

## 21st CENTURY PERSPECTIVES

by Lynn Stadler



### The I-Thou of Nonviolent Communication

About 15 years ago a co-worker mentioned Nonviolent Communication (NVC). He was leading NVC groups for prison inmates in Northern California. A few years later “NVC” popped up again. My friend, Rilyn, who was then pregnant with her first child, began NVC training in San Luis Obispo, California. She and her husband now have two sons who are being raised in an NVC household. In the past year or so, the parents of three child clients have initiated conversations with me about NVC and quizzed me a bit on my understanding of its underlying concepts.

I haven’t done any NVC training yet, but I did go to a one-day workshop in Santa Barbara awhile back, and last September I signed my daughter up for a preschool that touted an educational philosophy based on “Compassionate Communication” – what I suspected was a close cousin of NVC. The preschool handbook says, “With a deep emphasis on respect, we help each child build a solid emotional core. Through compassionate communication, we help children develop an awareness of their impact on each other and the earth.”

Well, I certainly liked the sound of that, not only as a mother, but also as a Gestalt therapist. The more I learn about NVC, the more I think it’s also a close cousin of the Oaklander Model, especially the “I-Thou” way of relating to children, parents, well actually, everyone.

A few weeks ago, my dear friend, Tory Blue, became a certified NVC trainer. She’s living up in Santa Cruz, California, but she took her final NVC examination here in Santa Barbara, and spent a few nights with my three-year-old daughter and me. Tory had lots to say about my parenting style and how it looked a whole lot like NVC. I just couldn’t resist the chance to interview Tory, and learn more about how NVC, Gestalt therapy, and the Oaklander Model intersect. The following experts from my email dialogue with Tory, as well as some text from the NVC website, will help us start to connect those dots.

#### Q. What is Nonviolent Communication?

A. Tory suggested that I check out the NVC website for this one. Here’s what I found: “Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is a process developed by [Marshall Rosenberg](#) and others which people use to communicate with greater compassion and clarity. It focuses on two things: honest self-expression — exposing what matters to oneself in a way that’s likely to inspire compassion in others, and empathy — listening with deep compassion. Formal NVC self-expression includes four elements: observations (distinguished from interpretations/evaluations), feelings (emotions separate from thoughts), needs (deep motives) and requests (clear, present, doable and without demand).

Those who use nonviolent communication (also called “compassionate communication”) describe all actions as motivated by an attempt to meet human needs. However, in meeting those needs, they seek to avoid the use of coercion (e.g., inducing fear, guilt, shame, praise, blame, duty, obligation, punishment, reward). The goal of NVC is to create a situation in which everyone’s needs are understood. The assumption is that, from this state of mutual understanding, new strategies will flow that meet some needs of everyone. A key principle of nonviolent communication that supports this is the capacity to express oneself without the use of good/bad, right/wrong judgment, hence the emphasis on expressing feelings and needs, instead of criticisms or judgments.”

#### Q. What’s the history of NVC?

A. Again from the NVC website . . . “Growing up in an inner-city Detroit neighborhood Marshall Rosenberg was confronted daily with various forms of violence. Wanting to learn what he could about the causes of violence and what could be done to reduce violence he chose to study clinical psychology and received his Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from the University of Wisconsin.

In addition to his studies in Clinical Psychology, he also studied comparative religions, the lives of peacemakers throughout history, and other research to identify what human learning contributes to violence and what human learning contributes to

compassionate giving and receiving. From his research, he identified thinking, language, communication skills and means of influence that reduced violence and supported compassionate relationships. He integrated what he learned into a process he named Nonviolent Communication.

Offering Nonviolent Communication to others and seeing how it empowered people to create change nonviolently and its ability to contribute to compassionate ways of living, he founded the Center for Nonviolent Communication. Marshall and members of the Center for Nonviolent Communication organized and trained teams of people in the following countries to apply Nonviolent Communication where it can best support compassionate ways of resolving conflicts and fulfilling the needs of all.

The Center for Nonviolent Communication now has more than 200 people certified to offer the training in these countries. In addition to people developing the process with the help of certified trainers, thousands of people around the world receive it from friends and family members whose lives have been enriched by it fulfilling the adage, "Each one teach one."

**Q. How does NVC differ from Compassionate Communication?**

**A. Tory:** Compassionate Communication is just another way to describe NVC -- some people prefer the term Compassionate Communications because it sounds more positive; some people initially think "nonviolent" communication is meant to help people who struggle with violent behavior, rather than us 'regular' people. Most people don't view themselves as communicating violently.

**Q. How can people get trained in NVC?**

**A. Tory:** There is no formalized or standard program for training, and a variety of options are available in hundreds of cities worldwide. For an introduction to NVC, six-week classes or weekend workshops are offered in most major and mid-sized cities. People tend to form their own practice groups after the introductory classes are completed, then follow up with intermediate or ongoing classes and study groups. In addition to workshops and classes, 9-day intensives are offered in many places as well.

**Q. What about self-led NVC training?**

**A. Tory:** A whole library of books, videotapes, CDs and audiotapes can be found via the [www.cnvc.org](http://www.cnvc.org) bookstore.

To really immerse yourself in NVC, I recommend watching videotapes or DVDs and listening to audiotapes or CDs rather than reading books about NVC. Learning NVC is like learning a new language, so I liken it to reading about Spanish rather than listening to it.

My favorite videotape is "The Basics of Nonviolent Communication: A one-day workshop with Marshall Rosenberg". It's actually two videotapes for a total of three hours, and this gives a clear and thorough presentation of NVC.

Marshall's book "Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life" is an important reference guide, but not really the best way to get an introduction to NVC.

**Q. What about NVC for kids, parents and teachers?**

**A. Tory:** There are lots of books and media for teaching NVC to children. I've posted a list below. A really cool thing to check out is the Family Week NVC Family Camp offered for eight days on a 26-acre farm on Vashon Island in Washington State July 29 - August 5, 2009. For details [click here](#).

**BOOKS**

Here are some books for parenting – my personal favorite is "**Ginny Be a Good Frog**" – a book for children.

**Growing Up in Trust** by Justine Mol

**Respectful Parents, Respectful Kids: 7 Keys to turn family conflict into family co-operation** by Sura Hart and Victoria Kindle Hodson

**Raising Children Compassionately: Parenting the Nonviolent Communication Way** by Marshall Rosenberg

**Ginny Be a Good Frog** by Vilma Costetti

**The Compassionate Classroom - Relationship Based Teaching and Learning** by Sura Hart and Victoria Kindle Hodson

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Like Tory said, NVC is a language, and we can't do it justice in one sitting, but I'm committed to learning more, and I want to thank Tory for helping to pave the way. Please send me your comments and questions about NVC so we can stay in dialogue!

I welcome your 21st Century Perspectives at [lynnstadler@verizon.net](mailto:lynnstadler@verizon.net)

*Lynn Stadler is a Marriage Family Therapist in private practice. She is a Founding Member of VSOF, and offers trainings on Gestalt Therapy with Children, Adolescents & Adults.*