
TOOLKIT

**CONNECT
BEFORE
CORRECT**

*using empathy for better
understanding*

*based on the Training Course
22 – 29 April 2024. PUCK, POLAND*

CONNECT BEFORE CORRECT

Training Course

Spis treści

ABOUT THE PROJECT	2
NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION	2
MARSHALL B. ROSENBERG.....	3
EMPATHY	3
3 TYPES OF EMPATHY:	3
TOOLBOX	4
POSSIBLE BARRIERS IN EMPATHIC COMMUNICATION.....	4
<i>EXERCISE</i>	5
EMPATHIC LISTENING.....	5
<i>EXERCISE: Empathic Listening</i>	6
FOUR STEPS OF NVC.....	7
<i>EXERCISE: Changing evaluations into observations</i>	9
FEELINGS.....	10
CREATING A VOCABULARY OF FEELINGS	10
TAKING RESPONSIBILITY.....	11
UNDERSTANDING WHAT FEELINGS ARE.....	11
NEEDS.....	11
<i>Needs vs Strategies</i>	12
<i>Exercise: Strategies vs. Needs Exploration</i>	12
3 WAYS OF CONNECTION	13
<i>Exercise: 3 ways of connection</i>	13
EMBODIED EMPATHY EXERCISES	14
BLIND WALK	14
MIRROR MOVEMENTS	15
MINDFUL BODY SCAN.....	15
PARTNER BODYWORK EXPLORATION	16
SOMATIC MOVEMENT EXPLORATION.....	16
DO YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE?	16
LITERATURE:.....	17



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ABOUT THE PROJECT

Empathy is very useful in many jobs, but it is especially important for those that are directed to help others, like teaching or working with young people. For teachers and youth workers, empathy supports them in understanding and connecting with the people they are helping, making it easier to provide the right way of caring.

Learning to be more empathetic also helps us grow emotionally and feel better overall. It allows us to regulate our own feelings better and build stronger, more genuine relationships with others. When we understand and care about how others feel, we can communicate more effectively and support them in figuring out what they need and how to improve their situations.

The training course “Connect Before Correct” focused on developing empathic skills and knowledge that could be used to create meaningful and authentic relationships. After this training, participants improved their communication skills to better support young people in their emotional struggles. The program was based on the Nonviolent Communication approach and offered both theoretical inputs and deep practice.

NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION

Nonviolent Communication (NVC), also known as empathic communication or the language of the heart, is a communication process developed by Dr. Marshall B. Rosenberg in the 1960s. NVC aims to facilitate dialogue between individuals and to foster societies built on empathy, while considering the needs of all involved parties. It helps individuals consciously select words to articulate their desires, thereby enhancing the likelihood of establishing genuine connection and mutual understanding.

Marshall B. Rosenberg

Marshall B. Rosenberg was an American psychologist, negotiator, mediator, trainer, and educator. He earned a Ph.D. in clinical psychology and was a student of Carl Rogers, a prominent figure in humanistic psychology. Rosenberg believed in social change, envisioning a world characterised by peace, cooperation, and mutual respect.

Born on October 6, 1934, in Ohio (USA), Rosenberg spent his formative years in Detroit, where he was exposed to violence and discrimination. Motivated to understand the roots of violence and explore avenues for prevention, as well as to comprehend why certain individuals maintain empathy and compassion despite challenging circumstances, he pursued studies in psychology.

Rosenberg founded the Center for Nonviolent Communication (CNVC), a global organisation dedicated to advancing peace and conflict resolution through the principles of NVC. Even after his passing on February 7, 2015, the CNVC continues to uphold Rosenberg's legacy and further his mission.

www.cnvc.org

EMPATHY

According to NVC, empathy is giving attention to another person by either silently or verbally guessing their feelings and needs. The aim of empathy is creating a safe space, being open to the words, feelings and needs of another person, not finding the strategy that will solve the problem.

3 types of empathy:

"Affective empathy" encompasses the sensations and feelings we experience in response to others' emotions, involving both shared experiences and emotional attunement.

"Cognitive empathy," also known as "perspective-taking" or "mentalizing," pertains to the ability to recognize and comprehend the emotions of others.

"Behavioural empathy" refers to actions taken in response to the internal experience of cognitive and/or emotional empathy, translating understanding into observable behaviours.

TOOLBOX

Possible barriers in empathic communication

In communication, we often use phrases or sentences that can actually break the connection and stop the empathy. It can be useful to be aware of them and the impact they have. You can practise in pairs, checking how you feel when you hear those kinds of messages and what happens to the conversation.

Advising: “If I were you...”, “I think the best solution would be to...” “Why don’t you...”

Consoling: “It wasn’t your fault”, “Soon everything will be fine.”, “Head up!”

Storytelling: “That reminds me of the situation when...”

Showing sympathy: “Oh, poor you! I am so sorry...”

Analysing: “You probably feel frustrated because...”

Comparing: “David found a much better solution than you.”, “Everyone else is doing well, why can’t you...”

Correcting: “She didn’t say that”, “He had good intentions, why don’t you see it?”

Pushing feelings away: “Come on, don’t be so angry.” “Take a deep breath and smile”

Interrogating: “Who was with you? What was her name? Why did you decide to go there? What happened later?”

Evaluating: “You are so unreliable.” “How could you be so stupid to behave like that?”

Educating: “Next time you will know that you shouldn’t do that”

One-upping: “That’s nothing, listen what happened to my friend!”
Agreeing with the person you listen to: “You’re right, she can’t be trusted!”

Cheer leading: “You’re the wisest person I know, you can deal with this.”,
“You are the best!”

EXCERCISE

In pairs, person A talks about a relatively light yet meaningful situation in their life. Meanwhile, person B uses the comments from above, and person A reflects on how these comments make them feel and tries to identify which barrier to empathy was used.

You are so right. I never liked him anyway.	
I'm sure you will learn and you will know what to better in the future.	
Don't be so sad. It wasn't that bad.	
That wasn't so wise.	
You must feel really angry after hearing that.	
That reminds me of my trip in Spain..	
Look around, other mothers are happy to work and they are able to take care of the children anyway.	

EMPATHIC LISTENING

How to Listen with Empathy:

- **Listen in Silence:** Allow the speaker to express themselves without interruption.
- **Be Present:** Focus entirely on the speaker, showing genuine interest through eye contact and body language.
- **Paraphrase and Clarify:** Ensure you understand by rephrasing what the speaker has said and asking for confirmation.
- **Reflect:** Repeat key points to show you are actively listening and understanding.

- **Ask Supportive Questions:** Only ask questions that help the speaker explore their thoughts and feelings further.
- **Identify Feelings and Needs:** Try to understand the speaker's emotions and underlying needs. For example, "Are you feeling angry because respect is important to you?"

EXERCISE: Empathic Listening

Empathic Listening is an interactive exercise that promotes deep understanding and empathy between participants. Here's a more detailed description:

1. **Pairing Participants:** Participants are paired up, with each pair consisting of a speaker and a listener. Partners may be assigned randomly or allowed to choose their own pairs.
2. **Sharing Thoughts and Feelings:** The speaker begins by sharing their thoughts, feelings, and experiences on a chosen topic. They are encouraged to express themselves openly and honestly, delving into their emotions and perspectives.
3. **Attentive Listening:** As the speaker shares, the listener practices attentive listening, focusing their full attention on the speaker without interruptions or distractions. They listen with an open mind and heart, seeking to understand the speaker's perspective deeply.
4. **Reflecting Back:** After the speaker finishes sharing, the listener reflects back what they heard, paraphrasing the speaker's words and emotions. The reflection aims to capture the essence of the speaker's message while demonstrating empathy and understanding.
5. **Clarification and Validation:** The listener may ask clarifying questions or offer validation to ensure they accurately understood the speaker's message. This step helps build trust and rapport between partners and fosters a sense of validation and acceptance.

6. **Switching Roles:** After each round of sharing and reflecting, partners may switch roles, allowing each participant to experience both speaking and listening. This rotation promotes mutual understanding and empathy as partners take turns expressing themselves and practising reflective listening.
7. **Feedback and Discussion:** After completing the exercise, participants may come together as a group to provide feedback and engage in a discussion about their experiences. They can share insights, challenges, and learnings from the exercise, as well as explore how they can apply reflective listening in their daily interactions.

Four steps of NVC

Step 1: Observations ≠ Judgements

- **Observations:** Describing factual events or statements, akin to what a video camera captures.
- **Example:** "They said they'd arrive by 3 PM, and it's already 4:30 PM."

Versus:

- **Judgements:** Interpreting events, labelling, or assigning blame.
- **Example:** "They're always late. It's so disrespectful."

Step 2: Feelings ≠ Thoughts

- **Feelings:** Identifying emotions experienced, arising from bodily sensations.
- **Example:** "I feel frustrated when plans change at the last minute."

Versus:

- **Thoughts/False Feelings:** Expressing interpretations or thoughts disguised as feelings.

- **Example:** "I feel like you're deliberately ignoring me."

Step 3: Needs ≠ Strategies

- **Needs:** Inner drives common to all humans, motivating our actions.
- **Example:** "I need reliability and punctuality to feel respected."

Versus:

- **Strategies:** Specific actions taken to meet needs, often involving who, when, and how.
- **Example:** "You need to text me your ETA in advance."

Step 4: Requests ≠ Demands

- **Requests:** Clear, positive, and actionable statements, allowing for refusal.
- **Example:** "Could you please let me know if you'll be late next time?"

Versus:

- **Demands:** Using coercive language or denying choice.
- **Example:** "You must inform me beforehand or else I'll be upset."

EXERCISE: Changing evaluations into observations

Change the judgements and criticism in the sentences below into facts. Focus on what could the person register through the senses: what could he/she hear, see...

Example:

Evaluation: He is always late!

Observation: We have met three times so far and every time he came 15 minutes after the scheduled hour.

Evaluation: She never listens to me!

Observation:

Evaluation: He is so lazy!

Observation:

Evaluation: She's such a gossip!

Observation:

Evaluation: He's always interrupting me!

Observation:

Evaluation: She's so disorganised!

Observation:

Evaluation: She doesn't like me.

Observation:

FEELINGS

In Nonviolent Communication (NVC), feelings are feelings that arise in response to a need being met or not met, while thoughts are mental evaluations or judgments about something.

Feelings - words that describe our sensations, we can feel them in the body and are an indication of whether our needs are being met or not.

- All feelings give us a message, there are no “good”, or “bad”, “positive,” or “negative,” there are only information if a need was met or not
- Words/labels we use to **describe our body sensations**.
- Words for feelings are **cultural and linguistic agreements** which differ between cultures and languages.
- Since feelings are a **subjective experience**, something that goes on within us as individuals, we cannot be sure that others experience the same as we do
- They describe what’s going on inside in us

Thoughts - words that describe our thoughts, interpretations, judgements and projections, mental evaluations about something/someone.

- often based on **beliefs, assumptions** or cultural and social influence
- are our (often habitual) attempts to **make sense of our feelings** and other aspects of our lives.
- consist of **interpretations, judgments, evaluations**, etc. that are our mind’s attempt to help us understand our world.
- They often describe an external situation or a person.

Creating a vocabulary of feelings

Since feelings signal whether our needs are being met or not, we can use our feelings as a map to find our needs. When we have very few labels to describe our feelings, it’s like having a low-resolution map. If we have a map with as low a resolution as a globe, we will never find a specific address. The same goes for feelings. If we have very few words to describe our inner life – for example, if we only feel good or bad – it becomes very difficult to identify our needs.

[Feelings Inventory - a list of feelings](#)

Taking responsibility

In NVC, we take responsibility for our feelings by connecting them to our needs, not to the actions of others. If we blame others for our feelings, we depend on them to change their behaviour in order for our mood to change. If others do not voluntarily change, we might want to use punishment, force or violence to change their behaviour.

Understanding what feelings are

Research has shown that most of us think between 12,000 and 70,000 thoughts per day. According to one source, 80 percent of these thoughts are negative and 95 per cent repetitive. Our thoughts – often in the form of positive or negative judgments about ourselves and others – therefore tend to be static. Feelings are always in movement.

We often use words that interpret what others (or we ourselves) think about us rather than how we feel. They are called **“pseudo feelings”**.

How to distinguish pseudo feelings from real feelings?

1. *“I feel like.....”, “I feel as if” , “I feel that...”*
2. Followed by pronouns: *“I feel it’s useless”, “I feel you criticise me.”*
3. Followed by the description: *“I feel I’m inadequate as a singer”*.
4. Words describe what other people do to me. *“I feel ignored.”*

NEEDS

A word **need** is used in Nonviolent Communication to describe the inner energy that “drives” us, the deepest motivations behind anything we think or say, any action or reaction. Everything we do is aimed at satisfying our needs.

The needs are:

- Positive - something we want to be fulfilled
- Universal - all human beings have the same universal needs; yet we choose different ways to meet our needs

- Abstract - not attached to any particular person, place or thing.

Being aware of our needs helps us to better understand our behaviour and our feelings. It also allows us to search for actions that can meet our needs. To be able to identify and name our needs, we need to know words which describe different needs → [Needs Inventory - a list of needs](#)

Needs vs Strategies

Strategies are concrete actions taken to fulfil our needs. There are many different strategies that can meet a specific need. One strategy may meet a variety of different needs.

Exercise: Strategies vs. Needs Exploration

Objective: To help participants differentiate between concrete actions (strategies) and underlying motivations (needs) in various scenarios.

Instructions:

1. Introduction:
 - Begin by explaining the difference between strategies and needs. Emphasize that strategies are specific actions taken to meet needs, while needs are the underlying motivations or desires that drive our behavior.
2. Scenario Presentation:
 - Present participants with a series of scenarios or situations. These can be hypothetical or drawn from real-life experiences.
 - Examples of scenarios:
 - You're feeling stressed and overwhelmed with work.
 - You're having difficulty communicating with a friend or family member.
 - You're experiencing conflict with a coworker.
 - Encourage participants to think about the underlying needs and the strategies they might use to address them.
3. Small Group Discussion:
 - Divide participants into small groups.
 - Assign each group a scenario to discuss.
 - Instruct participants to identify and list the needs underlying the scenario, as well as potential strategies that could address those needs.
4. Sharing and Reflection:

- After the discussion, reconvene as a larger group.
 - Have each group share their identified needs and strategies for the given scenario.
 - Facilitate a reflective discussion on the importance of understanding needs and selecting effective strategies to meet them.
5. Role-Playing Exercise:
- Optionally, conduct role-playing exercises based on the scenarios discussed.
 - Participants can practice implementing the strategies identified to address the needs in each scenario.
6. Wrap-Up:
- Conclude the exercise with a summary of key insights and takeaways.
 - Encourage participants to apply their understanding of needs and strategies to real-life situations, both personally and professionally.

3 WAYS OF CONNECTION

In the NVC model, there are three possible forms of connection:

1. **Self-connection/Self-empathy**, an inner dialogue connecting to my own feelings and needs in response to a stimulus. I might listen to some of my judging and blaming first, to uncover which feelings and needs lie beneath. This inner dialogue leads to clarity around requests I might make to myself or others to meet my needs. Acknowledging and being present to my own feelings and needs within also makes space to be present to others.
2. **Honest self-expression** with others, sharing my feelings and needs in a nonviolent way.
3. **Empathy**. To listen empathically to someone else's feelings and needs, connecting to what is going on for them. Becoming open and present to what's arising for the other person with full acceptance, offering a safe space for them to be heard.

Exercise: [3 ways of connection](#)

1. Pairing Up:

- Participants pair up for a role-play activity.
 - Player A selects a recent conflict or argument they've experienced and briefs Player B about the situation.
2. **Role-Play Dynamics:**
- Player B supports Player A by assuming the role of the person involved in the conflict.
 - Players engage in dialogue, attempting to resolve the conflict in a constructive manner.
3. **Dynamic Interaction:**
- Players navigate through three cards representing different stages of the process: self-empathy, empathy for others, and honest-expression.
 - They begin with self-empathy, reflecting on their own feelings, sensations, beliefs, and opinions related to the conflict.
 - When both players feel ready, they transition to empathy for others, considering the perspective and emotions of the other party.
4. **Reflection and Debrief:**
- Following the role-play, participants reflect on their experience.
 - Facilitate a debrief session to share learnings and observations from the role-play exercise.

EMBODIED EMPATHY EXERCISES

Blind Walk

The Blind Walk is an empathy exercise that involves pairs of participants, one of whom is blindfolded (the "blind" partner) while the other acts as a guide. The exercise is designed to deepen understanding and trust between partners by fostering communication, collaboration, and empathy.

Instruction:

1. **Preparation:** Before beginning the Blind Walk, gather the necessary materials, including blindfolds and a safe, obstacle-free space for walking. It's essential to ensure the area is free of hazards to prevent accidents.

2. **Pairing:** Participants are paired up, with each pair consisting of a blindfolded partner and a guide. Partners may be assigned randomly or allowed to choose their own pairs.
3. **Blindfolding:** The blindfolded partner puts on the blindfold, effectively limiting their ability to see. This step symbolises the experience of having a sensory impairment and relying on other senses, such as touch, hearing, and intuition.
4. **Walking:** The guide leads the blindfolded partner along the walking route, possibly in complete silence, making sure that the blinded partner is safe. The guide may provide different sensory experiences to be explored by the blindfolded partner.
5. **Switching Roles:** After completing the walk, partners switch roles, allowing each participant to experience both being blindfolded and guiding. This rotation promotes mutual understanding and empathy as partners step into each other's shoes.
6. **Reflection:** After the Blind Walk, participants come together as a group to reflect on their experiences. Facilitate a discussion where participants share their thoughts, feelings, and insights gained from the exercise. Encourage reflection on communication dynamics, trust-building, and the challenges and rewards of navigating without sight.

Mirror Movements

Pair up persons and ask them to mirror each other's movements without speaking. Encourage them to observe and attune to their partner's body language, gestures, and energy, attempting the impossibility of acting at the same time as the partner. Give participants a few minutes, then change roles. Close up with sharing and reflecting in a working pair. This exercise promotes nonverbal communication, empathy, and trust.

Mindful Body Scan

Guide participants through a mindful body scan exercise, where they bring focused attention to each part of their body starting from the head and the face, progressing down into the direction of the feet, all the other way around. Highlight the presence of natural body movement, such as breath,

pulse, release of the muscles, invite noticing sensations, tensions, and emotions without judgement. The exercise can be done standing, sitting or laying. Choose the best position for the energy level in the room. This exercise promotes self-awareness, embodiment, and empathetic understanding of physical and emotional experiences.

Partner Bodywork Exploration

In pairs, invite participants to explore gentle touch-based activities such as hand, back or shoulder touch by applying pressure, squeezing, brushing, tapping or energy awareness exercise: brushing very close but yet not touching the skin. This activity fosters connection, trust, and empathetic engagement through the physical experience of giving and receiving touch. It can be adopted into a self-touch exploration, when a person explores different qualities of touch on themselves.

Somatic Movement Exploration

Facilitate somatic movement explorations that allow young individuals to tune into their bodies and express themselves through movement. At first invite them to start on the ground, follow the impulses and observe what is present in the body. Encourage them to explore qualities such as fluidity, grounding, or expansion, pushing the ground, melting to the floor, rocking or gentle shaking fostering self-regulation through the body, awareness, and empathetic connections with self.

This toolkit was prepared by the trainers of the project:

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Visit Empathic Way Europe website and read the blog and join our events: www.empathiceurope.com

Read NVC books (see the list below)

Watch videos with Marshall B. Rosenberg on YouTube

Take part in another NVC workshop or 1-on-1 session.


Literature:

- Marshall B. Rosenberg "Nonviolent Communication. A Language of Life."
- Marshall B. Rosenberg "Living Nonviolent Communication"
- Marshall B. Rosenberg "Speak Peace in a World of Conflict"
- Justine Mol "The Giraffe and Jackal Within"
- Liv Larsson "A Helping Hand: Mediation with Nonviolent Communication"
- Liv Larsson "Anger, Guilt and Shame – Reclaiming Power and Choice"
- Liv Larsson "The Power of Gratitude" Miki Kashtan "Spinning Threads of Radical Aliveness"
- Miki Kashtan "Reweaving Our Human Fabric"
- Marie R. Miyashiro "The Empathy Factor. Your Competitive Advantage for Personal, Team, and Business Success."
- Jane Marantz Connor, Dian Killian "Connecting across Differences. A Guide to Compassionate, Nonviolent Communication."
- Sarah Peyton "Your Resonant Self"



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