry-Cold-Tired-Afraid | Satisfied-Content-Energized |
| 2. | Connection-Affection-Love | Lonely-Sad-Separate | Loved and Cared For |
| 3. | Engagement-Participation-Community | Lonely-Isolated-Alienated-Detached | Engaged-Connected |
| 4. | Creativity and Self-Expression | Depressed-Numb-Bored | Animated-Expressive |
| 5. | Celebration-Leisure-Play-Fun-Humor-Joy | Depressed-Sad-Bored | Happy-Joyful |
| 6. | Stimulation-Challenge | Bored-Listless | Engaged-Active-Excited |
| 7. | Effective-Competent | Frustrated-Hopeless-Helpless | Confident-Competent |
| 8. | Clarity-Understanding | Confused | Clear-Certain |
| 9. | Focus-Meaning-Identity-Purpose | Depressed-Sad-Confused | Purposeful-Motivated |
| 10. | Autonomy-Freedom-Choices-Options | Depressed-Powerless-Hopeless | Empowered-Strong-Hopeful |
| 11. | Acknowledgement-Empathy-Appreciation-Recognition | Lonely-Isolated-Separate | Recognized-Understood |
| 12. | Predictability-Consistency-Congruence | Frustrated-Confused-Surprised | Connected-Safe |
| 13. | Honesty-Integrity | Sad-Disappointed-Confused | Connected-Complete-Whole |
| 14. | Peace-Ease-Harmony | Stressed-Worried-Anxious-Afraid | Happy-Flowing-Peaceful |
| 15. | Connection or Understanding | Annoyed-Frustrated-Irritated-Angry | Accepting-Compassionate |
| 16. | Self-esteem | Jealous-Envious-Longing | Grateful-Appreciative-Satisfied |
| 17. | Spiritual Connection | Sad-Hopeless-Powerless-Alienated | Connected-Complete-Whole |

Source: *Non-violent Communication: A Language of Compassion*, by Marshall Rosenberg, Ph.D.© 2000For more information on Non-violent Communication, contact: www.cnvc.org