



The following activities are based on the method created by Marshall B. Rosenberg, Ph.D. as described in his book *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life* (2015).



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NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION FOR TALKING ABOUT CORONAVIRUS



**Make Observations Without
Blaming or Criticizing**

Connect Feelings to Observations

**Express Needs
That Cause Feelings**

**Make Requests
Without Demanding**

Key Steps of Nonviolent Communication

How You Can Use the NVC Process



Clearly expressing
how **I am**
without blaming
or criticizing

Empathically receiving
how **you are**
without hearing
blame or criticism

OBSERVATIONS

1. What I observe (*see, hear, remember, imagine, free from my evaluations*) that does or does not contribute to my well-being:

“When I (see, hear) . . . ”

1. What you observe (*see, hear, remember, imagine, free from your evaluations*) that does or does not contribute to your well-being:

“When you see/hear . . . ”

(Sometimes unspoken when offering empathy)

FEELINGS

2. How I feel (*emotion or sensation rather than thought*) in relation to what I observe:

“I feel . . . ”

2. How you feel (*emotion or sensation rather than thought*) in relation to what you observe:

“You feel . . . ”

NEEDS

3. What I need or value (*rather than a preference, or a specific action*) that causes my feelings:

“ . . . because I need/value . . . ”

3. What you need or value (*rather than a preference, or a specific action*) that causes your feelings:

“ . . . because you need/value . . . ”

Clearly requesting that
which would enrich **my**
life without demanding

Empathically receiving that
which would enrich **your** life
without hearing any demand

REQUESTS

4. The concrete actions I would like taken:

“Would you be willing to . . . ?”

4. The concrete actions you would like taken:

“Would you like . . . ?”

(Sometimes unspoken when offering empathy)

Source: Rosenberg, M.B. (2005). *The heart of social change: How you can make a difference in your world*. PuddleDancer Press, p. 46.

The following adaptation of Rosenberg's method and activities for talking about coronavirus were created by Elizaveta Friesem (Ph.D.) for the Media Education Lab (<https://mediaeducationlab.com>).

I. Observations vs. Evaluations

We use evaluations when:

- 1) We describe somebody using the verb "to be" without taking responsibility for our opinion or explaining where it came from. [*Example: Sam is lazy*]. [*Example: Billy is ugly*].
- 2) We describe somebody's ability/inability without taking responsibility for our opinion or providing specific context. [*Example: Sarah does not know how to write emails*].
- 3) We use words that suggest judgment without providing specific context. [*Example: Julie gossips*]. [*Example: They don't work hard enough*].
- 4) We imply that our opinions are the only possible interpretation. [*Example: Josh does not know what he is doing*].
- 5) We confuse prediction with certainty. [*Example: Meghan will be late again*].
- 6) We generalize. [*Example: Men don't know how to show their feelings*].
- 7) We may express judgments through words like *always, never, ever, whenever, seldom, often*. [*Example: Whenever I try talking to you, you avoid the conversation*]. [*Example: You are always criticizing me*].

Exercise 1: Rewrite each of these examples in order to convert them into observations free from evaluations.

Exercise 2: Write one observation (not mixed with evaluations) about the current situation with coronavirus. You can mention the disease itself, people's reactions, the media, possible global developments, new policies and changes (quarantine, online classes, etc.) and more.

II. Expressing Feelings

| <i>When our needs are met, we may feel:</i> | <i>When our needs are not met, we may feel:</i> |
|---|---|
| Adventurous | Afraid |
| Affectionate | Alarmed |
| Alert | Angry |
| Alive | Annoyed |
| Appreciative | Anxious |
| Blissful | Ashamed |
| Calm | Bitter |
| Carefree | Bored |
| Cheerful | Brokenhearted |
| Comfortable | Concerned |
| Confident | Confused |
| Curious | Depressed |
| Delighted | Detached |
| Eager | Disappointed |
| Encouraged | Discouraged |
| Energetic | Disgusted |
| Enthusiastic | Dismayed |
| Excited | Displeased |
| Fascinated | Embarrassed |
| Free | Exhausted |
| Friendly | Fearful |
| Glad | Frightened |
| Grateful | Frustrated |
| Happy | Furious |
| Hopeful | Guilty |
| Inspired | Helpless |
| Interested | Hesitant |
| Joyful | Horrible |
| Optimistic | Hurt |
| Peaceful | Impatient |
| Pleased | Irritated |
| Proud | Jealous |
| Refreshed | Lonely |
| Relaxed | Mad |
| Relieved | Miserable |
| Satisfied | Nervous |
| Secure | Overwhelmed |
| Serene | Reluctant |
| Thankful | Sad |
| Wonderful | Scared |

BE CAREFUL: Some Words Mask Feelings with Judgment or Blame

Some passive words seem to describe feelings but often mask them. For example: criticized, betrayed, cornered, diminished, intimidated, manipulated, misunderstood, neglected, overlooked, patronized, pressured, provoked, rejected, taken for granted, threatened, unheard, unseen, unsupported, used.

Exercise 1: Choose five words from the passive list of words above and think what feelings they may be hiding.

Exercise 2: Which of the following phrases describe feelings and which don't? For those that don't, think which feelings they may be hiding. If they contain evaluations, how can we express them as observations?

- 1) I am so afraid.
- 2) I am anxious about driving.
- 3) I feel that you don't understand me.
- 4) I feel it is useless to try explaining this to him.
- 5) I feel used.
- 6) I feel like a failure.
- 7) I feel so peaceful next to you.
- 8) I feel that Amy has been pretty irresponsible.
- 9) I feel inadequate.
- 10) I feel misunderstood.
- 11) I feel good about this idea.
- 12) You are disgusting.
- 13) I'm worthless.

Exercise 3: Write one phrase describing your evaluation-free observation about the situation with coronavirus; then name your feelings connected with this observation. You can mention the disease itself, people's reactions, the media, possible global developments, new policies and changes (quarantine, online classes, etc.) and more.

III. Taking Responsibility for our Feelings

To take responsibility for our feelings, we can choose from four options:

- 1) Blame ourselves
- 2) Blame others
- 3) Sense our feelings and needs and take responsibility for them
- 4) Sense other people's feelings and needs

SOME HUMAN NEEDS

| <i>Autonomy</i> | <i>Celebration</i> | <i>Integrity</i> | <i>Interdependence</i> | <i>Play</i> | <i>Spirituality</i> | <i>Physical</i> |
|---|---|---|--|---------------------|--|---|
| - choosing dreams, goals, values - choosing ways to meet/fulfil them | ...of: - creation of life - achievement of dreams - transitions - loss (mourning) | - authenticity - creativity - meaning - self-worth | - acceptance - appreciation - community - closeness - consideration - contribution - emotional safety - empathy - honesty - love - reassurance - respect - support - trust - understanding - warmth | - fun - laughter | - beauty - harmony - inspiration - order - peace | - air - food - water - movement - protection from viruses, animals - rest - sexual expression - shelter - touch |

Exercise 1: What needs were not met in every one of these cases below? Which statements suggest that the speaker takes responsibility for their feelings and needs?

- 1) The fact that he was late for the meeting really irritated me.
- 2) I was disappointed that you did not call because I really wanted to get your advice.
- 3) It really infuriates me when people do not follow simple instructions.
- 4) I feel hurt because you said that you don't love me and I want to be loved by you.
- 5) I am discouraged because I would have liked to have progressed further in my work by now.
- 6) It hurts me when you get bad grades at school.
- 7) I am scared of being in a relationship because I had a difficult break-up and I don't want to be hurt again.
- 8) I am angry because some people keep making a big deal out of this without any good reason.
- 9) I am sad because I would have liked to know that people appreciate what I have done.
- 10) I feel angry when you say that, because I want some respect and I hear your words as an insult.

Exercise 2: Write down an evaluation-free statement about the situation with coronavirus. Then take responsibility for your feelings by connecting them to your needs without blaming others. You can mention the disease itself, people's reactions, the media, possible global developments, new policies and changes (quarantine, online classes, etc.) and more.

VI. Requests That Seek to Fulfill Needs

Our needs are less likely to be fulfilled when:

- 1) We make a negative request. [*Example: Don't put your dirty legs on the couch!*].
- 2) We make a vague request, expecting the other person to read our mind. [*Example: I want you to understand me*].
- 3) We cannot clearly formulate (even for ourselves) what we want. [*Example: I just want people to see me as a good person*].
- 4) We are not making a conscious request. [*Example: I am feeling so sad right now*].
- 5) We do not check that the other person understood us correctly or do that in a way that causes irritation. [*Example: Is that really what I said?*]
- 6) We don't check if the listener would be willing to take the specific action we are requesting. [*Example: Can you wash the dishes already?!*].
- 7) We do not make it clear what kind of response we are expecting. [*Example: Let's talk about our relationship*].
- 8) We make a demand masked as a request. [*Example: I want you to make dinner tonight. If you don't do it, I will be very disappointed*].
- 9) We are not specific about the action we are requesting (specific steps that we want the other person to take). [*Example: I want you to stop drinking*].

Exercise 1: Which of these statements represent clear requests and which don't? For those that don't, how would you rewrite these phrases to turn them into clear requests.

- 1) I'd like you to tell me one thing I did that you appreciate.
- 2) I want you to get along with my parents.
- 3) I'd like you to drive at or below the speed limit.
- 4) I want you to know that it was a difficult decision for me to move away from Chicago but I needed to make this change to feel that I am getting over my relationship with Bob.
- 5) I'd like you to feel more confidence in yourself because it's really bothering me that you are so shy.
- 6) I'd like you to let me be me.
- 7) I'd like you to appreciate my kindness.
- 8) I would like you to show respect for my privacy.
- 9) I'd like you to prepare supper more often.
- 10) I want to be loved!
- 11) Tell me three things that you have learned in today's class.

Exercise 2: Write down an evaluation-free observation about the coronavirus situation, followed by your feelings, needs, and then a clear request you would like to make based on these feelings and needs. Indicate your target audience (e.g., US government, social network users, your friends, parents, shoppers, etc.).

V. Receiving with Empathy

We are not fully connecting empathically with the other person when we do not acknowledge feelings and needs behind their words. This happens when we:

- 1) Give advice. [*Example: I think you should... How come you did not?..*]
- 2) Compare their experiences with ours. [*Example: That's nothing! Wait till you here what happened to me!*]
- 3) Educate. [*Example: This could turn into a very positive experience for you if you just...*]
- 4) Console. [*Example: You did the best you could.*]
- 5) Tell stories. [*Example: That reminds me of the time when...*]
- 6) Shut their feelings down. [*Example: Cheer up! Don't feel so bad.*]
- 7) Sympathize. [*Example: Oh, you poor thing. At least...*]
- 8) Interrogate. [*Example: When did this happen?*]
- 9) Explain. [*Example: I would have called but...*]
- 10) Correct. [*Example: This is not exactly how it happened.*]

Exercise 1: In which of the following responses the person who answers (B) could be more empathic? Offer your suggestions for rephrasing the responses to acknowledge feelings and needs of the first speaker (A).

| |
|---|
| 1) A: How could I do something so stupid? B: Nobody is perfect. You are too hard on yourself! |
| 2) A: This is not what I said! B: Are you feeling very angry right now because you would have liked me to respond differently? |
| 3) A: You take me for granted. I wonder if you could really manage without me. B: It looks like you are upset because you want to feel more appreciation. Is that correct? |
| 4) A: I am disgusted with how heavy I am getting. B: Perhaps you should try jogging? |
| 5) A: When my relatives come without letting me know, I feel invaded. B: This is exactly how I feel! |
| 6) A: I am disappointed with your performance in the sales department. B: I understand that you are disappointed, but we had many absences due to illness. |
| 7) A: How could you say a thing like that to me? B: It sounds like you are furious because of what I said. Is that correct? |
| 8) A: If you ask me, we should just ship all these immigrants back home. B: Do you really think this would solve the problem? |

Exercise 2: Think of something you have recently heard or read someone say about the situation with coronavirus – something that you did not agree with (perhaps even something that made you experience strong negative emotions towards the speaker/writer). Describe this experience starting with an evaluation-free observation, followed by your emotions, and your needs. Then try to guess emotions and needs of the speaker/writer whose statement you chose to focus on. Craft a short response to them trying to be as empathic as possible.

Hint: To connect with this person empathically, you will want to show that you recognize their feelings and needs without judgment. You also might want to use a question to open up a possibility for a dialogue.