

One in a series of articles by

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## Connecting With Others: MOTHER & CHILD DIALOGUE

From a reader:

I have only recently started to become interested in NVC and wish to use this form of communication to help me specifically with my 9 year old daughter.

Here's my problem: when using NVC it seems that the process involves me stating my feelings to the person I am communicating with. For example "I feel angry because the kitchen is a mess and I just finished cleaning it."

If I say "I feel angry." or "I feel sad." I'm afraid that my child has no way of making the distinction that I am not mad or sad because of her. The minute I say "I feel angry" she thinks "Mom's mad, I'm bad."

Can I use NVC effectively by omitting the "I feel stuff?" I just know that my daughter will take responsibility for my feelings and I don't want to give her any unneeded pressure.

I would appreciate any suggestions you might have.

While you can omit reference to feelings, I don't believe that it is necessary for the reason you state. What is crucial in any situation where feelings are strong is that

when we do express our feelings, we also clearly express the needs that are the source of our feelings. This will help to make it clear to both you and the other person that your unmet need is the source of your pain. If you don't state your need, then just as you have said, your daughter will hear blame.

When you say "I feel angry because the kitchen is a mess and I just finished cleaning it", you are essentially attributing the cause of your feeling to a source outside of yourself - that is, a messy kitchen - and since your daughter participated in creating the mess, she might believe she is the cause of your distress. While the messy kitchen is a trigger or stimulus, the actual cause of your feeling is an unmet need within yourself.

This is very important to grasp. Also worth noting is any possible should thoughts you might be having since such thoughts will interfere with facilitating a compassionate connection. Be sure to get in touch with the needs behind thoughts like "my daughter should know better and clean up after herself." When we are fully connected to needs, it's impossible to be angry - feelings of will generally shift to discouragement, disappointment, sadness, fear or despair to name a few.

In this particular case, I would suggest a phrase like "When I see used dishes on the counter 30 minutes after I've cleaned the kitchen, I feel discouraged because I need appreciation for my efforts to maintain order and cleanliness in our home. (pause) I would like to be sure you're not hearing any blame in what I'm saying and am wondering if you can tell me what you're hearing me say."



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Here's what might follow:

Daughter: You're mad at me and you want me to clean up after myself. (While you've clearly communicated your need, your daughter has not connected with it and likely believes she is the cause - she's not yet learned that other people aren't the cause of our feelings.)

Mother: Thank you for telling me what you're hearing. I'd like you to hear differently. What I'd like is mutual respect for the living spaces we share together. Can you tell me what you're hearing?

Daughter: You want everyone to respect the spaces we share together?

Mom: Yes, that's it. I'm now wondering how you feel hearing this?

Daughter: I guess it makes sense but I don't really like cleaning and I just forget. (Notice that you've asked for a feeling and you've received a cognitive response - so now it's up to you to try to guess her feelings and needs.)

Mom: So are you feeling some concern because you would like to contribute to the order and

cleanliness but you're not sure you'll be in the mood or that it might just slip your mind?

Daughter: Yeah

Mom: Well I feel grateful learning that you would like to help out. What could we agree on right now that might help us out in future?

Daughter: How about you just tell me when I forget without yelling at me?

Mom: You would appreciate a reminder but you would like me to do it by saying something like "Honey, I am noticing that there are dishes on the counter and I'm guessing you may have forgotten to clear them away. Would you let me know now when you will be doing this?"

Daughter: Yes, that's soooo much better. Then I won't mind doing it.

Final note: this doesn't mean this issue will go away for ever. My experience is that, especially in parenting situations, we will often journey through the territory many times.

The question I try to consistently ask myself when I'm triggered is "how do I wish to journey through this territory with this person?" Asking myself this question helps redirect my attention to what I most want - to be fully conscious and present in my interactions with an intention to connect from my heart.

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