

Key Assumptions And Intentions Of NVC

Inbal Kashtan & Miki Kashtan

I. Assumptions Underlying the Practice of Nonviolent Communication

Our ideas about individual and collective human nature have evolved and will continue to evolve. These ideas shape our expectations of what's possible, the social structures we create, and how we interact with ourselves and other people. Therefore the assumptions we make can have a profound effect on the life we live and the world we collectively create.

Following are key assumptions that NVC practice is based on. Many traditions share these assumptions; NVC gives us concrete, powerful tools for putting them into practice. When we live based on these assumptions, self-connection and connection with others become increasingly possible and easy.

1. **All human beings share the same needs:** We all have the same needs, although the strategies we use to meet these needs may differ. Conflict occurs at the level of strategies coupled with interpretations, not at the level of needs.
2. **All actions are attempts to meet needs:** Our desire to meet needs, whether conscious or unconscious, underlies every action we take. We only resort to violence or other actions that do not meet our own or others' needs when we do not recognize the existence of more effective strategies for meeting needs.
3. **Feelings point to needs being met or unmet:** Feelings may be triggered but not caused by others. Our feelings arise directly out of our experience of whether our needs seem to us met or unmet in a given circumstance. Our assessment of whether or not our needs are met almost invariably involves an interpretation or belief. When our needs are met, we may feel happy, satisfied, peaceful, etc. When our needs are not met, we may feel sad, scared, frustrated, etc.
4. **The most direct path to peace is through self-connection:** Our capacity for peace is not dependent on having our needs met. Even when many needs are unmet, meeting our need for self-connection can be sufficient for inner peace.
5. **Choice is internal:** Regardless of the circumstances, we can meet our need for autonomy by making conscious choices based on awareness of needs; at the very least in terms of the choice of the meaning we assign to the circumstances.
6. **All human beings have the capacity for compassion:** We have an innate capacity for compassion, though not always the knowledge of how to access it. When we are met with compassion and respect for our autonomy, we tend to have more access to our own compassion for ourselves and for others. Growing compassion contributes directly to our capacity to meet needs peacefully.
7. **Human beings enjoy giving:** We inherently enjoy contributing to others when we have connected with our own and others' needs and can experience our giving as coming from choice.

8. **Human beings meet needs through interdependent relationships:** We meet many of our needs through our relationships with other people and with nature, though some needs are met principally through the quality of our relationship with ourselves and for some, with a spiritual dimension to life. When others' needs are not met, some needs of our own also remain unmet.
9. **Our world offers abundant resources for meeting needs:** When human beings are committed to valuing everyone's needs, are able to discern how much they actually need, and have regained their skills for fostering connection and their creativity about sharing resources, we can overcome our current crisis of imagination and find ways to attend to everyone's basic needs.
10. **Human beings change:** Both our needs and the strategies we have to meet them change over time. Wherever we find ourselves and each other in the present, individually and collectively, all human beings have the capacity to grow and change.

II. Key Intentions When Using Nonviolent Communication

Having clarity about our intentions can help us live and act in line with our values. We hold the following intentions when using NVC because we believe that they enrich our lives and contribute to a world where everyone's needs are attended to peacefully.

A. Open-Hearted Living

1. **Self-compassion:** We aim to release all self-blame, self-judgments, and self-demands, and meet ourselves with compassion and understanding for the needs we try to meet through all our actions.
2. **Expressing from the heart:** When expressing ourselves, we aim to speak from the heart, expressing our feelings and needs, and making specific, do-able requests that take into considerations the structural and cultural context within which we interact.
3. **Receiving with compassion:** When we hear others, we aim to hear the feelings and needs behind their expressions and actions, regardless of their social location and how they express themselves, even if their expression or actions do not meet our needs (e.g. judgments, demands, discounting, denial of responsibility, or physical violence).
4. **Prioritizing connection:** We aim to focus on connecting open-heartedly with everyone's needs before seeking solutions, even in challenging situations, so as to increase the chances of a solution that works for all.
5. **Beyond "right" and "wrong":** We aim to transform our habit of making "right" and "wrong" assessments (moralistic judgments), and to focus instead on whether or not human needs appear met (need-based assessments).

B. Choice, Responsibility, Peace

1. **Taking responsibility for our feelings:** We aim to connect our feelings to our own needs, recognizing that others do not have the power to make us feel anything. This

recognition empowers us to take action to meet our needs instead of waiting for others to change.

2. **Taking responsibility for our actions:** We aim to recognize our choice in each moment, and take actions that we believe will most likely meet our needs with the least cost possible to others. We aim to avoid taking actions motivated by fear, guilt, shame, desire for reward, or ideas of duty, obligation, or deserving.
3. **Living in peace with unmet needs:** We aim to make room for and embrace our feelings when we experience our needs as unmet, connecting with the needs rather than insisting on meeting them.
4. **Increasing capacity for meeting needs:** We aim to develop our internal resources, particularly our NVC skills, so we can contribute to more connection and greater diversity of strategies for meeting more needs of more people at least cost to others and nature.
5. **Increasing capacity for meeting the present moment:** We aim to develop our capacity to connect in each moment with our own and others' needs, and to respond to present stimuli in the moment instead of through static stories about who we and others are.

C. Sharing Power (Partnership)

1. **Caring fully for everyone's needs:** We aim to make requests and not demands, thus staying open to the other's strategies to meet their needs. When hearing a "No" to our request, or when saying "No" to another's request, we aim to work towards solutions that attend to everyone's needs, not just our own, and not just the other person's. We aim to do so with an understanding of how power differences affect our own and others' capacity to hear and say "No".
2. **Increasing capacity for needs-based sharing of resources:** We aim to develop and practice needs-based strategies for sharing our world's resources with the goal of meeting the most needs for the most number of people and for the natural environment.
3. **Protective use of force:** We aim to use the minimum force necessary in order to protect, not to educate, punish, or get what we want without the other's agreement; with the most love possible; and only in situations where we find that dialogue fails to attend to an immediate or ongoing harm especially as it relates to a need for physical safety. We aim to return to efforts to establish dialogue as soon as we have attended to the situation at hand.