Principles and Practices of Nonviolent Communication

For access to more self-awareness and skillful connection with others, it is helpful to be able to distinguish between:

1. Observations and Evaluation
2. Feelings and Thoughts
3. Needs and Strategies
4. Requests and Demands

1. Observation versus Evaluation:
   Awareness of observable data vs judgment, diagnosis, moralistic interpretation right/wrong, good/bad

2. Feeling versus Thought:
   Emotion, body sensation vs beliefs, opinions, images, interpretations: “I feel that…” “I feel like you…,” “I feel rejected,” “You/I should…”
   e.g, excitement, joy, fear

3. Need versus Strategy:
   “Universal values” vs Ways of fulfilling needs
   Independent of externals
   An inner experience
   Characteristic of all humans
   Specific to people, places, things, time
   Specific actions, solutions, behaviors

4. Request versus Demand:
   Given freely/ Choice/ Power “with” Clear, precise, doable Present action Language: “Are you willing?” “Would you?” vs Coercion/Lack of choice Power “over” Vague wants Guilt, obligation, duty Use of fear, shame; have to, should

Two types of requests:
Connecting/Process requests:
   For reflection, “Would you tell me what you heard me say?”
   For response, “How do you feel hearing what I say?”
Action/Solution requests:
   “Would you be willing to…(strategy to meet my and/or your needs)?”

Based on the work of Marshall Rosenberg (www.cnvc.org) and Bay NVC (www.baynvc.org)
"Out beyond ideas of wrong doing and right doing, there is a field, I will meet you there" ~ Rumi

The 4 skills listed above are the essential components of Nonviolent Communication – a set of principles and practices created by Marshall Rosenberg during the 1960’s when he mediated between conflicting parties during the civil rights movement. These skills emphasize personal responsibility for our actions and the choices we can make to respond rather than react to others. This in turn supports relationships grounded in cooperation and collaboration.

**Basic assumptions:**

Feelings and needs are universal in nature; all human beings have them. Difficulties arise when we confuse the 4 components, and stop seeing the other person (or ourselves) with compassion and clarity. Just as leaves reach for the sun, everything that people do is reaching to meet universal, life-serving needs. No matter what a person is expressing, it is their attempt to enrich their life. All attacks, criticism, blaming are an individual’s tragic expression of their attempt to meet life-serving needs. What others do stimulates, but does not cause, our feelings. The source of our feelings is our internal experience related to our needs.

For example:

- When our needs are met/fulfilled we may feel: glad, peaceful, tender, rested, grateful, calm
- When our needs are not met we may feel: sad, afraid, angry, confused, tired, uneasy

**Our own natural compassion is energized, and our natural desire to contribute to another’s well being becomes strengthened:**

- When our own needs are seen empathically – by ourselves and others
- When we feel heard – by ourselves and others
- When we are able to hear/recognize the other’s needs empathically

**The inability to connect with ourselves or another’s needs is usually prevented by one of four things:**

- Lack of resources of time or energy
- Lack of self-awareness of one’s own feelings/needs
- Attachment to outcome
- A reactive or defensive mode