
A GUIDE TO NON VIOLENT COMMUNICATIONS

What is Non Violent Communication ?

“Non Violent Communication (NVC) is a sharing of ideas in a straight forward, open way that does not presume agreement and respects persons with responses that may represent an honest but different point of view. NVC focuses on ideas and content without denigrating those who may differ from you. NVC seeks common ground that will help all parties feel they have been heard and understood.

NVC is an essential factor in establishing and maintaining accurate and constructive exchange of ideas and intentions among people and their communities. A major cause of broken relationships among people and their communities (often leading to physical violence) can be traced to violent communication of one sort or another.

Expressing violence can often be communicated without realizing it as such in personal, political, ethnic and international relations. Recognizing this unintended implication is the first step in trying to avoid unfortunate occurrences in all human relationships. Once aware of these pitfalls, there are many ways to avoid them and achieve better relationships.

Of course, one can avoid making violent statements by not making any statements at all. But when an important principle is involved, being silent can be taken as implicit agreement. The challenge here is to make your views known in a non violent manner and which will hopefully invoke thoughtful and constructive exchange of ideas.

“Violent” as used in this discussion on Non Violent communication, is defined as any effort designed to impose a will or idea on another by means of actual (or perceived) power, by influence (or perceived threat) or by deceit, humiliation or other unfair practice.

Some suggestions on how to achieve Non Violent Communications are listed below. Please be patient with what may appear to be obvious - it is surprising how often even the best of us overlook them:

Attitude

- * Think the best about those with whom you are communicating. Every person has some admirable qualities and even the best of us may have some limitations.
- * Be aware of your own biases. If you consider someone warped in his beliefs, stop to think that you too may have some biases - one can be biased without even realizing it.
- * Violent communication can arise from one’s attitude toward one’s self or toward others. A strong ego, it can make one impatient with those who do not immediately agree. Such impatience can easily lead to strong statements with violent implications.

- * Remember, that the point of a conversation is to exchange ideas. A *discussion* is to explore the facts and established merits of the issues. An *argument* is to present reasons for supporting one side of an issue, A *debate* is a contest to see who can argue most logically and effectively. All can be conducted constructively and peacefully if addressing the issue and not to the participants.
- * Be honest - admit mistakes or being misinformed if true. A statement like “ I had not thought of that” or even “that is an interesting thought” does much to suppress a violent disagreement.

Civility

- * Civility means being constantly aware of others and weaving constraint, respect and consideration into the very fabric of your relationships. It is the basic mechanism of non- violent communication.
- * It has been said the “rudeness (or lack of civility) is a weak man’s imitation of strength”.

One should try to judge the impact of one’s statements on others. This can be done by considering what would be our reaction if someone else made the statement to (or about) us. Would it lead to an exchange of violent communication?

Civility requires one to ask three questions about one’s every action:

1. Do I really want to do or say this?
2. Will this hurt anyone?
3. Will I regret doing this later

Civility requires exercising restraint which avoids a lingering regret of having made an ill advised remark.

Background

Often violent reaction to disagreement can be avoided if one can understand where the one who disagrees comes from and why he might feel as he does. A little empathy can go a long way to soften the feeling of conflict. Given *his* experience, you might even have developed the same attitude yourself. At least, it presents an opening for discussing the issue in an objective, and therefore, non violent manner.

Competitiveness

When the point of a discussion or argument becomes competitive (i.e. to “win”), constructive interchange of ideas is lost. It evokes emotions which readily lead to violent communications.

- * Violent communications often results when the participants fail to distinguish between actual fact and opinion. An actual fact is not arguable, however, an opinion might be changed based on a constructive exchange of ideas.

False Assumptions

False assumptions can be a form of violent communication because they impose untrue and unfair attributes to the other parties. A false perception may lead to violent communication regarding ethnic, religious, political, economic or moral issues. It takes a very objective evaluation of one's own perceptions to avoid this pitfall.

Exclusiveness:

Any statement that appears to unfairly exclude a person or group from the general community is a kind of violent communication - especially if stated in generally perceived derogatory terms such as "you people" of a minority.

Acknowledging Deficiencies

- * When warranted, an honest acknowledgment of deficiency or error will defuse most violent communication. Admitting that one has made an error or "does not know" the pertinent piece of information will clear the air. When losing an argument, lose with grace; it will garner respect.
- * If you can, admit your own biases (and why) explain what you are doing to try and overcome them. Be considerate of how and why others also acquired them.

Responding to Criticism

When warranted, an honest acknowledgment of criticism will clear the air and defuse the possibility of violent communication. A constructive reply might be "thank you for sharing your thoughts with me (us) about this. It will help finding a better answer."

Gracious Acceptance:

Refusing to accept an honest compliment or reasonable gift can be perceived as a form of violent communication in that it may make you appear wanting to avoid a friendly relation or that you feel that the giver is patronizing you.

- * Always thank the person for his complement of gift - failure to do so will often be perceived as a violent communication. Usually a simple "thank you" is most appropriate.
- * When one is thanked for a compliment, gift or service given, accept graciously and avoid making self diminishing remarks - rather express ones pleasure inhavaing been able to do it.

Body language:

This is an important part of communication: A relaxed, attentive look says you are attuned to what another person is saying. Crossed arms can appear to express a defensive attitude.

- * Good eye contact, a slight tilt of the head and occasional affirmative expression will be taken as an expression of interest and attention. but not necessarily an indication of agreement

Raising one's voice is a strong form of violent communication and directly invites a violent response.

- * Expressions of rejection, disgust, disagreement (head shaking, eyes rolling, snorting, disdainful comments, laughing, wave-off of hand) discourages productive exchange and encourages a violent response.
- * Respect the other person's space - don't crowd him when addressing him. Don't touch the person unless he/she is a relative or close friend.

Lack of punctuality is a sign of low respect and therefore a form of violent communication

Conversation

- * Listen-- you might learn something. At least you will learn important things about the other person. Repeat your understanding of what they said. Ask questions but avoid those which imply his ignorance, bias, or lack of judgement - such as "do you *really* think ..."
- * To establish a clear understanding of the issue, ask leading phrases: "I think I hear you saying" ... "Is that what you meant?" ; "How do you see it?"
- * If a disagreement is obvious, first try to identify all points of agreement - this will encourage a feeling of a "safe or friendly" environment for further exchange of ideas.
- * Don't let thinking of what you will say next keep you from really understanding what is being said now,
- * Be brief: Do not continue to talk after you have made your point - don't interrupt while someone is responding to something you have just said.
- * Pause for a few seconds to take in what another person has said before responding.

Avoid asking personal questions which tend to invade privacy: "how much do you make?" "how much did it cost?"; "how old are you?"; "how much do you weigh?"

Do not dominate the conversation. Let others have their say - always trying to "top" what the other person has just said. is a kind of violence.

Expressions to Avoid

'Everybody knows...'
'It is obvious that ...'
'That's ridiculous !'
'You (those) people

"You must be kidding !"
"Nonsense !"
"WHAT!"
Avoid "...*BUT*..." " instead use "*AND*" as less negative

Non Violent Responses (if you disagree with a statement made)

“I see it a little differently ...”

“Some people say...”

“Another point of view is ...”

“ I like to believe that...”

“ That may often be true, but there are times...”

“ Another way of looking at it is ...”

- “ I used to feel that way, but now I ...”

...

“ Many folks feel that ..”

“ I tend to have a somewhat different opinion...”

Keystone Principle:

A most important guidelines in achieving a productive, non violent exchange of ideas is to carefully avoid using any judgemental terms or expressions in stating the situation. Rather, first clearly establish (and hopefully agree upon) the actual facts involved. If in stating the facts, judgemental terms are applied at the outset, there is little chance at having any constructive exchange. However, it is important to remember that stating how one honestly feels about the situation at the moment is a pertinent fact and if stated in a calm and measured manner, is quite appropriate. This aspect of non violent communications is probably one of the most difficult to handle but one which is vital to a successful non violent communication.

Conclusion

While the suggestions mentioned above may help one avoid making or responding constructively to a violent communication, one still has the moral obligation to witness to his committed values and not let silence or passive acceptance represent your approval of something really contrary to you beliefs. If integrity is important to you, do not hesitate to witness to your conviction and hopefully, you can find some of the suggestions made here useful.

References

Nonviolent Communication-A Language of Life, Marsalll B. Rosenberg, PhD
Choosing Civility, P.M. Forni

Note: All suggestions are welcome at “ nbtharp@yahoo.com”