What is the best way to collaborate with people in a difficult situation; as a parent; as a professional, as a friend? When it comes to the business of helping others, there is no effective communication without collaboration. A common definition of the term “collaboration” is to work together toward a common goal or set of goals. One theory of collaboration is called Nonviolent Communication. In order to understand the theory of Nonviolent Communication, this discussion will first look at what the theory is and how it is practiced, why it is important, and examples on how it can be used.

According to the Center for Nonviolent Communication,

“Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is based on the principles of nonviolence-- the natural state of compassion when no violence is present in the heart…NVC begins by assuming that we are all compassionate by nature and that violent strategies—whether verbal or physical—are learned behaviors taught and supported by the prevailing culture. NVC also assumes that we all share the same, basic human needs, and that each of our actions are a strategy to meet one or more of these needs” (CNVC, 2011).

Yet another name for NVC is [*Giraffe*](http://en.nvcwiki.com/index.php?title=Giraffe&action=edit&redlink=1)*Language* - we use “giraffe” as a symbol for the most positive, idealistic communication model, and “[jackal](http://en.nvcwiki.com/index.php?title=Jackal&action=edit&redlink=1)” (or in some areas of the world “wolf” or “snake”) as a symbol for the kind of communication that is lacking compassion, or can be taken offensively.

In class, we used the term “whole messages” to represent NVC. Regardless of the term used, the principles are the same. The principles are to observe, think, feel, and express. While learning about these principles, we were given scenarios in which we had to convey frustration and discomfort in a nonviolent, nonintrusive way. For example, one scenario we had was how to address your roommate not helping with the dishes. When day you decide to speak to the person they walk through the door, slam it, and go straight their room. The first step was to state an observation that is a *pinpointed behavior*. A proper observatory statement would be, “I noticed you went straight to your room when you came home. It also sounded like the door had slammed. Second, we had to state a thought about possible reasons why that might have occurred. At this point, you’d say something such as, “I think you’ve been working a lot at school and your job, especially with the increase in hours and midterms coming up.” Third, nonjudgmental, personal feelings were expressed. Here we’d mention the stress, “I feel like with our busy schedules, the dishes have not been getting done and we are running out of utensils to use.” Finally, we had to make a request of some sort to address the observation, thought, or feelings. For this, I will address the dishes, “Next time we are both free, I’d like to sit down and talk about sharing the dishwashing chores. Then we can both eat!” At this point I would laugh lightly to end it on a positive note. (Rosenberg, 2010).

NVC is important because it helps us when we are involved in communication which is difficult and potentially conflictive. It also allows us to be more receptive to the feelings and viewpoints of those we communicate with. My “family cohort” and I have utilized NVC during our time together in and outside of class. As part of our class role plays, we had to create a “family”. The “family” that my group created had potential to be very controversial and we were constantly discussing what parts of the “family”-structure concerned us and how to approach it in a nonviolent manner. When we heard each other’s statements, we would work together to paraphrase, in the most nonviolent way, each and every input that we had during our discussions. Without NVC, my group may never have accepted the “family” that we created and found a way around our insecurities on the subject.

NVC is a very important theory of collaboration because, in order to effectively collaborate with anyone, you need to approach them without any form of tense behavior. I have been practicing NVC for 5 years now and will continue for the rest of my life. Whether it be with family, friends, or in a professional atmosphere, there is no situation NVC cannot be used.

References

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