



Dance Your Way to Empathic Dialogue: Nonviolent Communication by Gina Lawrie

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Empathic dialogue with ourselves is the basis for the quality of dialogue that we long for with others, whether family, friends, lovers or colleagues. Nonviolent Communication (NVC) guides us to connecting with our hearts as the basis for heart connection with others.

This workshop was designed for people to try out some of the basics of NVC using The NVC Dance Floors – an approach to teaching and learning developed by Gina Lawrie and Bridget Belgrave and used around the world.

The NVC Dance Floors are spatial maps providing an integrated kinaesthetic, visual and auditory approach to learning NVC. The Dance Floors are made up of large cards that place the NVC processes on the floor in various layouts called 'dances'. Each card represents a step in the dance of communication. People learning NVC stand up and 'dance' through the steps in role play, often with coaching from a trainer, or support from another participant. Gina and Bridget have developed seven dances, each of which is designed to help people develop awareness and skills in a particular area of NVC. Some of the dances are for dialogue with another person involving both inner and outer processes and some focus purely on our inner process.

The Anger/Guilt/Shame/Depression Dance

Marshall Rosenberg (who originated NVC) speaks powerfully about the life-alienated ways of thinking that are the cause of anger. NVC teaches people to become aware of this thinking, and transform the anger by recognising and respecting the unmet needs underlying this kind of thinking.

"Blaming and punishing others are superficial expressions of anger. If we wish to fully express anger, the first step is to divorce the other person from any responsibility for our anger. Instead we shine the light of consciousness on our own feelings and needs. By expressing our needs, we are far more likely to get them met than by our judging, blaming or punishing others."

Marshall Rosenberg in 'Nonviolent Communication – A Language of Life', Puddledancer Press 2003. ISBN:10892005034



The Anger/Guilt/Shame/Depression Dance that explores this process guides people through the following steps:

- Feeling the anger or the guilt and the associated sensations in the body.
- Listening to what we're telling ourselves that is causing our anger/guilt, e.g. 'He's so selfish and lazy,' or 'I'm useless at this and should be more careful'. It is not what the other person did that makes us angry although that may be the trigger. Rather it is the way we judge, label and blame the other that causes and fuels our anger. This is a critical step and the Anger/Guilt/Shame/Depression Dance Floor encourages people to fully connect with their judging and blaming and "enjoy the jackal show"!
- Identifying the needs not being met, e.g. for consideration, for recognition of our contribution. Taking time to come into full awareness of just how much this need matters to us in this situation.
- As we sit with this awareness, the feeling usually starts to transform e.g. to sadness. Taking time to allow this process and connect fully with the transformed feeling.
- With this awareness, we are reconnected to life and can identify some actions that might meet the previously unmet need. This forms the next step of getting clear what our request might be.

Now we are ready to dialogue with another in a way that is much more likely to achieve empathic connection and lead to everyone's needs being fulfilled.

Note: While I have presented these steps in this order for ease of following the process, it is important to point out that the NVC Dances are not linear processes. We will often find something is stimulated by standing on one step which takes us back to a previous step or on to another. This is the subtlety and aliveness of the dance.

In the workshop we also worked with The Self Empathy Dance. This 'Dance' guides a person through a deep inner process, in relation to something that is painful, or something that is joyful.

Whether in pain or joy, we often think in ways that cut us off from the fullness of our experience. This habit also leads to a distortion in our response, that is less linked to our needs and therefore less satisfying and energizing. The Self Empathy Dance helps us shift this kind of thinking and instead directly connect and dialogue empathically with our feelings and needs. It also supports creativity in seeking many ways to meet our needs, and creates focus as to what step to take next. This inner movement, from feeling to need to action that will fulfill the need, is as health giving as it is simple and profound.