

# Video 4 workbook

## *How do we use Mindful Communication?*

This resource book supports video 4 on how we use mindful communication, part of a series of five videos created for Museum Development North. In it we explore how Mindful Communication can be applied in real interactions with visitors.

Mindful Communication invites us to slow down, notice our own reactions, and respond with intention rather than reacting automatically. By listening carefully, acknowledging emotions, and choosing our words thoughtfully, you can create moments of understanding even in challenging situations. This approach helps maintain a welcoming and respectful atmosphere in the museum or gallery, supports positive visitor experiences, and enables you to address concerns while staying grounded and professional.

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## Expressing Needs and Requests

When we do not know how to express our needs, it becomes less likely that they will be met. In order to communicate our needs effectively with others, we need to clarify what it is that we would like the other person to do, using positive, clear action language.

If we are in conflict, we might sometimes use language which inadvertently creates disconnection from others and makes the conflict or misunderstanding worse; the other person might use defence mechanisms such as attack or withdrawal. If they do accede to any requests we have made, they may do so out of guilt or shame, because it has been perceived as an “ought”.

Language such as demands involving manipulation or implied threat; generalisations (“*You always/never...*”); critical labelling, assessment and diagnosis (“*You’re selfish/stupid...*”); comparisons (“*You’re not as good as...*”); moralistic judgements (“*You are wrong to... /You ought to...*”) are all unuseful expressions of an unmet need.

In order to express our needs in NVC, we can use the following formula:

***“I feel [emotion] when [observation of action/event] because I need [need/value].  
Would you be willing to [concrete, specific action].”***

When we simply express or imply our feelings, it may not be clear to others what it is we are requesting them to do in order to meet our needs. Also, requests may sound like demands if they are not accompanied by our feelings and needs. It is therefore vital that we ensure that we have accurately communicated our message and the intention behind it; we want them to comply with our request only if they can do so willingly.

Requests are received as demands when others believe they could be blamed or punished if they do not comply. Whether something is a request or a demand depends on what happens if the request is not complied with; criticism, complaint or judgement indicates it was a demand – empathy towards the other person’s own needs means it was a request.

When making requests, the objective is to improve connection first by building a relationship based on trust, integrity and empathy that will ultimately fulfil everyone’s needs; requests should be ecological – the intention is not to change the other person, or their behaviour, in order to get our own way.

When making requests, we should ask ourselves:

- What do I want this person to do?
- What do I want this person’s reasons to be for doing it?

*“There is a world of difference between doing something for others in order to avoid guilt, and doing it out of a clear awareness of our own need to contribute to the happiness of other human beings... The recognition that we have chosen to use our power to serve life and have done so successfully brings us the genuine joy of celebrating ourselves in a way that approval from others can never offer.”*

- Marshall Rosenberg

## **Exercise: Focus on what matters - Identify and address the core issues**

**From Oren Jay Sofer**

What is the visitor in front of you really saying? The clearer we are about what we want and why, the more creative we can be about how to make it happen. Prioritise essential information in conversations to avoid getting sidetracked or overwhelmed. To focus on what matters:

- Identify the key observations, feelings, needs, and requests in a situation
- Separate facts from interpretations or judgments
- Look for the underlying needs or values behind stated positions
- Frame issues in terms of shared goals or mutual benefit

When discussing complex topics:

- Break down the conversation into manageable chunks
- Periodically summarise and check for understanding
- Redirect the conversation if it veers off course

By maintaining focus on core issues, you increase the likelihood of reaching meaningful resolutions and deepening understanding; thereby improving connection and reducing the risk of an argument or disagreement.

## **Exercise: Make specific, positive requests - ask for what you want clearly and flexibly**

**From Oren Jay Sofer**

When you are speaking with others about something you wish them to do, have ideas for strategies that meet as many needs as possible - this invites others to look for creative solutions. Formulate clear, actionable requests to move conversations forward constructively. Effective requests are:

1. Positive: State what you do want, not what you don't want
2. Specific: Ask for concrete, doable actions
3. Flexible: Open to negotiation and alternative solutions

When making requests:

- Check the other person's willingness: "Would you be willing to...?"
- Provide context for why it matters to you
- Be open to hearing "no" and exploring other options

For example: "Would you be willing to send me a quick text if you're running more than 10 minutes late? It would help me feel more relaxed and able to plan my time."

## **Exercise: Recognise and manage emotional activation to stay balanced in challenging conversations**

**From Oren Jay Sofer**

Paying attention to our own reactivity; noticing when we are triggered by something, and supporting the calm of deactivation, can help us make wiser choices about what to say and when. Developing emotional agility can help us to navigate difficult conversations more effectively.

Reflect on a recent difficult conversation that still makes you feel uncomfortable. When feelings arise, you can manage your emotional activation:

1. Recognise signs of activation in your body:
  - Increased heart rate or breathing
  - Muscle tension or clenched jaw
  - Feeling hot or flushed
2. Use grounding techniques to regain balance:
  - Take slow, deep breaths
  - Feel your feet on the ground
  - Focus on a neutral sensory experience
3. Support deactivation by:
  - Noticing moments of ease or calm during the conversation
  - Intentionally creating pauses or breaks when needed
  - Shifting attention to less charged aspects of the situation

Next time you are triggered by something, stay attuned to your nervous system - you can maintain presence and make more conscious choices about how to respond in challenging moments.

# Power and Conflict

Conflict can be described as a perceived difference of opinion *plus* an emotional charge. The most important thing to consider when working with conflict is in the connections that are made at a human level. It is not until connections have been forged between different sides that each will seek to understand what the other is feeling and needing. Needs cannot be met at the expense of others. Once the connection is made, the conflict will often resolve.

In conflict situations, both parties usually spend too much time trying to prove that they are right and the others are wrong, rather than paying attention to the feelings and needs of either side.

It is important to recognise the difference between needs and strategies:

- Needs contain no reference to anybody taking any particular action
- Strategies (requests, desires, solutions) refer to specific actions that people may take, eg “I need to get out of this job” is a strategy; “I need to feel my work is meaningful” is a need.

We must first learn to translate any communication into an expression of need, regardless of how it is expressed, and avoid any language that implies wrongness on either side.

Maintaining respect is key if we are to create an environment in which the different parties can connect, express their needs and understand one another, and then work together to create strategies to meet those needs.

## Use of Power

Much of conflict emerges from the difficulty that many people have with the use of power; punishment and reward interfere with people’s motivation. When someone fears punishment they are more likely to focus on consequences rather than on their own needs and values; fear of punishment diminishes goodwill and self-esteem.

It can be harder to empathise with those whom we perceive as possessing more power or status. However, the more we do empathise, the more we will connect with them and recognise the common needs and qualities that are shared. We can own, acknowledge and take responsibility for our own actions whilst being aware that our own wellbeing and that of others is interdependent.

### NVC Model for Conflict Resolution:

1. Examine what the conflict is *really* about – remember, “It’s not about the dishes...” Examine our own thought processes, beliefs around conflict, and projections.
2. Identify and express your own feelings and needs, if it is the right time to do so, for both of you.
3. Lead with presence; stay centred. Search for the real needs of the other person (ie not opinions, judgements, analysis, strategies).
4. Stay aware of your intentions. Come from a place of curiosity and care, with an intention to understand.
5. Focus on what is important – what matters to you both.
6. Provide as much empathy as is required to mutually hear one another’s needs.
7. Recognise when you are stuck – are you trapped in justification, or proving you are right and they are wrong?
8. Slow down, and make sure that each side recognises accurately the other’s needs by feeding back what has been understood.
9. Each propose strategies for resolving the conflict, framing them in positive action language (focusing on what is wanted, not what is not wanted).
10. Learn to speak with the language of responsibility:
  - Vulnerability – willingness to let myself be seen without my defence mechanisms.
  - Ownership – take accountability for my own needs and choices.
  - Communication – Listen, ask and express.
  - Acceptance – embrace reality and let go of what I can’t control.
  - Boundaries – good rules of acceptable behaviour; “no” is the foundation of trust.

### Exercise: Thoughts About Conflict

Thinking about a recent conflict you’ve had, reflect on what thoughts and feelings you had at the time about yourself, the other person and the situation. What beliefs about conflict do you have?

|                         | Self | Other | The Situation |
|-------------------------|------|-------|---------------|
| Thoughts                |      |       |               |
| Feelings                |      |       |               |
| Beliefs around Conflict |      |       |               |

## **Exercise: Navigate difficult conversations skilfully - prepare, stay grounded, and recover gracefully**

When in conflict, if we aim to listen to the other person first it increases the chances that they will be willing to listen to us. Approach challenging dialogues with intention and skill to increase the likelihood of positive outcomes. To navigate difficult conversations:

Prepare:

- Clarify your intentions and desired outcomes
- Anticipate potential challenges or triggers
- Practice self-empathy and ground yourself

During the conversation:

- Start by listening and seeking to understand
- Stay attuned to your own and the other's emotional state
- Use the tools of observation, feeling, need, and request
- Take breaks if needed to maintain presence and balance

Recover and learn:

- Reflect on what went well and what you could improve
- Be willing to revisit the conversation if needed
- Celebrate small successes and progress made

Reflect on a scenario where a difficult conversation ensued; how might it have been different using this technique? Remember that effective communication is a skill that develops over time with practice. Be patient with yourself and others as you work to implement these principles in your interactions.

# The Power of Presence

Listening is a skill we all possess; it is a natural, innate ability. However, as we grow and develop, we learn different, adapted ways of listening, which require effort:

- ☞ We learn to listen in order to respond – we are waiting for the other person to finish talking so we can speak.
- ☞ We learn to listen merely in order to validate what the other person is saying.
- ☞ We learn to listen in order to negate what the other person is saying – to make them wrong, so that we can be right.
- ☞ We also listen to ourselves in order to make moralistic judgements of whether we are “right” or “wrong”.

Listening in terms of moralistic judgements will often lead to misunderstandings, conflict and disagreements, and therefore needs are less likely to be met.

Empathic listening is an active, immediate, and continuous process of attention to the feelings and needs of the other person. Being empathetic reflects an attitude of profound interest and sensitive immersion in their world of meanings, feelings and needs; we are joining them in their model of the world.

‘Awareness is the primary foundation of all communication’, says Oren Jay Sofer. Without awareness, we might be thinking of something else or distracted in some way... Trying to talk with someone who is looking at their phone or watching TV can be a prime example of this!

The more we can hear others’ feelings as a reflection of their needs, the easier it is to understand them without hearing blame, needing to agree or feeling responsible for their emotions.

*“The hearing that is only in the ears is one thing. The hearing of the understanding is another. But the hearing of the spirit is not limited to any one faculty; to the ear, or to the mind. Hence it demands the emptiness of all the faculties. And when the faculties are empty, then the whole being listens. There is then a direct grasp of what is right there before you that can never be heard with the ear, or understood with the mind.”*

- Chuang-Tzu

# Expressing Gratitude

Compliments are often judgements; in Mindful Communication we can learn to offer appreciation as a celebration, rather than as a reward or for manipulation.

When we offer feedback in the following way, others can understand better how they are contributing towards enriching our life.

There are three components of appreciation:

1. The actions that have contributed to our wellbeing: *“This is what you did...”*
2. The particular needs of ours that have been fulfilled: *“This is the need of mine that was met...”*
3. The pleasurable feelings engendered by the fulfilment of those needs: *“This is what I feel...”*

Mindful Communication also encourages us to receive appreciation in the same way, “...with grace and without feelings of superiority or false humility.”

*“Take into our hearts the joyous reality that we can each enhance the quality of others’ lives... Become more aware of what others around you are doing that enriches your life, and hone your skills in expressing this appreciation.”*

- Marshall Rosenberg

Thinking about your work colleagues, where might you be able to express your appreciation in this way?

# Example Scenarios

**Scenario 1:** A gallery is closed because of a private function/leak/or other reason which was, or wasn't put on the website/social media and the visitors have travelled a long way to see this particular exhibition. They are very annoyed that they have had a wasted trip and what is the museum going to do about it?

## What's happening underneath?

Visitors may feel:

- Disappointed
- Angry
- Powerless
- Unimportant
- Financially strained

Their deeper needs:

- Respect for their time and money
  - Clear communication
  - Fairness
  - To feel valued
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## Step-by-Step Mindful Response

### 1. Stay Regulated First

Before responding:

- Take one breath.
  - Relax shoulders.
  - Remind yourself: *"They're upset about the situation, not about me."*
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## 2. Use NVC in Practice

### Observation (neutral, factual):

"I can see you've come specifically to see this exhibition, and today that gallery is closed due to [private event/leak/etc]."

### Feeling (empathy for them):

"I imagine that must be really frustrating, especially if you've travelled a long way."

### Need (what matters to them):

"It sounds like your time and effort getting here were important, and you were really looking forward to seeing it."

### Request / Solution:

"Let me see what I can do to help. We can offer [refund/complimentary return ticket/discount/free guide/alternative highlight tour]. Would that help?"

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## If They Escalate

Instead of defending the museum:

### Avoid:

- "It was on the website."
- "There's nothing we can do."
- "It's not my fault."

### Try:

"I hear how disappointing this is. I would feel frustrated too if I'd made a special journey. Let's look at what options we have to make this right."

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## Key Principle

### Empathy first. Policy second.

When people feel heard, they calm down. Often what they want most is acknowledgement, not compensation.

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**Scenario 2:** Part of the visitor experience is chargeable and some visitors have tagged onto the end of a group without paying. At the end of the tour they are asked to pay and they complain strongly that they weren't made aware of the cost. The cost is displayed in the entrance and on the website and the member of staff on duty says they did make it clear it was a chargeable extra. They were squeezed in at the last minute which was a favour to them as they hadn't paid in advance, but on the understanding they would pay afterwards. The charge was extremely small.

### **What's happening underneath?**

They may feel:

- Embarrassed
- Defensive
- Accused
- Caught out

Their deeper needs:

- Dignity
- Fairness
- Not feeling foolish
- Transparency

The staff member's needs:

- Fairness to paying guests
- Upholding museum policy
- Respect

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### **Step-by-Step NVC Response**

#### **1. Stay Neutral**

Avoid moral language like:

- "You should have known."
- "Everyone else paid."
- "It's only peanuts."

## 2. Use NVC

### Observation (neutral, no blame):

“You joined the guided section at the end of the group, and that part carries a small additional charge.”

### Feeling (acknowledge theirs):

“It sounds like you’re upset and maybe surprised about being asked to pay.”

### Need (what matters to them):

“It’s important to feel clear about costs and not caught off guard.”

### Request / Resolution:

“The charge is £X, and it covers the guide’s time. Would you be happy to settle that now?”

## If They Push Back Strongly

Instead of arguing:

“I understand you may not remember the cost being mentioned. From our side, we try to be clear because we want it to feel fair for everyone, especially those who booked and paid in advance.”

Then offer options:

- “If you’d prefer, I can ask my supervisor to speak with you.”
- “We can waive it this once, but normally this is chargeable.”
- “Would you like to check the information displayed at the entrance with me?”

## Important Mindful Communication Principles Here

### 1. Separate the Person from the Behaviour

They are not “cheapskates.”

They are people who feel uncomfortable about paying.

### 2. Protect Dignity

Public embarrassment escalates conflict.

Speak quietly and respectfully.

### 3. Avoid Winning

The goal is resolution, not proving you’re right.

### Emotional De-Escalation Phrases Staff Can Use

- “I can see this is frustrating.”
- “Thank you for explaining how you see it.”
- “Let’s see what we can do.”
- “I appreciate you bringing this up.”
- “We want your visit to be a positive experience.”

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### When to Offer Compensation vs Hold Firm

| Situation                               | Likely Best Approach           |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Museum error / unclear communication    | Offer goodwill gesture         |
| Clear signage & clear explanation given | Calmly hold boundary           |
| Visitor travelled far                   | Offer return incentive         |
| Small charge but big escalation         | Weigh reputational cost vs fee |

- Sometimes waiving a small fee protects goodwill.
- Sometimes holding the boundary protects fairness and staff morale.

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### What NVC Does in Both Scenarios

- Reduces defensiveness
- Preserves dignity
- Protects the institution
- Builds trust
- Keeps staff regulated

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### Final Thought for Museum Staff

In heritage and cultural spaces, visitors often come with **high emotional investment**. They’re not just buying a ticket - they’re buying meaning, memory, identity or nostalgia. When that expectation is disrupted, emotions rise quickly. The role of mindful communication is not to absorb abuse – it is to:

- Stay grounded
- Listen deeply
- Name feelings

- Clarify needs
- Offer fair solutions

That balance protects both **visitor experience** and **staff wellbeing**.

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**Scenario 3: Some visitors are unhappy that the art gallery is opening a new exhibition for LGBTQ+ History Month or Black History Month. They are expressing their thoughts on this loudly to staff within the gallery space.**

Visitors may say things like:

- “Why are you pushing this agenda?”
- “This isn’t what museums should be about.”
- “Why are you celebrating this?”
- “This is political.”

They may also speak loudly in a way that disrupts the gallery environment.

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### **What Might Be Happening Underneath**

Even if the views expressed are uncomfortable, the underlying feelings may be:

- Confusion
- Threat to personal beliefs
- Feeling excluded
- Frustration
- Loss of familiarity

Their deeper needs might include:

- Being heard
- Respect
- Clarity
- Belonging

Meanwhile the museum’s needs include:

- Inclusion
- Respectful environment
- Protection of visitors and staff
- Upholding institutional values

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### Step 1: Regulate Yourself

Before responding, staff should pause and ground themselves.

Internal reminder:

“My role is to keep the space respectful and safe for everyone.”

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### Step 2: Acknowledge Without Agreeing

Using NVC:

#### Observation

“I can hear that you have strong feelings about this exhibition.”

#### Feeling (reflect theirs)

“It sounds like you’re frustrated or uncomfortable with the museum marking this month.”

#### Need

“People often want museums to reflect what feels meaningful or appropriate to them.”

#### Boundary / Request

“At the same time, we aim to keep the gallery a respectful space for everyone who is visiting today.”

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### Step 3: Offer Context Calmly

If appropriate:

“Museums often use events like LGBTQ+ History Month and Black History Month to highlight stories that have historically been underrepresented.”

Keep the tone **informational rather than defensive**.

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### Step 4: Redirect Behaviour if Necessary

If the visitors are being loud or disruptive:

“I’m happy to talk with you about your concerns, but I do need to ask that conversations stay respectful and at a quieter volume so that other visitors can enjoy the gallery.”

This is a **behavioural boundary, not a belief argument**.

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### Step 5: Offer Choice

Choice reduces confrontation.

“You’re welcome to continue exploring the exhibition, or if it’s not something you’d like to engage with, there are other galleries you might enjoy today.”

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### **If the Visitor Escalates**

- Avoid debate.
- Do not argue facts or morality.

Instead:

“I hear that this matters strongly to you. My role is to ensure the space remains respectful for everyone visiting.”

If necessary:

“If you’d like to discuss the museum’s programming further, I can direct you to our visitor services team [*or relevant role*] who handle feedback.”

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### **If Comments Become Offensive or Discriminatory**

A clearer boundary is needed.

“We want everyone to feel welcome here, so we don’t allow language that could make others feel uncomfortable or unsafe.”

Then redirect:

“If you’d like to continue your visit, I’d ask that the conversation remains respectful.”

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### **NVC Structure in Practice**

#### **Observation**

“I’m hearing that you’re unhappy about the exhibition.”

#### **Feeling**

“It sounds like this is frustrating for you.”

#### **Need**

“People often want cultural spaces to reflect their own expectations.”

#### **Boundary / Request**

“We do need to keep the gallery respectful for everyone.”

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### **Helpful De-Escalation Language**

- “Thank you for sharing your thoughts.”
- “I hear this matters to you.”

- “Museums often present a range of perspectives.”
  - “We aim to create a welcoming space for all visitors.”
  - “Let’s keep the space comfortable for everyone here.”
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### What Staff Should Avoid

- Debating politics
- Arguing about whether the visitor is “right”
- Shaming or criticising the visitor
- Ignoring disruptive behaviour

Instead: **acknowledge → explain → set boundary → redirect**

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### Why This Matters in Museum Spaces

Museums are not just information spaces — they are **shared public environments**.

Mindful communication helps staff:

- Maintain dignity for everyone involved
  - Prevent escalation
  - Protect the museum’s values
  - Keep galleries calm and welcoming
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### A Short Staff Training Reminder

Staff can remember three steps:

#### Hear → Acknowledge → Hold the Space

1. Hear the concern
2. Acknowledge emotion
3. Hold the boundary of respectful behaviour

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