

Nonviolent Communication (NVC) views communication that is characterized by judging, criticizing, analyzing, moralizing, accusing, blaming, and using right-wrong thinking as "violent" or "life-alienating" because it can lead to defensiveness, resentment, and conflict, moving away from connection and understanding. Instead of focusing on shared humanity and needs, talking in this way fuels disagreements and can escalate tensions.

When using NVC, the goal is not to win or to be right, but to create a connection where everyone's needs matter. What can help is to translate "done-to" language with "self-owned" language. Instead of having it sound like someone (or right-wrong thinking) is making you feel a certain way, you can express yourself in a way that takes ownership of your feelings and connects them to your needs. To support this shift, NVC provides a simple four-part structure, which is referred to by the acronym OFNR, for staying connected to what really matters to everyone.

Here's an example of using it to express what's alive for the speaker:

O - Observations - What actually happened, without judgment or interpretation. Like a video camera recording facts.

Instead of: "You interrupted me. How rude!"

Try: "I notice I haven't finished a full sentence yet."

F - Feelings - The emotions arising in you—actual feelings, not thoughts disguised as feelings.

Actual feelings: frustrated, anxious, sad, joyful, relieved

Not feelings: "I feel like you don't care" (that's a thought/judgment)

Example: "I'm feeling apprehensive"

N - Needs - The universal human needs underlying your feelings. Everyone shares these needs—things like respect, understanding, safety, connection, rest, autonomy.

Example: "...because of my need to be clear and my need for effectiveness"

R - Requests - A specific, doable action you're asking for (not a demand). The other person can say no.

Instead of: "Pay attention to me"

Try: "Can I finish this thought?"

Putting it together in a more natural way, with a bit of empathy added at the end:

(O) Actually, I notice I haven't finished a full sentence yet. (F) I'm having trouble finishing my thought, and am feeling apprehensive right now, (N) because I really want to be clear and I need a bit more space to get my point across. (R) Can I finish this thought?

(Empathy for the interrupter) and then I'd love to hear yours since I'm guessing you might be feeling excited because you really want to share your ideas.

Here's an example of using OFNR to make an empathy guess in response to someone sharing their feelings:

(O) When the meeting was canceled, (F) were you feeling disappointed (N) because you were counting on getting to engage collaboratively? (R) Would talking about what might support you at this point be something you would like to do now?

The magic isn't in the OFNR formula itself—it's in the awareness that develops as you practice distinguishing facts from judgments, feelings from thoughts, and identifying the needs behind your reactions.

Some would say though that although NVC is often presented as a technique for better communication—its deeper purpose is actually transforming how we perceive and relate to ourselves and others.

Often it is more about it being an "inside job" in that it is about self-observation and consciousness-shifting.

Nonviolent Communication (NVC) asks us to:

- Notice our habitual patterns of judgment, blame, and right-wrong thinking
- Develop consciousness about the needs driving all human behavior (ours and others')
- Cultivate presence with what's alive in us moment-to-moment
- Practice separating clean observations from evaluation/judgment, which is actually quite difficult
- Recognize the difference between strategies and needs - Strategies for meeting our needs can often be in conflict, whereas some argue that needs are never in conflict. So, it's important to see the difference between a strategy for getting a need met and the need itself.

In this view, the structured communication format (of observations, feelings, needs, and requests) is more like a training wheel—a concrete practice that forces us to slow down and examine our internal landscape. The real transformation happens in the awareness itself: recognizing that anger is often a surface emotion pointing to unmet needs, or seeing how our language patterns perpetuate disconnection.

So someone might come to NVC wanting to "communicate better with their partner," but what they're actually signing up for is a sustained practice of self-observation and consciousness-shifting. The communication improvements are almost a side effect of this deeper awareness work.