

## **Basic Model of Non-Violent Communication (NVC)** **(Marschall B. Rosenberg)**

The **four steps of NVC** are **observation, emotion, need, request**:

1. The **Observation** describes an action without mixing the description with any judgement or interpretation.

The aim is to distinguish and separate judgement and observation, which leads to two helpful results:

- a) Your partner knows exactly what you're talking about if you describe things objectively, and
  - b) Your partner will not be triggered emotionally by your objective description and observation; this is different if you judge or interpret his or her actions, to which he or she will most probably react more strongly, which then leads from one argument to the next, often resulting in a fight.
2. Your observation normally leads to an **emotion** within you, which you can often locate in your body. Try not to jump from your observation to your emotion and not to immediately throw your emotion towards your partner, but stay within your own mind and body and ask yourself the next question:

3. What is your **need** behind this emotion?

A need is something basic which every person strives for in his or her life, e.g. safety, intimacy or acceptance.

Needs are not to be confused with wishes, which are nice to have but not necessary for a fulfilled life, e.g. wealth, a certain job or a holiday trip.

Emotions are, according to the model of NVC, an indicator or expression of the fact whether or not a certain basic need is fulfilled.

Understanding the concept of basic needs in general as well as understanding your own and your partner's individual needs is very important in order to have a healthy relationship, since your and your partner's needs lead the way to a creative solution of a conflict, so that both sides feel comfortable.

➔ A list of typical emotions (2) and needs (3) is given at the end of this article.

4. Finally, the needs lead to a **request** for a certain action here and now. Once more, requests need to be distinguished from wishes:
  - a. A request aims for a clear-cut action ("Please ask me before eating up all the chocolate."), whereas
  - b. a wish usually stays more vague and describes a state of being in the future ("Be respectful!")

Requests are more easily fulfilled than wishes, since they're more concrete, and thus their chance of being fulfilled is much higher.

M.B. Rosenberg suggests phrasing your requests in a 'positive language of call-to-action', i.e. to say what you want instead of what you don't want: e.g. "Please speak to me before making an appointment with our friends" instead of "Don't ignore me".

M.B. Rosenberg also differentiates between a 'request for action' vs. a 'relational request', e.g. "Could you please empty the dishwasher?" (request for action) vs. "Could you tell me how you feel now?" (relational request).

**Rosenberg summarizes the four steps of NVC in one sentence:**

"If I see *a*, then I feel *b*, because I need *c*. Therefore, I'd like to ask you for *d*."

*a* = observation; *b* = emotion; *c* = need; *d* = request

This phrasing is supposed to help the speaker not to communicate in an aggressive way, but to use the four steps of NVC; thus, mutual understanding will be enhanced and an inner connection between the partners can grow.

To be honest, a lot of practice is needed in order to use this method of NVC in your everyday-communication. But it is learnable and feasible. ;-)

If the solution of a problem is not possible in a NVC dialogue at the moment, the best is to take a certain **time off**. It's important that (a) you both agree with this time off and that (b) you have a clear-cut time-limit for it. This way, you can prevent further emotional injuries, and you give each other space and safety in which both of you will develop an inner willingness to get back into contact with each other and solve your problem in a healthy way of communication.

➔ On the following page, you get a practical, four-step example on how to use the concept of NVC in your everyday-life.

### The basic model of NVC in an example (dirty kitchen)

	Non-violent communication (partner A)	Aggressive (negative) communication	Empathitic (positive) reaction (partner B)
<b>OBSERVATION</b>	Observing a concrete action which disturbs your well-being: <i>“Last week (clear timeframe), you didn’t clean away your dirty dishes three times (clear number of occasions); they stood there until the next morning, then I washed and put them away (clear consequence I had to take).”</i>	Observation and evaluation (often devaluation) are being mixed: <i>“Your behavior in the kitchen is always (several occasions are termed ‘always’) totally (exaggeration) messy!”</i> Or even worse: <i>„You’re totally messy and disgusting!”</i> (behavior is misinterpreted as character trait.)	Understanding and mirroring partner A’s observation: <i>„I see, you’ve found dirty dishes in the kitchen three times last week, and they were mine.”</i>
<b>EMOTION</b>	Stating your emotion connected to your observation: <i>“I’m frustrated about this ...”</i>	Interpretation, accusation, generalization, blaming: <i>“You’re provoking me. You don’t care at all about this dirt, about me and my feelings.”</i>	Understanding and mirroring partner A’s emotion(s): <i>“You’re frustrated / unhappy ...?”</i>
<b>NEED</b>	Observing and phrasing your need: <i>“... because I’d like to relax (need) at home. This isn’t possible for me if I find a dirty kitchen when arriving home.”</i>	Judging and denigrating your partner instead of expressing your need: <i>“You’re messy and gross!”</i>	Trying to understand A’s need(s): <i>“... because you want to relax, and you want my support in order to be able to do so?”</i>
<b>REQUEST</b>	Requesting a concrete action – and giving your partner the option of not accepting your request and trying to find a compromise instead: <i>“Could you please clean away your dishes right after your meal?”</i> <i>“If this is not possible for you, could we please try and find a solution / compromise that fulfills both our needs?”</i>	Demanding instead of requesting. If the demand is not fulfilled, you threaten you partner with a punishment: <i>“I want you to clean away your dishes after each meal, no matter what. Otherwise I’ll throw them into the rubbish bin, dirt and china and all of it!”</i> <i>“I’ll move out of here if you won’t learn to be more cleanly!”</i>	Trying to understand A’s request. If B feels unable to fulfill A’s request due to his/her own needs, B formulates his/her own observation, emotion, need and request and suggests a compromise: <i>“You’d like me to clean away my dishes immediately after each meal, right? So you’re able to relax in a clean house.”</i> (understanding) <i>“Unfortunately, I’m completely exhausted after my work, too, so I’d like to relax a little after my meal before cleaning the kitchen.”</i> (observation, emotion, need) <i>“How about I get the freedom to clear away my dishes at some point in the evening that suits me, promising I will do it before going to bed and not leaving it up to you?”</i> (suggested compromise)

## List of some typical universally human emotions:

Pleasant emotions		Unpleasant emotions	
• happy	• trusting	• sad	• distrustful
• giggly	• joyful	• nervous	• anxious
• thrilled	• relaxed	• stressed out	• fearful
• excited	• curious	• angry	• jealous
• peaceful	• adventurous	• troubled	• lonely
• appreciated	• precious	• restless	• hurt
• free	• full of energy	• neglected	• ignored
• calm	• safe and secure	• worthless	• grief-stricken
• cozy	• geborgen	• degraded	• cornered
• loved	• comforted	• overwhelmed	• uncomfortable

### Please note:

**1. Emotions, pleasant as well as unpleasant ones, are generally value-free!**

**2. Unpleasant feelings are not to be put equal with 'bad'!**

Many unpleasant feelings have a good reason and purpose. They often point us to a trouble-spot, a danger or something that needs to be helped or fixed.

For example:

- fear → protects us from danger or rash actions
- anger → points us to something which is not all right, or to an unfulfilled or ignored need
- mental overload → shows us that things are too much and need to be slowed down

## List of some typical universal needs:

- security
- respect
- intimacy
- freedom
- order
- love
- attention
- empathy
- autonomy
- creativity
- appreciation
- understanding
- communication
- justice
- self-development
- reassurance
- affection
- purpose
- faith
- peace