

One in a series of articles by

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Connecting With Others: BRINGING MORE OF OURSELVES INTO OUR RELATIONSHIPS

In workshops, where people are learning about NVC for the very first time, I'll sometimes hear individuals say, "It sounds like you're saying that I have to become someone else . . . but I want others to accept me the way I am. Why should I have to change the way I speak?"

I answer by saying that I hope that no one will think they have to change or censor themselves. I hope instead that they will perceive the opportunity that Nonviolent Communication offers people which is to bring more of themselves into their exchanges with others. NVC makes this possible by showing us how to identify and express our feelings and needs and ask for what we would like to meet our needs. When we express our pain without reference to needs and without a clear request of what we would like, it's more likely that others will hear blame and think that it's their responsibility to make our pain go away. They may have little idea in fact about how to go about supporting us and so it's up to us to take responsibility for ourselves.

NVC does not ask us to change who we are or to change others. NVC never suggests that our feelings or needs are inappropriate. NVC suggests that we fully embrace and express ourselves. In order to

accomplish this, what is required is that we become aware of our needs and offer clear do-able strategies. It requires that we ask ourselves on an ongoing basis, "What are my present needs and what would I like back from others?"

Sometimes people say that becoming aware in this way is a change they don't wish to make - it's simply too much work. I know of no other way however to positively affect my relationships in mutually beneficial ways than to bring this level of awareness to my interactions. Clearly, it's a matter of choice - we can continue to relate with ourselves and others in ways that often leave us and others feeling hurt and alienated or we can explore alternatives.

As I bring more awareness to how I communicate, I may see how I have in the past expressed myself in blaming ways and how I have participated in perpetuating a cycle of violence by expecting my needs to be met at the expense of others. I may recall situations where I have not gotten what I wanted and then expressed myself in ways that I hoped would induce guilt or shame in others. Realizing this, I may feel guilt myself. Part of waking up sometimes means we will see ourselves differently and not like what we see.

The wonder of NVC however is how, in the very moment we experience those possible feelings/thoughts of unworthiness, we can apply the model and exercise compassion with ourselves. Doing this, we realize that we have been communicating in alienating ways because it's how we were educated and that while our communication has been misguided in the past, it has been in a clear attempt to meet our needs however ineffective our strategy may have been. We were doing the best we could and were not aware of another way - it had never been modelled to



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us. This doesn't in any way justify our past behaviour - what it does however is allow us to reflect on how our needs and those of others were not met and how we might like to act differently in future. It clears space for us to get in touch with our deep self and the trust in new possibilities.

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