

Nonviolent Communication (NVC)

Pattern

A practical guide to clarifying needs and making clean requests without blame.

Quick Reference

Here's the pattern at a glance:

*When [something specific happens],
I feel [emotion word],
because I need [universal need].
Would you be willing to [specific, doable request]?*

Example: "When plans change at the last minute, I feel unsettled, because I need predictability. Would you be willing to give me more notice when possible?"

What is This?

Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is a way of expressing yourself that helps you say what you mean without accidentally blaming, criticizing, or shutting down the conversation. It was developed by psychologist Marshall Rosenberg.

The Big Idea

Most of us learned to communicate in ways that put people on the defensive. NVC gives you a different path - one that helps you be honest about what's going on for you while keeping the door open for connection.

The Four Parts

1. What Happened (Observation)

Start with the facts - what you actually saw or heard. Keep it neutral, like you're describing what a camera would capture.

Instead of: "You never listen to me"

Try: "When I was sharing about my day and you picked up your phone..."

The tricky part here is separating what happened from your story about what it means. Stick to the facts.

2. How You Feel (Feeling)

Name the emotion. Use actual feeling words - sad, anxious, frustrated, relieved, hurt - not thoughts disguised as feelings.

Instead of: "I feel like you don't care"

Try: "I feel hurt and disconnected..."

Watch out for "I feel like..." or "I feel that..." - these usually signal a thought or judgment, not a feeling.

3. What You Need (Need)

Connect your feeling to a need. These are universal things all humans need - connection, respect, autonomy, safety, understanding, rest, meaning.

Example: "...because I need to feel heard and connected with you."

4. What You're Asking For (Request)

Make a clear, specific ask. Say what you want, not what you don't want. And keep it optional - a request, not a demand.

Instead of: "Stop ignoring me"

Try: "Would you be willing to put your phone away when we're talking about something important?"

Make It Doable

Good requests are specific actions someone can actually take. "Be more considerate" is vague. "Give me a heads up if you're running late" is something someone can actually do.

Putting It Together

Here's how the full pattern sounds:

*When plans change at the last minute,
I feel unsettled,
because I need predictability and consideration.
Would you be willing to give me more notice when possible?*

It's a Framework, Not a Script

You don't have to say it exactly like this. The goal is making sure all four pieces are there - what happened, how you feel, what you need, and what you're asking for.

Try It Yourself

Think of a recent situation where you felt frustrated or hurt.

Create Your NVC Statement

Fill in the fields below to practice the pattern.

When this happens (what did you actually see or hear?):

I feel:

Because I need:

Would you be willing to:

A Few Things to Keep in Mind

NVC isn't about getting people to do what you want. It's about being honest while staying connected - even when you disagree.

This can be helpful for:

- Navigating conflict with a partner
- Setting boundaries with family
- Expressing needs at work
- Being kinder to yourself when things are hard

Go Easy on Yourself

This takes practice. Start by just noticing - when you're upset, try to identify what you're feeling and what need isn't being met. You don't have to say anything out loud at first.

Learn More

If you want to go deeper, check out Marshall Rosenberg's book *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*.