

Video 3 workbook

What is Mindful Communication?

This resource book supports Video 3 introducing mindful communication. It is part of a series of five videos created for Museum Development North. In this resource and the accompanying video you will learn about the principles behind mindful communication.

Nonviolent Communication (NVC) and Mindful Communication can be valuable tools for museum staff and volunteers. They can help you respond calmly and respectfully in emotionally charged situations.

Visitors often arrive with strong expectations and personal investment in their experience, and when things go wrong - such as a closed gallery, unexpected costs, or disagreement with an exhibition - frustration can arise quickly.

Mindful Communication helps you to listen with empathy, acknowledge visitors' feelings and respond without becoming defensive, while still maintaining clear boundaries and upholding the museum's values. This approach can reduce conflict, support positive visitor experiences, and help you feel more confident and resilient when dealing with challenging interactions.

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"[Mindful Communication] reminds us that humans are meant to relate to one another. It helps us reframe how we express ourselves and hear others. Instead of automatic reactions, our words become conscious responses based on our awareness of what we are perceiving, feeling and needing. We are led to express ourselves with honesty and clarity, whilst simultaneously paying others a respectful and empathic attention. In any exchange, we listen for our own deeper needs and those of others."

- Marshall Rosenberg

Mindful, or Non-Violent Communication (NVC) is a way of communicating first developed in the 1960s by Marshall Rosenberg as a way of improving connection and resolving conflicts.

It is concerned with two main questions:

- ☞ What is alive in us right now?*
- ☞ What would make life more wonderful for us?*

NVC is based on the premise that all judgements and unuseful reactions are the result of an unconscious unmet need. There are four basic components:

1. What **behaviour** are we observing in others (or doing ourselves) that is having a negative effect on us?
2. How do we **feel** about this?
3. What is our underlying **need** behind the feeling?
4. What **actions** could be done by ourself or other people in order to fulfil our underlying needs.

There are two parts to NVC:

1. Expressing honestly through the four components
2. Receiving empathically through the four components

According to Marshall Rosenberg, in his book *Non-Violent Communication*, NVC is the integration of:

- **Consciousness:** A set of principles that support living a life of compassion, collaboration, courage and authenticity.
- **Language:** Understanding how words contribute to connection or distance.
- **Communication:** Knowing how to ask for what we want, how to hear others even in disagreement, and how to move towards solutions that work for all.
- **Means of Influence:** Sharing power with others rather than using power over others.

Empathic, mindful listening allows us to assist an individual differentiate between moralistic judgements about themselves and others (“*My husband is messy...*”) and observable behaviours (“*My husband doesn’t fold all the napkins in the same way...*”), and also between the congruent expression of a feeling (“*I feel afraid when I think about that...*”) and statements that describe thoughts and interpretations (“*I felt betrayed...*”), assessments about themselves (“*I am useless at this...*”), or what they think others are thinking about them (“*I felt they were ignoring me*”).

The practice of NVC has been further developed in recent years by Oren Jay Sofer (*Say What You Mean*) and Rick Hanson (*Making Great Relationships*) amongst others.

According to Sofer there are three foundations for Mindful Communication:

- **Leading with Presence** Ensure you are fully present in the conversation
- **Intention:** Come from a place of curiosity and care
- **Attention:** Focus on what is important – what matters

Gentle, compassionate exploration can help us discover unhelpful judgements and assumptions, and help us to identify our underlying need, and what actions are required by ourselves and others in order to fulfil that need. Being fully present, with empathy, without judgement and without trying to “fix” things for others is vital.

One of the most important outcomes of using Mindful Communication is the development of our own self-awareness and self-compassion; we can use it in order to use the language of our mind in the service of growth and self-acceptance rather than allowing our learnings to be governed by shame, guilt and negative self-judgements.

Exercise: Come from curiosity and care - approach conversations with genuine interest

From Oren Jay Sofer

The more mutual understanding, the easier it is to work together and find creative solutions. Cultivate genuine curiosity about others' experiences, thoughts, and feelings. This intention to understand creates an atmosphere conducive to collaboration and problem-solving. To practice curiosity and care:

- Ask open-ended questions to learn more about others' perspectives
- Suspend judgment and really listen to understand, not to refute or argue
- Show empathy by trying to imagine how the other person feels
- Express appreciation for the other person's willingness to share

Remember that curiosity is not about agreeing with everything the other person says, but about creating a space where both parties feel heard and respected. This approach lays the groundwork for finding mutually beneficial solutions.

Think of a recent scenario where this approach might have been useful for you, or try it out next time you are in conversation with someone.

Three Keys to Authentic Presence

Three Keys to Authentic Presence

Self-Awareness	Taking responsibility for our own thoughts and actions
Self-Acceptance	Accepting who we really are, not who we believe we ought to be
Connection	Authentic Connection with Self and Others



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According to Oren Jay Sofer, in his book *Say What You Mean*, the first step in mastering the skill of mindful communication depends on our own ability to be fully present with another person.

In order to be fully present with another person in an empathic, non-judgemental and supportive space, we need first to learn to be present with ourselves... then we can learn to:

- Listen with the intention of understanding the other person's perception of their experience, and their underlying feelings and needs;
- Avoid interrupting the other person;
- Focus questions with the intention of deepening the other person's understanding of their experience;
- Avoid judging or interpreting the other person's experience based on your own experiences.
- Listen to yourself in order to hear your own feelings and needs, and avoid judging yourself in terms of being "right" or "wrong".

Exercise: Lead with presence: Be fully aware and engaged in the moment

From Oren Jay Sofer

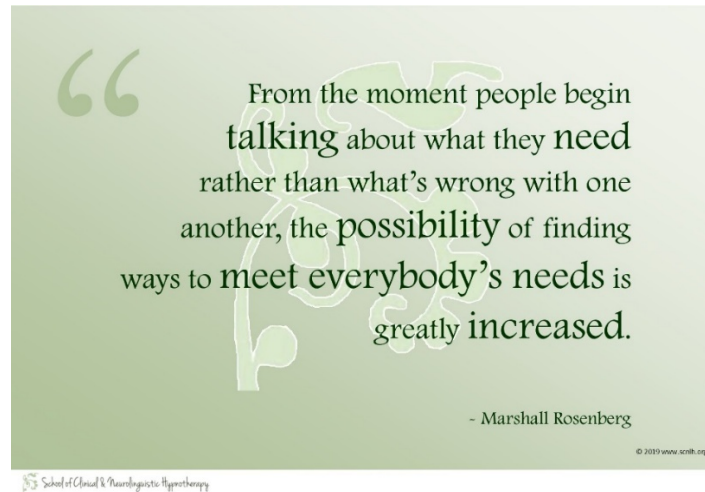
Presence lays the ground for connection; mindful presence is the foundation of effective communication. It involves being aware of what's happening in the present moment in a balanced and non-reactive way. When you are in conversation with someone, practise leading with presence and notice the difference in your level of connection with them

To cultivate presence:

- Ground your attention in your body using techniques like:
 - Feeling the sensation of gravity
 - Sensing your centreline or posture
 - Focusing on your breathing
 - Noticing touch points like your hands or feet
- Practice pausing regularly during conversations to:
 - Check in with your own state of mind and body
 - Re-centre your attention if you've become distracted
 - Create space for more thoughtful responses

By leading with presence, you create the conditions for genuine connection and understanding in your interactions.

The Components of Mindful Communication



The Mindful Communication (NVC) process has four components:

- **Observations:** The concrete actions we observe that affect our wellbeing
- **Feelings:** How we feel in relation to what we observe
- **Needs:** The needs, values, desires etc that create our feelings
- **Requests:** The concrete actions we request in order to enrich our lives

We use NVC in order to express ourselves honestly, and to receive empathically, through these four components.

In our modern society, our language has developed in ways which do not lead us to express ourselves in a compassionate way to each other, and to ourselves. We have learned to repress and conceal our feelings from ourselves and others, because to show emotion is perceived as somehow “wrong”; and therefore, because we do not show emotion to one another, our feelings are not validated, so we question our own feelings and experiences and do not give ourselves permission to feel whatever we are feeling.

We are also encouraged from a young age to look after others' needs at the expense of our own, and we therefore learn to ignore our own needs by “keeping the peace” for example, or “not being selfish”. Selfless devotion does indeed negate the self. There is a balance between Selfless and Selfish, and that is Self-Acceptance and Self-Care.

When we don't value our own needs, then others may not do so, either, which will lead us to feel angry. Until we can recognise and acknowledge our feelings, we cannot discover the unmet need that lies behind the feeling. It is therefore important for us to develop a vocabulary of feelings in order to identify and own our emotions, rather than using generalisations such as "good" or "bad".

Allowing ourselves to be vulnerable through expressing our feelings and needs can help improve connection with others and also improve the likelihood of resolving conflicts through increased compassion.

Observations

NVC encourages us to reconnect with our own feelings and to recognise and observe clearly, without judgement, whatever it is that we are seeing, hearing or touching that is affecting our sense of wellbeing.

Mindful listening can help us to differentiate between sensory-based observation and an evaluation, judgement or mind-read:

Observation + Judgement = Generalisation, Evaluation or Mind-Read; more likely to be heard as a criticism.

Observation – Judgement = Sensory based; more likely to be heard as objective.

Observation with Judgement	Observation Separate From Judgement
Jane is never any good with the computer.	This morning, Jane was unable to complete the task on the computer.
I think Peter is bullying Andrea.	I observed Peter raise his voice to Andrea in a conversation.
People in Audi cars always drive dangerously.	Yesterday I saw someone in an Audi car overtake another car on a blind bend.

Exercise: Make clear observations without judgement - separate facts from interpretations

From Oren Jay Sofer

What happens when we listen without judgement? Next time you are in a situation which could potentially cause conflict, try stating clearly what happened, without judgement or evaluation; this makes it easier for someone to hear us and to work toward a solution.

Distinguish observations from evaluations to create a shared understanding of events. To make clear observations:

- Describe specific, observable behaviours or events
- Avoid generalisations like "always" or "never"
- Use concrete language that could be captured on video
- Separate what you saw or heard from your interpretation of it

For example, instead of saying "You're always late," try "You arrived 15 minutes after the agreed meeting time." This approach reduces defensiveness and provides a more solid foundation for problem-solving.

Think about your own experiences at work where you might have applied a negative judgement to someone; how was it taken? Reflecting back on that experience, how might it have been different if you had used an observation instead?

Feelings

Feelings are our barometer for whether or not our needs are being met. We feel good when our needs are met – bad if they are not.

It is not possible for us to “make” anybody else feel anything. Our behaviours can act as a catalyst or a trigger for someone else, but they are never the cause. People feel as they do because of what is alive in them – their filters, values, memories, beliefs and so on. Other people do whatever they do – what we choose to do with that is ours.

It can be a profoundly liberating experience for us to realise not only that we are not responsible for the feelings of others, but also that we can give ourselves permission to feel however we feel, and to value our own needs. When we take responsibility for our own feelings and choices, we realise that when others blame, criticise or negate, they are telling their own story, not ours.

Feelings From Needs Not Being Met	Feelings From Needs Being Met
Afraid	Grateful
Ashamed	Joyful
Helpless	Blissful
Discouraged	Intrigued
Sad	Fulfilled

Feelings vs Thoughts, Mind Reads and Interpretations

It is important to distinguish between our feelings and our thoughts; what we think we are, or what we think others think of us. Words such as, *ignored, betrayed, intimidated, offended, rejected*, express our interpretation of others’ behaviour (thought), rather than how we feel, and are actually useless expressions of our own unmet needs. Our language can dissociate us from our feelings (“*That’s really sad*”) or project responsibility onto others (“*I feel [emotion] because [somebody else’s action].*”)

Accepting Responsibility for Feelings	Thoughts/Perceptions/Assessments
I feel content when I am cuddling my dogs.	You must think I’m stupid.
I feel lonely.	I feel neglected.
I am unhappy that my photograph was shared without my permission.	I am offended and I feel betrayed.

Allowing ourselves to be vulnerable by expressing our feelings can help to resolve conflict because it fosters connection and understanding, leading to compassion. It requires strength to be vulnerable; to be able to stand up with no defence mechanisms and be our authentic self.

Needs

People can often feel selfish or ashamed about having needs, but needs are a normal part of life; they are what govern our motivation. In order to grow and maintain our sense of wellbeing, it is important that we develop our ability to recognise our own needs, and when they are or are not being met.

We live dependently, needing many things for physical survival, and when we accept this universal fact then we are more accepting of ourselves and others. The first step in getting others to meet your needs better is to respect your needs yourself.

Exercise: Express feelings and needs authentically - connecting emotions to underlying values

From Oren Jay Sofer

The more we take responsibility for our feelings, connecting them to our needs rather than to others' actions, the easier it is for others to hear us.

Think about a forthcoming 'difficult' conversation, and notice how you feel when you connect your emotions to your underlying needs – what is important to you.

Communicating emotions clearly and linking them to the universal human needs or values they reflect means that others understand you better.

To express feelings and needs:

1. Identify and name your emotions accurately
2. Connect feelings to underlying needs or values
3. Take responsibility for your emotions rather than blaming others
4. Express vulnerability when appropriate to build trust

For example: "I feel frustrated because I really value efficiency, and I'm concerned about meeting our deadline." This approach helps others understand your perspective without feeling attacked or blamed.

In Video 4 and the accompanying workbook, we will explore more about how we can use Mindful Communication in your work, and what can happen when you do!