

Nonviolent Communication in a Nutshell

1. Everything we think, say, and do is an attempt to meet a universal, human need.

We share the same human needs throughout space and time. People in China want respect, autonomy and connection just like people in Nigeria. The Aztecs and the Romans all wanted understanding, acceptance, support, just like we do.

Because our needs are universal throughout space and time, we can understand each other. We understand what it is like to want love, belonging, safety. We have compassion for our shared humanity.

One of the beauties of recognizing universal human needs is that they open up our capacity for mutual understanding and our options for collaboration.

2. Strategies are specific ways to meet our needs.

Strategies are **localized** in space and time and **idiosyncratic** to each of us. Safety is a need, \$60.000 net income a year a strategy to meet that need. A monastic for example *does* want safety -- to be protected from harm. \$60.000 net income a year doesn't mean much to them. Having shelter and being free from persecution does.

3. Conflicts arise at the level of strategies, not at the level of needs.

Conflict arises when we get só attached to our strategies, that we cannot think outside the box to support all needs. We get stuck in ***either/or***.

You want to participate in a coaching class, I want to have dinner together. When we are too attached to our strategies, we get stuck: either the class or having dinner together, or we each do our own thing.

When we see that the class might support your needs for meaning and self-worth, and having dinner might support my needs for closeness and community, we can collaborate. Maybe do the class together and stay home for dinner tomorrow. Or go for a walk in the morning, you do the class on your own and help me find someone else to have dinner with.

4. Some strategies are a tragic expression of unmet needs.

When we chose a strategy that meets the needs of one party and doesn't include the needs of other stakeholders, Nonviolent Communication calls those strategies "tragic expression of unmet needs".

Yelling, criticizing, blaming, demanding, judging, killing are all tragic expressions of unmet needs. The party that yells may meet their need for understanding and support. The party that is "forced" to listen may have *unmet* needs for respect or consideration.

Even if we suffer from a 'tragic expression of unmet needs', we can use empathy to understand and connect to the precious, human, universal needs underneath the strategy that doesn't work for us. When we are able to do that, we can help the other person find strategies that meet their needs *and* ours.

5. We might use protective force to protect our needs, when we perceive urgency and ignorance in others.

We use protective force when we think strategies are harmful to needs.

We scoop up a child running into the street to protect them from traffic. This may not meet *their* need for play. When we see our need for safety *and* the child's need for play, we can scoop up the kid and take them to the back yard to play.

Protective use of force is different from punitive use of force: it is not to punish, it is to serve as many needs as possible.

It is protective force when we move people out of harm. It becomes punitive when we tell them there is something wrong with them. It is protective when we explain the harm we feared. It is punitive when we ascribe our fears to their behavior.

Protective use of force honors the distinction between the person and their behavior: what someone does is *not who they are*.

Endnote

There is a lot more to Nonviolent Communication than I described in these two pages. Yet, I hope this helps. [Contact me](#), elly@ellyvanlaar.com if you want to learn more.