

Video 3 transcript

What is Mindful Communication?

So, in the next couple of videos, we're going to be talking about something called Mindful Communication; why we might want to use this, what it actually is, how do we do this and what happens when we do.

My name is Joanna Taylor; and I'm a psychotherapist, a wellbeing coach and I've been working with Sarah to help bring you some new skills.

So, why do we need to use something called Mindful Communication? Well, "from the moment people begin talking about what they need, rather than what's wrong with one another, the possibility of finding ways to meet everybody's needs is greatly increased", says Marshall Rosenberg.

This sounds like a fairly gentle and compassionate way of communicating; when you've got people who've been a bit awkward or whatever then it's useful to be able to communicate better with them.

So, it was first developed in the 1960s by a gentleman called Marshall Rosenberg, who was a psychotherapist, and it's a process for improving the way we communicate with one another and communicate with ourselves so that we can resolve conflicts better and enrich our lives. Marshall called it 'Nonviolent Communication', or NVC.

It's concerned with two main questions:

- What's alive in us right now - what am I feeling?
- What would make life more wonderful for us?

Why is it important? Well, here's the answer; it reminds us that human beings are meant to relate to one another, because we're designed for connection. It helps us reframe how we express ourselves and hear other people. Instead of automatic reactions, our words become conscious responses based on our awareness of what we're perceiving, feeling, and needing.

We're led to express ourselves with honesty and clarity, while simultaneously paying others a respectful and empathic attention. In any exchange, we listen for our own deeper needs and those of others.

So, in other words, we're listening to ourself, we're listening to other people, we're paying attention to what we are needing and feeling, and we're also listening for what other people are needing and feeling. And this helps us with our communication.

So it has four main components:

- It asks us to observe things without making a judgment, without making assessments or making meanings out of things.
- What do we feel about this? What are we feeling about what we are noticing?

- What are we needing?
- And what would we request that we would do, or other people would do, in order to help us meet this need?

So Mindful Communication is encouraging us to reconnect with our own feelings and to recognise and observe without any judgments whatever it is that we're seeing hearing or touching. In other words, what is it that we are noticing that's affecting how we feel.

When we listen to other people, Mindful Communication can help us to differentiate between a sensory-based observation and an evaluation, judgment or mind read. What is it that we are seeing somebody else do, or hearing somebody else say, that we're making up a meaning about - and that is *our* meaning; it might not actually be the meaning.

So it's asking us to be very objective, and not subjective, because when we are subjective - when we're making evaluations, judgments or mind reads - then we're much more likely to be heard as being critical. So if I say that person was very rude, that's a moralistic judgment on my part - I'm judging them to be, or to have been, rude - but actually if I observe without an evaluation, just a sensory-based observation, it is much more likely to be heard as objective.

So if I say, well, why did I think they were rude? What was it they did that made me judge them as being rude? Well, actually, that person didn't respond to my question!

There may be a thousand reasons why that person didn't respond to my question, but I just judged them as being rude. But if I say, well, that person didn't respond to my question, then that leads me into a bit of curiosity about why might they not have responded to my question. So we can separate fact from interpretation.

I know... I'm sorry, I know you work in a museum, and interpretation is part of what you do! But when we're communicating with other people, it's a good idea to not interpret their words. So We're describing a specific observable behaviour, or something they did or said, something that happened.

What is it that we actually saw? We're not using generalisations, so we're not saying, "You're always late", or, "You never make a cup of tea", or making comparisons like, 'too much'. We are separating what we saw or heard from our interpretation of it, so instead of saying, "You're always late" to somebody, on this occasion we might notice "You arrived 15 minutes after the agreed meeting time", so that we're making this observation about what actually happened, rather than making a judgment about it.

Because our needs are there in the background, our feelings act as the barometer for whether or not those are being met, so if we feel wonderful about something then we can be pretty certain that our needs are being met. But if we feel really sad or depressed about something, then clearly there is a need that's not being met.

If we ask somebody else how they're feeling and they give us a thought - often this happens – "So, how are you, how do you feel about that?" "Well, I feel it's not fair", or "I feel it's very sad". That's not a feeling; that's not a real emotion, that's a thought about it. And when you listen for other people, what other people say, this happens a lot.

It doesn't help that in English, of course, the word 'feeling' can also refer to a thought. And our feelings may well be triggered by something that somebody else did or said, but they're not *caused* by the other person.

Other people can't make us feel or do anything, we do that for ourselves. And humans have about nine or ten actual needs... We all have the same needs - and how we meet those needs, those are strategies, and there's a billion different strategies - but there's only a few needs.

Our primary human need is for safety, so if safety is satisfied then we can go on to meet other needs. There was a gentleman called Maslow who did a wonderful model called the 'Hierarchy of Needs' and you can look that up if you wish.

But as social mammals, which humans are, connection is a biological imperative for us. But as modern humans, we're often incredibly bad at expressing what it is that we are feeling. As we said, we often give a thought instead, and then instead of saying what we need in a useful way, often we'll just make an unuseful expression of an unmet need.

If we shout at somebody else; if we refuse to speak to somebody else, that's an unuseful expression of an unmet need. So we can have this need for connection, we do have this need for connection, but often we can end up feeling disconnected, isolated from other people as well as from ourselves.

If we don't know how to express our needs it becomes very unlikely that they're going to be met, or at least much less likely, and if we're in conflict with somebody we might sometimes use language which inadvertently makes us more disconnected from other people - makes the conflict or misunderstanding far worse than it would have otherwise been.

And conflicts with others, they don't occur at the levels of needs, as we said; we've all got the same needs as human beings - but we've got lots and lots of different strategies, and so a conflict occurs at the level of the strategy, not at the level of the need.

If we understand what somebody else really needs, then we will understand it. So we can't be in conflict with them because we understand them. But if we don't express our needs, and we make passive aggressive demands and generalisations and moralistic judgements instead, they're all unuseful expressions of an unmet need and we're not expressing our need properly.

We're not expressing the feelings that we have behind the need. So when we're making a request for somebody else to help us meet our need, we need to use really clear language. So, what is it that we want them to do? Clear action language.

So we can use this formula and it can sound a bit formulaic obviously, but we can use our own language around it as long as we get all the elements into the into the sentence.

"I feel, [whatever the emotion is we're feeling], when I see [this happening] because I need [what it is that you need], so would you be willing to [concrete specific action]?"

So for example, "I feel quite sad when I see you using your phone in the meeting, because actually I need to feel that I'm of value to this company or to this museum. Would you be willing to put your phone down and pay attention to me please?"

So, in mindful communication, it doesn't matter what words other people use to express themselves, we can listen to them; listen for their observations, feelings, needs and requests, with compassion, with curiosity, without judgement, because if we become aware of *why* somebody else is behaving in the way that they're doing, we can help them to understand that they have been heard.

This is the other face of why we need to use Mindful Communication, so that we can, whatever other people are expressing, in whatever unuseful way that they're expressing it, we can feel, we can notice, we can listen - and we can understand whatever it is that's going on for them.

- So, if you reflect on what I've been talking about, how might it be useful in your work in the museum?
- If you think about your own communication style, how good are you at identifying your own feelings and needs, and communicating them to other people? Or do you use passive aggression? Or do you use, "I just think other people should know"?
- How and what would you like to change in order to develop your emotional agility?

So here are some resource guides for you. There's the book I mentioned, *Nonviolent Communication - a Language of Life'* by Marshall Rosenberg.

I hope you've enjoyed the video and I'll see you in the next one.