

# WHAT IS VIOLENT COMMUNICATION?

There are four forms of child abuse: physical, emotional, sexual, and neglect. Physical abuse is defined as the threat of or act of physical violence against the child by another person. Emotional abuse is coercive verbal and non-verbal behaviors such as insults or slamming doors that are not directed at the child's physical body but at his or her emotions and feelings of self-worth. Sexual abuse is forced or coerced sexual behavior imposed on the child by an older person. Neglect is the denial of basic human care that is required by the child in order to live a healthy life. Neglect can be emotional or physical. Abuse is marked by a power differential with the abuser in a superior position of power over the abused.

Taken from: Adult Survivors of Child Abuse by Tell, Pavkov, Hecker, and Fontaine in *Contemporary Family Therapy* (2006) 28:225–238.

From Thesaurus. Com

**Main Entry:** coercion

**Part of Speech:** *noun*

**Definition:** compulsion, pressure

**Synonyms:** browbeating, bullying, constraint, duress, force, intimidation, menace, menacing, persuasion, restraint, strong-arm tactic, threat, threatening, violence

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After reading and considering the above information, how can we define violent communication?

**Violent communication is communication that limits liberty, denies recognition of needs, diminishes the worth of a person, and/or blocks compassionate.**

Violent communication is often the result of using manipulative or coercive language that induces fear, guilt, shame, praise, blame, duty, obligation, punishment, and/or reward.

Violent communication happens in speaking and listening (and in thinking, through self-talk or imagined conversations).

Common ways that violent communication occurs are through:

- Moralistic judgments and evaluations of others
  - Typical examples include insulting, putting people down, labeling, criticizing, diagnosing, or seeing someone as “wrong.”
    - *My students are so lazy.*
    - *Mary understands the material. Why can't you?*
    - *I wish you people were more like my 12:30 class.*
    - *You're just working the system, trying to pass without doing the work.*
- Denial of responsibility for our own feelings, thoughts, and actions
  - Typical examples include blaming our feelings, thoughts, and actions on others, vague and impersonal forces, authority, policies, rules, regulations, social or gender roles, or uncontrollable impulses instead of our own choices and needs.
    - *I'm going to have to fail you because you missed too many days.*
    - *Look, it just wouldn't be right for me to change your grade.*
    - *I can't give you a make-up exam because it's not the course policy.*
    - *I hate failing students, but that's what teachers sometimes have to do.*

- Demands
  - Typical examples of demands include an implied or explicit threat of blame, punishment, or reward.
    - *If you don't turn your paper in on time, you'll fail.*
    - *If you're not here to learn, you should leave.*
    - *If you complete this assignment early, I'll give you five bonus points.*
  
- Blocking compassion
  - Typical examples revolve around intellectual understanding that leads to trying to “fix” a situation by providing feedback that advises, one ups, shuts down, sympathizes with, educates, consoles, tells a story, corrects, explains, or interrogates a person.
    - *How long have you been sick? Did you go to the doctor? When will you be back to class? Do you think you'll be able to take the exam on Friday?*
    - *Don't worry. You'll do just fine if you study.*
    - *It might be a good thing that you failed this class. Just think what you can learn the second time around.*
    - *How come you didn't talk to me before you missed the exam?*

If we speak violently to others, they may do what we want by our inducing fear, guilt, shame, praise, blame, duty, obligation, punishment, or reward. Although we can control others this way, some important questions to ask are:

- What are the costs in terms of the relationship between you and others if you communicate this way? (How good is your goodwill?)
- What will the person do if the punishment or reward is not there or you are not around to observe their behavior? What is the cost to your well-being by acting violently?
- Is controlling others using violent communication effective?
- Is it worth it to you?

# WHAT IS NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION?

Nonviolent communication (NVC) is a communication process developed by Marshall Rosenberg, Ph.D., and is sometimes referred to as “compassionate communication.”

**Nonviolent communication is communication that maximizes liberty, enhances understanding of the relationship between feelings and needs, promotes equality, and creates compassion.**

NVC involves understanding that our feelings are a result of our basic human needs being met or unmet. When our needs are met, we feel “positive” emotions, such as joy, delight, confidence, inspiration, etc. When our needs are unmet, we feel “negative” emotions, such as annoyance, tension, fatigue, yearning, etc.

Basic human needs are similar to those in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs: physical well-being, connection, honesty, play, peace, autonomy, meaning, etc. They are basic human needs that we all share as opposed to specific actions we would like others to take (e.g., I need you to understand the material.)

NVC proposes that a basic human need is to contribute to our own and others’ well-being.

Using NVC increases the likelihood of mutual giving and receiving because it helps us recognize and foster the joy we feel when we meet our basic human need of contributing to our own and others’ well-being.

What is your most basic human need behind the practice of teaching?

The most essential way that NVC occurs is through expressing the link between a person’s feelings and needs or our own feelings and needs, thus, we could say:

Are you feeling \_\_\_\_\_ because you need \_\_\_\_\_?  
I am feeling \_\_\_\_\_ because I need \_\_\_\_\_.

We can also understand ourselves better and work through our emotional experiences more effectively by asking ourselves, “Am I feeling \_\_\_\_\_ because I need \_\_\_\_\_?”

I believe two things are important to note:

1. Anger is a feeling usually associated with violent communication, like blaming the other person (see “What Is Violent Communication?”). Underlying the anger are usually other feelings such as sadness, disappointment, regret, and frustration. Focusing on these feelings may help identify the underlying needs more quickly.
2. “Feelings” such as threatened, stupid, pretty, ridiculous, generous, betrayed, and industrious are actually intellectual evaluations (see “What Is Violent Communication?”) instead of feelings. NVC works best when you are discussing feelings instead of evaluations.

Once everyone’s needs are identified, the problem-solving can begin. Similar to interest-based bargaining, problem-solving with everyone’s needs on the table can result in win-win solutions that both you and your students are *willing* to implement because it will benefit you both.

My main needs when teaching:

To continually improve my practices of nonviolence.

To help the students accomplish the learning objectives.

To ensure the work of teaching and learning is done joyfully and willingly.

As part of setting up an NVC classroom, I had to change and still am

- self and my orientation to the world in general and teaching
- the way I communicate
- my course policies
- my teaching practices
- how much I communicate with students
- my creativity
- meditative and other practices to rid myself of malice in my heart

Biggest changes

Self grading

-Midterm and final self-eval reports

-Rigor

All A's?

Anyone ever fail themselves?

Retakes?

Grades inflated? Sometimes

Grades deflated? Sometimes

Grapple with big questions like:

Whose standards really matter?

How do we really know when we know something?

What do grades really mean?

What is the relationship between performance and learning?

Which means more and to whom?

Can we really grade learning?

How do I get students to willingly buy-in to learning the material?

Reconceptualizing "problem students" and "problem classes" to opportunities to be creative

--very very difficult for me

A class revolted

Sometimes individual students revolt

Students miss class

Students don't always turning in their work

Their work consistently differs from my expectations

Student sleep in class, text messages, uses laptop for facebook, etc.

Students dislike assignment

-get in touch with my core needs and devise creative, nonviolent solutions.

Time consuming and exhausting!!!

## Benefits:

I've been surprised and delighted by the students' engagement.

- extra assignments/responses to my questions via email and extra work
- meet and talk
- work independently and form small groups, solicit others outside of class to learn with them
- suggest additional things they'd like to learn about
- they share materials they are familiar with that relate to class or that I might enjoy
- willingly apply what they are learning outside of class
- keep their books, buy books for others
- bring others to class
- talk about learning about themselves as well as course content
- openly talk about liking class, missing it, enjoying it, etc.

I assume the best of my students and the learning environment is more positive and constructive.

- I enjoy the freedom I have to comment on their work without creating defensiveness
- Use positive action language to show what they could do instead of what they didn't do
- Easier to discuss work or behavior that disappoints or worries me because I tie it to my own needs
- I teach students how to communicate this way and they have been more appreciative of each other's contributions to class
- Students experience less anxiety and depression and more connection with others and meaning in life and joy out of learning
- Students transform with shiny-eyed tales of experiences they've had outside of class
- The students openly express gratitude to me for the work I do. They express their appreciation for the contributions I have made to their lives or helped them make to their own lives.