

WORKBOOK



MINDFULNESS IN CONVERSATION

CREATING THE LIFE AND
WORLD YOU ENVISION ONE
CONVERSATION AT A TIME



John Kinyon



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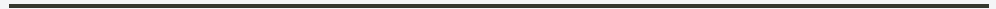
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Part One

Foundations of Empathic Communication from a Mindfulness Perspective



What is Empathic Connection

Neuroscience tells us that our brains are wired for care and connection. Physicists and mystics tell us that the entire Universe is connected, everything connected to everything else. **We have the experience of separateness, yet it seems that we are also inextricably interrelated and interdependent.** So, my understanding of reality then is that we are already and always connected in profound and mysterious ways. I define empathic connection as the experience of that connectedness that underlies our uniqueness and differences. It is the felt experience of our commonality and sameness, our shared humanity of being part of the one family of life on Earth. I also define this connection as being moved to contribute to one another's well-being out of the joy of compassionate giving and receiving, acting from the heart, ultimately from the energy of care and love. With the experience of empathic connection comes happiness and well-being, resilience with life's challenges and stresses, and the ability to create the life we want and the world we envision.

What I am offering you in this Workbook is how to do this one conversation at a time with yourself and others.

What Is Mindfulness in Conversation?

In recent years, mindfulness and meditation have become much more widely known in mainstream culture. They have gone from being seen as esoteric Eastern mysticism to a core component of health and wellness, backed now by a large amount of science demonstrating its many benefits — mental, emotional, and physical. The way I would define mindfulness in brief is to say that it is the intentional training and development of our capacity to be consciously aware of our experience, to focus and sustain attention, and ultimately, to shift from identification with our mind and body to knowing ourselves as the awareness of these. The deepest experience of mindfulness, as I know it, is the ability to relax our normal sense of being a separate self and experience connection beyond duality. This experience could be described as oneness, unity, or wholeness. In some traditions, it is called non-duality.

Mindfulness is something that can be brought into conversation through how we speak and listen with ourselves and others. Mindful conversation is being consciously aware of our perceptions, thoughts, and feelings as we speak and hear, aware of the sounds of words, the seeing of images, and the movement of body language. Speaking and listening in this way takes us into this mystery of connection and the universal beyond but including the personal. From this connection, I have found, we access a more expansive realm of well-being, resilience, creativity, and possibility for responding to the challenges we face.

Components of Empathic Communication

At the core of my approach are four components of communication that come out of an international body of work called Nonviolent Communication (NVC), developed by Marshall Rosenberg, Ph.D., starting around 50 years ago. It is now being learned and practiced in over 70 countries around the world. The four communication components are Observation, Feeling, Need, and Request (OFNR). They were developed as a methodology for experiencing empathic connection and compassion, and returning to it when it's lost. Ultimately, as I see them, the components are for healing and restoring wholeness and health with all the ways we are alienated and fragmented in ourselves, in society, and as part of the living systems of the planet.

The components are often taught in terms of language distinctions and skills. My work is about how these OFNR components are four dimensions of mindfulness in the context of conversation. For me, mindfulness is primary. The resonant language and skills are learned and practiced from the experience of mindfulness, and flow from it.

How To Use This Workbook

This Workbook provides an introduction to a mindfulness approach to the OFNR communication components applied to and practiced in conversation. In addition to describing different levels of the components, I give you exercises and practices that you can do with yourself and others, and apply them to what is important and meaningful in your life. I encourage you to ask others to practice with you. There is so much we can learn with and from each other in conversation, and so much nourishment in the connection.

As the Workbook progresses, the descriptions of the components and the exercises and practices become increasingly deep, rich, and layered. If you start to feel overwhelmed or lost, just slow down. The essence of the work is actually simplicity. It's more about a shift in realizing who or what you are than struggling with the complexity of language and wording. The simplicity is in knowing yourself as awareness. The difficulty is in how different this perspective is from how we normally relate to our experience. So, go slow. Take your time. Allow the depth and the shift in perspective to sink in. And most of all, enjoy. What I love about this work is that it allows deep connection in conversation to flow with ease and effortlessness in a way that is enriching, nourishing, fulfilling, and empowering. I also love how it allows a depth and sweetness of compassion to come to us that holds even the most difficult of experiences.

Introduction to the Components of Empathic Communication: OFNR



Intro to ONFR

The Observation, Feeling, Need, Request (OFNR) communication components are a structure to help people experience empathic connection and communicate in a way that supports and deepens connection. They also give the ability to come back to connection when triggered into disconnection, suffering, and conflict. Each component is a doorway to connection through awareness and language. More deeply, the OFNR components are different ways of expanding our experience of who we are beyond identification with our mind, body, and actions. When we know ourselves as awareness, we experience more connection with ourselves, others, and life. We can also use language in ways that resonate with, amplify, and support awareness and connection. We can use OFNR language to talk about our own experience and to connect with others' experience.

Also, as we strengthen awareness, a more conscious and connected relationship between our conscious and unconscious mind can develop. There are dimensions of subconscious, superconscious, and many other parts and aspects of us that operate in the unconscious. We can interact with and ask our unconscious for things and receive responses and information. A resource I have found extremely valuable on this is the internationally recognized work of Internal Family Systems (IFS). I will include this rapport building with the unconscious mind as we move through the Workbook.

In this next section of the Workbook, although I frame the components in the context of mindfulness, I primarily focus on the language distinctions. To introduce you to the components, I first want you to feel some grounding in what may seem more familiar to you.

Starting in Chapter Three of the Workbook, I go into much more depth with the mindfulness dimensions of the components and how they are used in conversation.

Below I give an overview of each of the components and then take you through different experiences with them. But first, given how centrally important the concept of empathic connection is to this work, I'm curious what empathic connection means to you so far, and the benefits you currently see to being able to experience it?

Take a few minutes to reflect on this. I recommend journaling.

EXERCISE



I will be giving you exercises to do for each component. I encourage you to also ask others to practice with you. It's a great way to learn and experience a deepening of connection in your relationships!

-John

Observation vs. Evaluation/Judgement

The communication component of Observation is about being aware of and communicating about the activity and content of our mind. I define mind as the experience our brain creates of the world through sense perceptions — sight, sound, smell, touch, taste — and also through generating inner thoughts — words and images/pictures in the mind. When we use words to talk about our experience, some words describe what we are perceiving and other words evaluate or morally judge what we perceive. I define evaluation generally as whether something is or is not in harmony with what we value or care about, i.e., whether we like or dislike something, agree or disagree, etc. I define moral judgment as a form of evaluation based in moral beliefs — what we believe is right and wrong, good and bad, and what we should or shouldn't, can't or must do. So, the component of Observation is about being mindful of our sense perceptions and thoughts, and of the words we are using to talk about these with ourselves and others, whether our words describe or evaluate/judge.

Here is an exercise you can do to strengthen your ability to observe separate from thinking

Find a quiet place to sit or be where you won't be disturbed for about 5–10 minutes. Take a deep breath and relax your body, letting go tension on the outbreath.

EXERCISE

Find something pleasing to you to look at — a flower, your favorite coffee mug, a painting. It can be helpful to pick something that doesn't have writing on it.

For three minutes (or more if you'd like) just look at that object, being aware of your sense perception of seeing.

EXERCISE



While you are looking and seeing the object, automatic thinking will happen — words and images/pictures in the mind spontaneously talking to yourself, the voice in the head, and there are many voices. Thinking can take the form of labeling, evaluating, judging, story telling, talking to yourself in any way about the past, present, or future. We usually don't even notice that we've started thinking. We go unconscious. We “fall asleep” in a sense. The practice is to “wake up” to noticing the thinking and come back to being aware of being aware, and being aware of the thinking.

EXERCISE



As you come back to awareness, acknowledge that a conversation was happening in your mind. Something was being communicated. Something important enough to be spoken was being spoken. Speaking was happening, and listening was happening.

If you'd like, and if it feels true to you, express to yourself in your own way some form of warmth and appreciation that something important was being communicated in you, that you are open, that you care.

EXERCISE



Go back to consciously seeing and looking at the object. Continue waking up to observing your automatic thinking until your meditation time is up.

Debrief. Were you able to experience the difference between being aware and thinking? How was it to relate to your thinking as a conversation, and to bringing warmth, care, and understanding to it? Take a moment to reflect on this. I recommend journaling.

Repeat this exercise as often as would benefit you. You can also use sounds or any other focus of perception to practice with.

EXERCISE



Observation vs. Evaluation/Judgement

When we talk to ourselves or others about what we are observing, we easily can mix up describing what we observe with evaluating and judging, without even realizing it. For example, someone you care about comes into the room. You see them move around the room, doing different things, and they don't come talk to you or say hello. If I asked you what happened, instead of describing it in the way I just did, you more likely would say something like, "They came into the room and ignored me. They were being rude. That's what happened."

Can you see a difference between how I described what happened and what I imagined you might say?

Here is another exercise you can do to strengthen your ability to observe separate from thinking.

Find a quiet place to sit or be where you won't be disturbed for about 5–10 minutes. Take a deep breath and relax your body, letting go tension on the out breath.

EXERCISE

Have something to write on and write with, if you would like.

Take a deep breath and relax your body, letting go tension.

Ask your unconscious mind if there is a situation you'd like to work with for this exercise, a situation in which someone said or did something that you didn't like.

Take something small, that you don't have much charge around.

EXERCISE



As a memory appears in you, observe in your mind what happened as vividly as you can. Visualize what you saw and heard, as many details as you can remember — the surroundings, how you and the other were dressed, the other person's body language, face, tone of voice, etc.

Were there experiences of touch, taste, smell?

Do this for a few breaths or more.

EXERCISE



Notice how it is for you to just observe in this way.

Focus just on observing in your mind what it was the person said or did that you didn't like. Try to see what was done and hear what was said without talking to yourself about it or putting any words to the experience. Just look and listen. Do this for a few breaths or more.

EXERCISE



Ask yourself if there are words to describe the situation to yourself. You could do this silently or out loud. If so, begin intentionally talking to yourself, describing what happened. Allow the words to just flow into your mind as you observe them.

After you verbalize it to yourself, write it down as well if you have something to write with.

EXERCISE



Looking at what you said/wrote, are there any ways you could make it more descriptive, more about just seeing and hearing?

Notice if there are any ways you are evaluating what happened in terms of what you want, like, or value, or in terms of it being good or bad, right or wrong, in any way.

EXERCISE

With any evaluations and judgments that you have, you can talk about them as observations. Observing them in your mind and owning them as your thinking is observation. Describing it this way is different from talking about evaluations and judgments as objective truth and reality.

Debrief. Notice if you experience a difference when you are observing and describing versus evaluating or judging. What's your experience of connection in relation to doing this?

EXERCISE

Feeling vs. Thinking/ "Faux Feelings"

The communication component of Feeling is about being aware of and communicating about the inner sensations and emotional experience of our body. When talking about our feelings, some words describe our bodily experience, and some words we use for feelings are more about our thinking that evaluates or judges. These are sometimes called faux feelings, such as, "I feel manipulated, disrespected, controlled, judged, abandoned..." Sometimes our words for talking about feelings are actually thoughts that analyze a situation, create meanings and stories around what happened, and look for who's at fault and who to blame. We say, "I feel like..." and "I feel that ..." and follow with thoughts rather than feelings, such as, "I feel like you are not listening to me" or "I feel that she was being rude."

When we interpret and think about situations in these kinds of ways, in which there is an experience of some kind of threat or danger (even if only psychological), emotions of fear and anger and related emotions are activated by the more primitive parts of the brain responsible for the Fight-Flight-Freeze survival response. These powerful emotion systems and circuits in the brain and nervous system can easily overwhelm us and pull us into unconscious, automatic, and habitual reactivity. Both thinking and emotions mutually interact, reinforce, amplify each other, and can draw us into losing awareness. So, building our capacity and ability to be aware and present in our bodies, particularly when stronger, more instinctual impulses are activated, is very important to our well-being.

There is strong research evidence showing that accurately putting words to and naming our feelings calms and relaxes the nervous system and contributes to other psychological and physical benefits. You can get Feelings and Faux Feelings downloadable sheets on the last page of the workbook.

Here is an exercise you can do to strengthen your ability to feel your feelings and develop feeling language.

Find a quiet place to sit or be where you won't be disturbed for about 10–15 minutes, or more if you'd like.

Go to Feelings List, see Appendix

Take a deep breath and relax your body.

With your attention, scan through the different parts of your body, starting at your feet and going all the way up to your head. Feel whatever sensations you are able to feel as you do that. If you don't feel anything, that's ok. Just move your attention throughout your body.

EXERCISE



When you're done with the body scan, take another deep breath and relax your body, letting go tension on the outbreath.

With the Feelings List in front of you, slowly read each feeling word on the list (or whichever words you would like). As you read each word, pause for a moment, close your eyes, and listen for a response from your body to that word. The response could come verbally in your mind, or it could come as a body feeling.

Whatever response you get, see this as communication happening in your body that you are aware of, a conversation of speaking and listening at the feeling level.

EXERCISE



If you'd like, and if it feels true to you, express to yourself in your own way some form of warmth and appreciation towards this communication.

You may not be able to feel anything as you do this, and that's ok. Just keep slowly reading each word, pausing, and listening for a response.

After you've read through the words, again take a deep breath and relax. Scan through your body again and notice how you feel overall from doing the exercise.

EXERCISE

Debrief.

How was it to connect feeling words with body feeling? Could you experience being aware of body and feeling? How was it to express warmth and care?

Do this exercise as often as would be valuable to you. And of course feel free to experiment and vary the exercise in any ways you think would work better for you.

EXERCISE



Feeling vs. Thinking/ "Faux Feelings"

There is both feeling your feelings and putting words to the felt experience in ways that reflect what is happening in your body. We often mix up thoughts and feelings. We can observe thoughts our mind is generating, and we can focus on sensations and emotions in the body. We can also notice that how we think has a very strong influence on how we feel. If we judge someone to be rude, inconsiderate, and disrespectful then we are likely to feel upset and angry. If our mind gives other evaluations, meanings, and stories, and doesn't look for fault and blame, then we would feel differently.

This exercise is about moving attention from emotion to sensation, putting words to emotion and sensation, and feeling the experience of your feelings. The exercise is also about a conversation within you when you are intentionally using words to connect with your experience. It is listening to how your unconscious mind is generating experience and then putting words to that experience.

EXERCISE



Find a quiet place to sit or be where you won't be disturbed for about 10–15 minutes, or more if you'd like.

Have the Feeling List again in front of you. I again recommend that you have something to write on and write with.

Take a deep breath and relax your body.

Ask yourself for a situation in which someone said or did something that you didn't like. Take something relatively small.

EXERCISE

Start with intentionally expressing to yourself evaluation or judgment words about the situation, such as “He is such a...” or “I am too...”

Notice how your body responds to those words.

Ask yourself for some emotion words (such as anger, sadness, fear) that describe your feelings (use the Feeling List if that would be helpful).

Write down the emotion words.

With each emotion word that comes to you, close your eyes and with your attention scan through your body, noticing what physical sensations go with that emotion word and where they are in your body. Perhaps there are sensations in your stomach, neck, shoulders, or face. Is the sensation of pain, pressure, tingling, movement, or temperature?

EXERCISE



Focus attention on feeling the sensation(s) without putting any words to them for one full breath or more.

Ask your unconscious if there are words to put to the sensations. If so, consciously talk to yourself about the sensations you feel with words that come to you to describe the experience. Observe your words as you speak them. See if you can be aware of each word as it comes, and the spaces between the words. Continue to feel your body as the words come to describe the experience.

There might not be words that come to you, at least not right away. That's ok. You could say to yourself something like, "Well, I feel something in my stomach, and I don't know what words to put to it right now."

EXERCISE

If you would like, acknowledge that the emotions and sensations are communication from your unconscious mind and body, a conversation, and that you are aware of this and listening and caring.

When you're done going through the emotion words that came to you, scan through your body and notice how you feel overall from doing the exercise.

Debrief. How was the difference for you between thinking and feeling, and between using words and feeling your feelings? Could you experience a difference between emotions and sensations?

Do this exercise as often as would be valuable to you.

EXERCISE

Needs vs Wants/"Strategies"

The communication component of Need is about being aware of and communicating about the universal — the underlying commonality and sameness we share with each other as human beings, and with all of life. The language aspect of this component is a language of universal needs that connect us. All living beings, in every moment, are seeking to meet needs we all share at a basic level. There are specific wants and desires for certain "strategies" to meet our needs, like a particular house or car or person to be with, etc. The language of human needs is made up of formless qualities we all universally need to survive and thrive in the world, such as freedom, trust, safety, respect. Beyond words, this component for me is about life energy that animates us, and connecting our experience to a larger wholeness of the world.

A way to get to the universal level of needs is to start with asking yourself what you want in relation to a situation. As you ask this question of yourself, and listen for an answer, you can then start to ask yourself what is it you want and need that all people everywhere on the planet have the same want and need? If you have trouble getting to this level, you can repeatedly say to yourself something like, "Ok, if that happened [this thing you want], then what would that give me?" and do this until you get to the universal.

You can get a Needs sheet on the last page of the workbook.



Here's an exercise to help you strengthen your needs vocabulary and your felt, bodily connection with needs.

Find a quiet place to sit or be where you won't be disturbed for about 10–15 minutes, or more if you'd like.

With the Needs List in front of you, take a deep breath and relax.

Slowly read each Need word on the list (or whichever words on the list you would like).

As you read each word, pause for a moment, close your eyes, and feel if that need resonates in your body. Listen for a response from your body to that word. The response could come verbally, or it could come as a body feeling.

(You can get a Needs sheet on the Resource page at www.JohnKinyon.com)

EXERCISE



Acknowledge the response as a communication from your unconscious mind about something of importance and mattering.

You may not be able to feel anything as you do this, and that's ok. Just keep slowly reading, pausing, and listening for a response.

After you've read through the words, again take a deep breath and relax your body.

Debrief. How was it for you to connect with your body, feelings, and needs this way? What did you notice? Take a minute or two to reflect on this. I recommend journaling.

Do this exercise as often as would be valuable to you.

EXERCISE

Needs and Thoughts

It was the tremendous insight by NVC creator Marshall Rosenberg that we can see and hear every judgment as an expression of needs, and every thought or action as our best attempt in any moment to meet our needs. If I hear someone judge me as selfish, I can focus on hearing and connecting with the needs for caring and consideration behind that judgment, rather than react defensively to perceived criticism. To take a more challenging and difficult kind of example, I can experience compassion and connection towards someone who has different beliefs from me around hot button issues such as the environment, gun control, abortion, immigration, social equality, etc. by seeing those thoughts and behaviors as the best ways this person sees for meeting needs we all share for perhaps safety, security, and belonging.

Needs and Feelings — Levels of Responsibility and Empowerment

Marshall also made an amazing connection between feelings and needs. I like to think about this in terms of three levels of responsibility and empowerment for how we understand what causes our feelings. The most common level is to connect our feelings solely to being caused by external factors, especially the actions of other people. We think and talk in terms of, "I feel because you." For example, "I feel [angry] because you [said what you said to me]." The next level of perceived causation that takes greater responsibility and offers more empowerment is to think and talk in terms of, "I feel because I think." For example, "I feel [angry] because I think [that you talked to me disrespectfully]." Here I am acknowledging, to at least some degree, how my own thinking, the story I'm telling myself, is contributing to and causing my feelings. The third and deepest level of causation that takes even greater responsibility and offers even more empowerment is to think and talk in terms of, "I feel because I need." For example, "I feel [angry] because of needs for [respect and consideration]." Here I am essentially saying that my feelings are being caused by these needs that are alive in all of us. At this level there is pain, but not suffering, blame, or defensiveness. There is just the power and freedom of being focused on the deepest layer and source of our feelings — what we want, and want universally.

Find a quiet place to sit or be where you won't be disturbed for about 5–10 minutes, or more if you'd like.

Ask yourself for a situation in which someone said or did something you didn't like. Take something small.

Have the Feelings and Needs lists in front of you.

Take a deep breath and relax.

Focusing on the situation in your mind, find a feeling word that resonates for you right now on the Feelings List. See if you can feel the resonance in your body.

EXERCISE

Now, say out loud to yourself, “I feel [your feeling] because this person [what they said or did].” Notice how you experience saying it that way.

Say out loud to yourself, “I feel [your feeling] because I have the thought [your thinking about the person or situation].” Notice how you experience saying it that way.

Find a need word on the Needs List that resonates for you. See if you can feel the resonance in your body.

Now say out loud to yourself, “I feel [your feeling] because of the need for [your need]. This need is what is causing my feeling.”

Notice how it was for you to connect a feeling with a need, and to see the need as the cause of the feeling.

Repeat as desired with the same situation or a new situation.

EXERCISE



Needs and Energy

In addition to working with the language of needs, you can also focus your attention on sensing the energy and aliveness of your body. As you move from specific wants to universal needs you can combine this with focusing on the experience of energy in your body while you say the need words to yourself.

I have found this deepens and enhances the experience of connection, as well as inspiration for creative insights and solutions to whatever situation you're dealing with. More on this in later sections of the Workbook.

Requests vs. Demand

The communication component of Request is about creating new possibilities from conscious connection. When we are aware and in touch with needs, we can receive in a more powerful and creative way what emerges from our unconscious mind and from the situation to manifest those needs being met in some way. We come back to the question of what we want — specifically, tangibly, concretely. Is there a request of ourselves or another? And is it in any way a demand, which tends to create resistance and interfere with needs getting met? We can feel into that request and see if we are truly willing to do it or ask it. If not, we can stay with the inquiry until there is an authentic yes.

When we make a request of someone else, it is the same. We can check to see if they are truly willing, if they have an authentic yes to do it or not. When we make demands, we try to get people to do things out of fear, guilt, shame, obligation, duty, should, have to, etc. Ultimately, this component of Request is about being with ourselves and others in a flow of compassionate giving and receiving from the heart, so that we are motivated, moved, and inspired to act from the natural enjoyment of contributing to one another's well-being. As NVC creator Marshall Rosenberg would say, it is focusing attention on "making life more wonderful" for others and ourselves.



Find a quiet place to sit or be where you won't be disturbed for about 10–15 minutes, or more if you'd like.

Have the Needs List in front of you.

Take a deep breath and relax.

Find one need word that particularly resonates for you in this moment.

Close your eyes and for a few breaths or more silently repeat the need word to yourself multiple times as you focus attention and warm presence on your body, feeling your whole body.

If you'd like to try this, see if you can feel or sense on a deeper and subtler level the energy and aliveness animating your body (more on this in a later section). If you can, feel this energy for a few breaths or more.

EXERCISE



Ask yourself if you have a request of someone else or of yourself to do something to meet that need. It could be something very small.

Close your eyes and for a few breaths or more ask your unconscious mind for a request to meet that need. See if an image/picture comes into your mind, or perhaps some words. Try not to dismiss anything. Be open to whatever comes, even if it doesn't seem doable or possible at first. It is a communication from your unconscious, and you can honor it.

If you received something, see if it could be made more specific, concrete, tangible, action-oriented. What exactly would you like this person to do, what action would you like them to take, or words to say, if they are willing?

Close your eyes again and imagine asking this person if they would be willing to do this request, if they would like to do this for you. Imagine that they are happy to receive this request from you because they care about you and are happy to know how to give to you and would enjoy doing it.

EXERCISE

Close your eyes again and imagine that you ask your request and they say no in some way. Now, this is very important, imagine that you are happy to receive this honesty because you only want someone to say yes if they really want to do it, if it would make them happy to contribute to your happiness and well-being in this way. Then guess (empathize with) what need or needs might be keeping them from wanting to do this for you. Then see if a new request comes to you that might meet your need and theirs.

Debrief. Well, how was that? How was it to experience a request emerge from deep connection with a need? Were you able to make your request specific, action-oriented? How was it to ask and be received with a joyful yes? How was it to be grateful for and empathize with a no and search for a new request?

Take a minute or two to reflect on this.

I recommend journaling.

Do this exercise as often as would be valuable to you.

EXERCISE

To give you a deeper understanding of the OFNR components and a different kind of experience of them, I'll take you through a guided meditation of them.

Find a quiet place to sit or be where you won't be disturbed for about 10–15 minutes, or more if you'd like.

First ask your unconscious mind for a situation in your life that is currently alive for you, either something that you're feeling pleased about or something you are struggling with. Either way, pick something that has significance and meaning for you

EXERCISE

Observation. Invite a specific instance or interaction related to your situation to come to mind, something that happened at a particular place and time. Perhaps it was just you by yourself, or maybe you were with one or more others. Can you see the memory in your mind? First just look at what you see happening, without putting words to it. Just observe. See the body language of you and anyone else. Do you hear anything? Are words being spoken by you or others? Are there other sounds? Just hear and see. Don't worry about putting words to these experiences yet. Words, talking to yourself, may arise in your mind spontaneously and automatically. That's fine. Just notice and go back to observing this memory without words.

Now ask yourself if there are words to describe this situation. If so, consciously talk to yourself about what you are experiencing as you observe the memory. As you do this, notice if the words appearing in your mind describe what you are seeing and hearing, or are the words evaluating or judging? You may not have clarity yet about this. That's ok. Just be with the obscurity and notice the words you are speaking. Also notice if you are feeling more or less connection as you're talking.

EXERCISE



Feeling. Now shift focus to your body. Scan through your body with your attention and notice the sensations and emotions you feel. Don't yet try to put words to your body experience. Just feel your body, and feel what you feel without words. Words, talking to yourself, may arise in your mind spontaneously and automatically. That's fine. Just notice and go back to feeling your body and sensations without words.

Ok, now ask yourself for feeling words and consciously talk to yourself about what you are feeling in your body as you observe the memory. As you intentionally talk to yourself notice if the words appearing in your mind describe the inner sensations and emotions you are feeling, or are the words evaluating, judging, analyzing, blaming? You may not have clarity yet on this. That's ok. Just be with the unclarity and notice the words you are speaking. Again notice if you are feeling more or less connection as you're talking. As you say the words to yourself about your feelings, continue to focus attention into your body, feeling your feelings.

EXERCISE



Need. Now shift focus to asking yourself about universal needs related to this situation. Using the information of your thoughts and feelings, you could start by asking yourself what you want. Then continue to ask what you want in relation to this situation that is what we all universally want as human beings everywhere on the planet. If you experience difficulty with this, you could say to yourself something like, "Ok, if that happened [what you want], then what would that give me?" As the need words come to you, feel your body. Slowly repeat the need words, feeling your body. Notice if you are feeling connection as you are doing this.

Request. After you have connected with some needs, ask yourself if there is a request of yourself or others for a specific thing or action. Wait for a response to emerge from your unconscious mind. If words or an image come, play with it in your mind to see if it can be made more concrete, tangible, and specific. What is the observable action you or another could do? Check with yourself if you actually feel the willingness to ask for it. Is there a true yes in you? If something in your body does not say yes, then stay with the inquiry until you find something your whole mind and body say yes to.

See Appendix for a story example of the OFNR components.

EXERCISE





PART TWO

OFNR Mindfulness in Conversation



CHAPTER THREE

ONFR Mindfulness in Conversation

So far we have been looking at the OFNR components primarily in terms of the language distinctions. In the next sections, I go more deeply into the mindfulness dimensions and how they are used in conversation. The essence of this greater depth is a shift in who or what we know ourselves to be. The components can be used as a way to move from identifying with mind, body, and actions to knowing ourselves as the awareness of these, and to bring this perspective into our daily, moment-to-moment conversations with ourselves and others.

For most of us, when we are talking, the conversation unfolds automatically and habitually without us being self-aware and present. We in a sense go “unconscious” in the waking state. Neuroscience has identified a network in the brain that is responsible for this automatic thinking. It’s called the Default Mode Network (DMN). The DMN comes online whenever we are not consciously focusing our attention and concentration on a task. It generates thoughts in ways that range from positive to extremely negative, harsh, and cruel. For most people, the DMN produces a mild to moderate negative tone or valence to our experience. The reason for this seems to be evolutionary. For this network of the brain, it is better to focus on what is potentially threatening and dangerous, and to survive, rather than to feel good. Training ourselves to develop beyond our evolutionary inheritance and become more aware, present and conscious in conversation is a practice that takes a great deal of dedication, but well worth it!

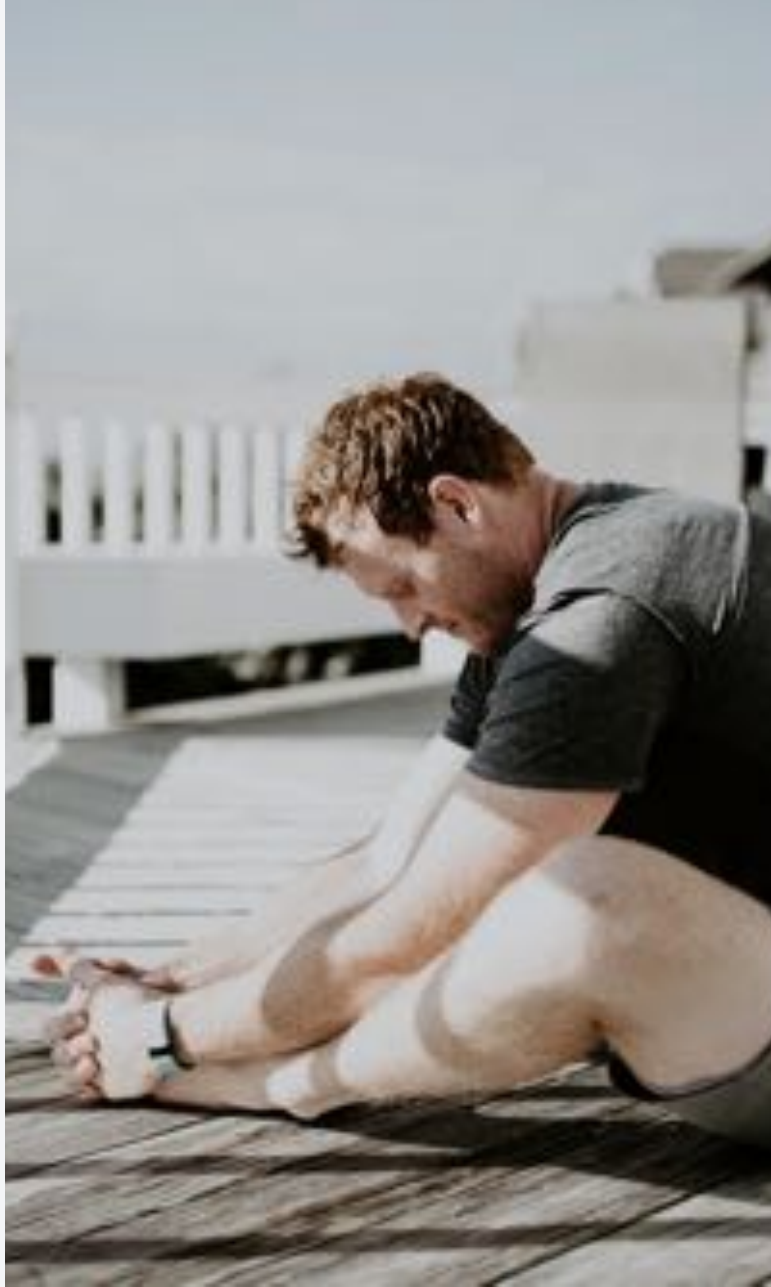
In a related way, there are powerful forces involved in how our bodies react to perceived danger and threat. At these times, our brain and nervous system are flooded with primal, instinctual, and emotional responses and we easily lose self-awareness. We are triggered into the Fight-Flight-Freeze survival system in the evolutionary oldest parts of the brain.

ONFR Mindfulness in Conversation

It is a profound and radical shift in perspective, therefore, to experience the voice in our head and the sense of our body, which we normally think of as who we are to instead be what happens in us. If I look closely, I see that the perceiving and thinking of my mind and the feelings and actions of my body actually happen in me, awareness, rather than the other way around, me happening in my mind and body. The perspective I'm offering you is that who we are is actually the awareness of our thinking, feeling, and actions. By holding this perspective, I have found that we can experience a deeper sense of connection and resilience to challenges and adversity, greater happiness and well-being, and the ability to create and find solutions from the field of potential and possibility.

If you're ready, buckle up, and let's take a deeper dive into these aspects of mindfulness with each component and give you a chance to practice in conversation with yourself and others. You will also see how the language of the components can flow naturally and effortlessly from the mindfulness of them.

Mindful Observation in Conversation: Awareness of Mind



Mindful Observation in Conversation: Awareness of Mind

Mindful observation in conversation is the shift from identifying with the content and activity of our mind to knowing ourselves as the awareness of our mind as we are speaking and listening. A central aspect of this mindful approach to conversation is how we relate to the voice of “me, myself, and I.” Paying close attention, it can be recognized that when “I” am talking, there are the words being spoken, and there is the one who is aware of them. From this perspective, the words being spoken, in my head or out loud, are being generated by my mind. I am the one who is aware of the words. I am not the words or the speaker of the words. It is a shift to knowing ourselves to be the aware space in which all content of the mind’s activity comes and goes, including the voice in the head that says, “This is me. Here I am. I am the one who is talking.”

Everything we perceive, internal and external, including the voice that we normally identify with as ourselves talking, simply appears and disappears in the same space of awareness. We easily “go unconscious” as we merge with and identify with the mind’s activity. What I’m offering is a way to practice “waking up” through conversation to observing the mind that does the perceiving, thinking, talking and imagining. We are the awareness that observes this, and paradoxically, the moment this insight becomes thought and language it is the activity of the mind to be observed by the awareness that we are.

There is now a significant amount of neuroscience research that supports the observation that our thoughts and actions get initiated before awareness becomes aware of them, and that different parts of our brain can think and act independently of each other. So, perceiving and thinking happens, and it appears in us and to us as awareness. Perceiving with our senses and thinking thoughts is what the mind does, just as it is what the heart does to pump blood through our body. These words I’m writing to you now are being generated by my mind, and I am watching them as they appear on the page.

Mindful Observation in Conversation: Awareness of Mind

As strange and paradoxical as this perspective may seem, as I observe my mind in this way, something seems to change in a very beneficial way. The brain seems to function better. There seems to be more coherence, stability, and clarity, a greater sense of peace and well-being. I have the sensation that my brain waves and neural activity literally shift into a more relaxed, effective, and connected state. These kinds of brain changes are what neuro scientists are finding as they study meditators.

The approach I'm offering is radically different from how most of us learned to relate to ourselves and the world. It can be difficult to see and may feel uncomfortable, but with practice it gets more and more familiar and easier. I invite you to experiment with this shift of perspective in your own experience, finding for yourself what seems true and accurate. As you experiment, see what brings a greater sense of freedom, ease, well-being, and connection.

Now let's do some mindful observation in conversation. First, pay attention to your sense perceptions — sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste — and to your thinking while you are speaking and listening. What I have found to be an incredibly valuable insight about thinking is that we can relate to the words and images/pictures in our mind as things we can perceive as sights and sounds, just like we perceive sights and sounds from the environment. We actually hear ourselves talking, and we see the images and pictures in our mind of past memories, present visualizations, and imaginations of different futures. So, you can observe hearing the sounds of the words and seeing images/pictures in your mind.



As part of hearing the sounds of the words, observe the qualities of sound — tone, rhythm, volume, intensity, etc., just as you might listen to the sounds of rain outside your window. If you are speaking, you can hear each word that you speak as it arises in the space of awareness. You can also observe the spaces between the words. The practice is to observe your mind word by word, image by image, whether the mind is speaking out loud or internally “in your head.” If you are listening to another person speaking, you can observe the sounds of their words and the seeing of their body language. As you drop down to the level of sense perception, see if you feel a pleasant enjoyment of groundedness, simplicity, relaxation, and ease. There are three parts to this practice of mindful observation in speaking and listening:

EXERCISE

The first part is to continually “wake up” from getting mesmerized and lost in thought, and return to perceiving with your senses, particularly words and images coming from you and others, and to ultimately shift to identifying with awareness rather than thinking.

The second part of the practice is to notice, of the words being spoken, which words describe and which evaluate or judge, and which ways of using language seem to produce the most fulfilling connection. You can also ask yourself (developing relationship with aspects of your unconscious mind) if there are words that want to be spoken and for words that are resonant with OFNR. You can practice whenever you are in conversation with another person, and you can also practice whenever you are in conversation with yourself, which for most of us is almost all the time.

The third part is compassion. We can receive and care for these inner and outer conversations that rise into awareness as carrying something valuable and important, something essential, vital, and meaningful that wants to be seen and heard despite how difficult or aversive they may appear on the surface. We can be respectful, curious, and understanding and see them as wanting to return back to connection, to wholeness, to their source. We can bring compassionate healing into conversation.

EXERCISE



You can set aside quiet time to do this for 3–5 minutes or more, or you can do it as you go through your day whenever you remember.

Focus attention on your breath, following the breath as it moves in and out. As you breathe out, let go any mental tension.

Focus attention on your head — your whole head, your forehead, the point between your eyebrows, wherever works best for you. As you focus attention there, imagine you are breathing into and through your headspace. Follow the breath in and out.

As you breathe into your headspace, notice when your mind takes you off into being lost in automatic, unconscious thinking/talking to yourself in mental words and images/pictures (which you can see and hear in your mind). When you “wake up” to this, you can see with compassion the words or images are not you but are arising in you and acknowledge them with kindness. Then gently bring your attention back to your breath and headspace/mind space.

EXERCISE



Practicing with yourself.

First Practice instruction. This is a conversation practice with yourself in which you are listening to your mind as it generates words and pictures spontaneously and automatically, without your intention.

Find a quiet place to sit or be where you won't be disturbed for 10–15 minutes, or more if you'd like.

Take a deep breath and relax.

Ask your unconscious for a situation you'd like to focus on. It could be something you're happy about or it could be a challenging or difficult situation.

As the memory or image emerges, with your sense perception of seeing, just observe the pictures in your mind, without trying to put words to what you are seeing. Do this for a few breaths or more.

As you do this, thoughts in the form of words, talking to yourself, will spontaneously appear.

Observe those mental words. Notice how they are sounds, just like other sounds that you hear, like the wind in the trees, but they are in the form of you talking with yourself, words appearing and then disappearing.

EXERCISE



Do you experience an intimacy or closeness with these words and images as they appear in you and you receive them this way?

Gently shift attention back to just seeing images in your mind related to your situation.

Continue to notice when automatic thoughts happen in you, respectfully acknowledge them, and return to just seeing.

See if you can experience yourself as the aware knowing space in which all sounds are arising the sounds in your environment and the sounds of your inner words, and it being your mind that is creating both the environmental sounds (through the brain's perceptual systems) and your thoughts. You are the one observing this. You are the open space in which this inner conversation is happening.

Debrief. How was it for you to observe your mind in this way? What was your experience of connection, ease, and enjoyment while doing this? Take a few minutes to reflect on your experience. I recommend journaling.

EXERCISE

Second Practice Instruction.

Now try adding intentionally talking to yourself and observing this in the same way.

Find a quiet place to sit or be where you won't be disturbed for about 10–15 minutes, or more if you'd like.

Take a deep breath and relax.

You can stay with the same situation or ask your unconscious if there is another one.

Ask yourself if there are words you'd like to say about the situation. Begin intentionally talking to yourself with whatever words come to mind. You could talk silently "in your head," or you could talk out loud to yourself.

If you'd like, try asking your unconscious for observation words to describe the situation.

As you talk to yourself intentionally, again see if you can experience this as words and sounds being spoken, and you are the awareness that is observing. You are the one hearing the sounds of your words, even though the words are now being spoken intentionally by you.

EXERCISE



Give close attention to each word as it arises into awareness. Pay attention to the qualities of sound in your voice — tone, rhythm, pacing, intensity, etc., and the spaces between the words.

Shift your identification from being the speaker of the words to being the awareness and observer of the speaking and the words. Can you experience a connection, a sensual richness and enjoyment in hearing the sounds of the words this way? As you pay attention this way, notice how the words flow from you, each word just appearing, one after the next, effortlessly, even as you are speaking intentionally.

Notice also the words you are using to talk about your experience or situation in terms of your sense perceptions — what you see, hear, smell, touch, taste. Are the words describing or are they evaluating or judging? If you're not yet clear on this distinction, no problem. Just keep noticing the different ways of using words to talk about something and how you feel as you use those words.

Debrief. As you spoke intentionally, could you experience a shift in a sense of you being awareness vs. being the words and images? What did you notice about the words you were using to talk about a situation in terms of describing or evaluating/judging? What was your experience of connection, ease, and enjoyment? Take a few minutes to reflect on your experience. I recommend journaling.

It's easier to do this practice when you set aside quiet, focused time for it, but ideally you gain the ability to do it any time as you go through your day, by yourself and when with others. I encourage you to repeat the exercise as often and regularly as would be valuable to you.

EXERCISE



Practicing with Someone Else

I encourage you to try doing the exercises above with another person so you can share your experiences and insights with each other and enjoy the connection. One way to do the exercise in partner practice is to do it exactly the same way as by yourself, with one of you doing the exercise and one of you watching. Then switch, and then debrief together.

A different way to do the First Instruction would be to listen to your partner talk about something and you observe their words, giving very close attention to each word as it arises into your awareness, paying attention to the qualities of sound in their voice— tone, rhythm, pacing, intensity, etc., and the spaces between the words. As you do that, also observe your thoughts that spontaneously and automatically arise while your partner is talking.

In the Second Instruction you could intentionally speak out loud to your partner while you do the exercise. There could be other variations and possibilities as well recommend taking turns speaking and listening, and using 5-minute turns, or longer. Experiment as your creativity moves you.

Mindful Feeling in Conversation: Compassionate Presence with Body



Mindful feeling in conversation is to know ourselves as the awareness of our body sensations and emotions while speaking and listening, and it is to experience ourselves as the presence that compassionately holds our body in awareness. Most of us identify with our feelings. We say things like, "I am sad" and "I am happy." If I look closely, however, I see that sensations and emotions arise in me, but they are not me. They come and go, just like perceptions and thoughts. We are the presence with all these — perceptions, thoughts, and feelings.

Going further, when I look more closely, I see that I am not my body. Now this really may sound like a stretch. Of course we are our body, right? What I see, however, as I look closely is that my body too is arising in awareness. I am aware of and present with my body. And the body changes just like everything else, just more slowly. Biologists tell us that the body's cells are continually changing and being replaced over weeks and months; and of course we see the longer-term changes in the mirror and photos. If I close my eyes and feel my body, it appears as a cloud of amorphous and fluid sensation with no solid boundaries.

From this perspective then, we are more than our body, but we are intimately connected. We can be present with our feelings deeply and powerfully. We are so humanly vulnerable to feeling the tremendous intensities of the pain and suffering of fear, loss, and anger, as well as the sublime heights of joy, happiness, and pleasure. This is the richness and splendor, and ultimately the meaningfulness, of our full human experience. It is also the incredible difficulty of being human and embodied. The truism seems to be accurate that the more we allow ourselves to feel the pain, the more we can feel the joy; and conversely, the more we protect ourselves from feeling the pain, the more we are cut off from the joy and aliveness. For many of us, however, the suffering we experienced in the past, and the protective mechanisms we learned to employ, make it tremendously difficult to feel the fullness of our experience now. And of course there are current events that stimulate overwhelming amounts of pain and traumatic experience.

Mindful Feeling in Conversation: Compassionate Presence with Body

So, what does this mean for us as presence with our feelings and body? As I see it, being able to know ourselves as presence means we can feel pain without suffering, which is hugely significant. The suffering is what makes pain unbearable, and as I understand it, suffering comes from our thinking, the interpretations and stories we make about what happens that add a layer of excruciating suffering on top of the pain. Of course pure pain, physical pain for example, can be tremendous. With presence, however, we can feel deeply into the pure, basic sensations related to the pain and discomfort, even potentially the most intense, separate from thinking. At this level of pure sensation there are no good or bad, positive or negative, feelings. There is just being present with the intensity of the sensations. We are not our feelings, as deeply as we might feel them. This perspective of course can be quite difficult to experience and maintain, and can take lots of practice to get there. But I believe the possibility is there even with our greatest challenges.

There is so much compassion available here as well. As awareness and presence, we are infinitely open and receptive to all experience. What neuroscientists call mirror neurons in our physiology allow us to empathically and sympathetically feel and connect with one another's experience. We can be present with ourselves and others in a way that is profoundly nourishing and healing. The body is constantly communicating through sensations and emotions, as well as thoughts and actions. Thinking has great effect on the body's reactions and vice versa. Through presence we can support a healthy and nurturing flow of bodily conversation as we engage with ourselves and others.

Mindful Feeling in Conversation: Compassionate Presence with Body



You can set aside quiet time to do this for 3–5 minutes or more, or you can do it as you go through your day whenever you remember.

Focus attention on your breath, following the breath as it moves in and out. As you breathe out, let go any tension in your body.

Focus attention on your heart/chest and with your peripheral awareness be aware of your whole body. See and feel how your body is appearing in you, not you in it.

As you are present with your heart, imagine you are breathing into and through your heartspace. Follow the breath in and out.

As you breathe into your heart, notice when your mind takes you off into being lost in automatic, unconscious thinking/talking to yourself in mental words and images/pictures. You can then with caring, warmth, and kind regard recognize this conversation and gently bring your attention back to the breath, heart, and whole body awareness.

EXERCISE



Practicing self-care. If feeling your body and feelings at any time doesn't feel ok or healthy for you, just put your full attention on observing the images of your situation and your automatic thinking, or take a break from doing the exercise and only return if it feels healthy and right for you.

First Practice Instruction. You'll be practicing feeling your body's emotions and sensations, and returning to presence when your mind generates words and pictures spontaneously and automatically, without your intention. I like to think of this visually as expanding the circle of awareness from just mind to include the body. Both mind and body appear in the same space of awareness. Awareness of body includes awareness of mind, and you can focus more fully on one or the other.

EXERCISE

Find a quiet place to sit or be where you won't be disturbed for about 10–15 minutes, or more if you'd like.

Take a deep breath and relax.

Ask your unconscious for a situation you'd like to focus on. It could be something you're happy about or it could be a challenging or difficult situation.

As the memory or image comes to you, with your sense perception of seeing, observe the pictures in your mind, without trying to put words to what you are perceiving. Do this for a few breaths or more.

Shift attention to scanning through your body and feeling any emotions or sensations that you can feel in relation to your situation — pressure, pain, temperature, tension, relaxation, tingling, movement, etc. Start at your feet and scan all the way up to your head.

Allow yourself to feel the sensations as deeply as you're willing. You might not feel anything, and that's ok. Just keep feeling whatever you feel. Do this for a few breaths or more.

Automatic thinking will arise periodically. As you observe this, you could compassionately realize it is not you but happening in you, and gently go back to presence with your sensations.

EXERCISE

You could ask yourself to experience as much acceptance, warmth, and positive regard as you can towards these conversations of your automatic thoughts and feelings.

As you focus on being present with the emotions and sensations, feel your whole body all at once, as one whole. Sense your body in space. Notice how the sensations and your whole body are happening in you, awareness. Do this for a few breaths or more.

From this perspective, you are the presence that is observing and feeling. You can feel deeply, richly, and powerfully, but the experience arises in you and is not you.

Notice, if you can, the relationship between feelings and thoughts, how certain thoughts seem to stimulate certain feeling reactions, and vice versa.

Debrief. How was it for you to feel your body in this way? Were you able to identify with being the presence and awareness of your body? What was your experience of connection, ease, and enjoyment while doing this? Take a few minutes to reflect on your experience. I recommend journaling.

EXERCISE

Second Practice Instruction. Now try adding intentionally talking to yourself, while at the same time continuing to be aware of and present with your body and sensations.

Find a quiet place to sit or be where you won't be disturbed for about 10–15 minutes, or more if you'd like.

Take a deep breath and relax.

You can stay with the same situation or think of another one.

Time for 5 minutes or more.

You could ask yourself what words want to be spoken about the situation, particularly about the emotions and sensations you feel as you bring the situation to mind.

Begin intentionally talking to yourself. You could talk silently "in your head," or you could talk out loud to yourself.

As you are observing the sounds of your words talking, also feel your body sensations and your whole body.

EXERCISE

Notice the words you are using to talk about your experience or situation in terms of your perceptions — what you see, hear, smell, touch, taste — including now words for sensations and emotions you are feeling in your body. Are the words describing or are they evaluating, judging, analyzing, blaming? If you're not yet clear on this distinction, no problem. Just keep noticing the different ways of using words to talk about something, and how you feel as you use those words.

When you notice automatic thoughts have taken you away, you could acknowledge with acceptance, warmth, and kind regard that they are not you and gently return to awareness of the words you are speaking about your situation and presence with your body as you talk.

Continue until you are complete with the exercise.

Debrief. What did you notice about awareness of speaking intentionally? What about the words you were using to talk about the situation in terms of describing feelings vs. evaluating, judging, analyzing, blaming? Did you notice a relationship between thinking and feeling? What was your experience of connection, ease, and enjoyment? Take a few minutes to reflect on your experience. I recommend journaling.

EXERCISE

I encourage you to ask someone to practice with you by taking turns speaking and listening about a situation or anything meaningful. I recommend timing 5 minute turns (or longer than 5 minutes if you wish). You could also just do this practice internally while you're in a normal conversation.

When you are listening to the other talking, shift attention between hearing their words and seeing their body language.

As you focus on the other, also feel your body.

Your mind will start generating thoughts spontaneously, talking to yourself. As you become aware of this happening, gently bring attention back to the other person and to awareness of your body and sensations.

When you are talking, listen to your own words as you speak, each word emerging into awareness one word at a time, spaces between the words, voice quality.

As you do this, expand awareness to include your body and also the other person — their eyes, face, and body language.

EXERCISE

Notice if your words as you speak are describing observations and feelings or are they evaluating, judging, or analyzing. If you're unclear, just keep noticing and wondering about the words and how you feel using them.

Can you feel compassion towards the thoughts and feelings, for how they are searching to dissolve into being received?

Debrief. After the conversation, take a few minutes to reflect on your experience. Were you able to hold both of you in peripheral awareness as you focused on the sounds and images of their speaking and yours? What did you notice about the language you both were using to talk about what you were talking about? What was your experience of connection, enjoyment, and ease? I recommend journaling about this.

EXERCISE

Need Energy in Conversation



The mindfulness dimension of Need is awareness of the energy and aliveness of our body and combining this with the language of needs while speaking and listening. I like to imagine that the energy animating our body is life energy, the one energy and life force that creates, animates, and moves through everything. The reason I focus on body energy is to connect experientially and nonverbally with universality, with the wholeness of life of which we are a part, and in which we are interconnected with everyone and everything. Sensing into this energy is a way to feel more grounded, stable, and secure internally. It also gives an experience of universal empathic connection with other people and with life. And by doing this we can bring a greater compassion to disconnecting language and behaviors (e.g., judging, blaming, demanding). We can more easily perceive these kinds of difficult, and perhaps damaging, conversations as ultimately being part of a larger whole; and we can help return the conversation to connection and healing.

Awareness of body energy is a way to deepen into the language of universal, formless needs. As you find need words to connect with your experience, or with what others are experiencing, and you contemplate and meditate on the words and the feeling of energy of your body, you can experience the "energy of the needs." Needs are a way to talk about what universally moves us all, how all living beings are always in every moment doing their best to meet needs we all share, and how those needs are the source of all thoughts, feelings, and actions. In focusing on energy and aliveness of the body, you can more directly experience, if only in your imagination, a creative, alive power flowing through, consciously connecting with needs. I have found great beauty in this experience.

From this energetic connection, we can expand awareness fully to the totality of our perceptual field, connecting us with the field of possibility and potential. We can ask our unconscious mind for what we want to meet the needs, and receive images and ideas of those needs being met. We can then continue to bring our focus and attention to the needs and the positive future we are imagining and creating.

This exercise helps you develop a felt sense of energy of your body and connecting this with need words.

Have the Needs List in front of you

Find a quiet place to sit or be where you won't be disturbed for about 10–15 minutes, or more if you'd like.

Take a deep breath and relax.

Hold your dominant hand in front of you in a comfortable way.

For about 15 seconds, close your eyes and focus attention and concentration on your dominant hand and see if you can sense energy and aliveness in that hand, perhaps a tingling or vibrating sensation.

Now imagine slowly dialing up a dial of concentration to the highest point on the dial. Notice what you feel in your hand.

Close your eyes again and be aware of your whole body. See if you can sense the energy animating your whole body. If not, then try focusing in the same way on your other hand. You can play with moving attention back and forth from your hand(s) to your whole body. Do this for a few breaths or more.

EXERCISE

Now, go through each need word on the Needs List (or as many as you'd like). As you read each word, pause for a moment, close your eyes, and feel the energy in your hand(s) or whole body as you say the need word to yourself.

See if you can deepen your concentration and feeling of energy in your body as you say the need word to yourself.

Also as you do this, remind yourself that needs are what we all want and need everywhere on the planet.

Debrief. When you are complete with the exercise, reflect on what you experienced. What did you notice about connecting with body energy and needs language in this way? I recommend journaling. Do this exercise as often as would be valuable to you.

EXERCISE



You can set aside quiet time to do this for 3–5 minutes or more, or you can do it as you go through your day whenever you remember.

Focus attention on your breath, following the breath as it moves in and out. As you breathe out, let go any tension in your body.

Focus attention on your belly/stomach and breathe there. Breathe into and through your belly. Do this for a few breaths or more.

See if you can feel the energy and aliveness of your whole body. Take a breath or more to feel this if you can.

If you would like, concentrate your attention more and more deeply into the sensation of energy as you breathe.

Focus on your belly and breathe while you are aware of energy in your whole body. Do this for a few breaths or more.

As you do this, notice when your mind takes you off into being lost in automatic, unconscious thinking/talking to yourself or body feeling reactions. When you “wake up” to this, you can warmly welcome the thinking and feelings, and then gently bring your attention back to the breath, belly, and need energy.

EXERCISE



Connecting Thought and Feeling with Need Energy

You may remember from chapter two that we talked about how thoughts are expressions of needs and how we can relate to our feelings in terms of levels of causation, responsibility, and empowerment. As I see it, the most empowering way we can relate to our thoughts and feelings is to see them as being caused by our needs, that they are giving information and feedback about needs being met or not, and how we can better meet them. Coming back to this again now, as you are mindfully aware of mind and body arising in you, you can link that experience to sensing the deeper need energy of your body. If, for example, you are feeling some form of emotional pain, as you feel that pain you can also feel the sensation of energy and aliveness, as well as connect with need words if they come to you. With this deepening into need energy, notice a warm, soothing, caring quality of your presence.



Have the Needs List to look at if you would like.

Find a quiet place to sit or be where you won't be disturbed for about 10–15 minutes, or more if you'd like.

Take a deep breath and relax. Invite a situation to mind that you'd like to work with, something that is a challenging or difficult situation for you.

As the memory or image comes to you, with your sense perception of seeing, observe the pictures in your mind, without trying to put words to what you are seeing. Do this for a few breaths or more.

Then shift attention to scanning through your body and feeling any emotions or sensations that you can feel — pressure, pain, temperature, tension, relaxation, tingling, movement, etc. Start at your feet and scan all the way up to your head.

EXERCISE



Sense deeper into the energy of your body, gently dialing up the intensity as you would like. Do this for a few breaths.

Then ask your unconscious if there are need words that these feelings connect to (starting with what you want, then moving to what we all want and need). You could look at the Needs List if this would be supportive to you.

Connect in your mind the emotions and sensations triggered by your situation to your experience of need energy and words. Continue to do this, deepening the focus of your presence as feels right to you, for as many breaths as you would like.

You could also remind yourself of feelings arising from needs.

Debrief. When you are complete with the exercise, reflect on what you experienced. What did you notice about connecting feelings with needs and body energy? I recommend journaling. Do this exercise as often as would be valuable to you.

EXERCISE



I encourage you to ask someone to practice with you by taking turns speaking and listening. I recommend timing 5 minute turns (or longer than 5 minutes if you wish). You could also just do this practice internally while you're in a normal conversation.

When you're listening to the other person, focus attention on your sense perceptions of hearing their words and seeing their eyes, face, and body language as they speak.

As you focus on the other, feel the emotions and sensations of your body, and then sense down further into the energy and aliveness.

While you do this, your mind will start generating thoughts spontaneously, talking to yourself. As you become aware of this happening, receive them with warmth and acceptance, and gently bring attention back to the other person and to presence with body and energy.

When it is your turn to talk, listen to your words as you speak, each word emerging into awareness one word at a time, spaces between the words, voice quality. As you do this, sense your body energy.

EXERCISE



Notice if your words as you speak are describing observations, feelings, and needs or if they are doing something else. If you're unclear, just keep noticing and wondering about the words you're using and how you feel in relation to them.

Debrief. After the conversation, take a few minutes to reflect on your experience. Were you able to experience your body energy as you focused on their speaking and yours? What did you notice about the language you were using to talk about what you were talking about? What was your experience of connection, enjoyment, and ease? I recommend journaling about this.

Connecting with need energy and language in this way tends to lead to experiencing a shift, sometimes profound, to peace, well-being, and connection with ourselves and others. Once we have connected to this level, the specific people, things, actions, and behaviors that would be a manifestation of the needs can emerge with a new and different kind of creativity. This can take the form of specific requests we can make of ourselves and others.

EXERCISE

Mindful Request in Conversation: Creating the Life and World We Want



Mindful Request in Conversation: Creating the Life and World We Want

Requests are about asking for what we would like to enrich life, to solve problems and conflicts, and to enjoy contributing to one another's well-being compassionately. The mindfulness dimension of Request is to move from the energy of the body and universal needs to being aware of the wholeness of our field of sense perception (e.g., visual, auditory, kinesthetic) and ask for what specifically would meet the needs. It is to expand peripheral awareness to the entire field of perception while inviting and listening for what compassionate action wants to emerge. In some traditions of mindfulness meditation, this is called open awareness or awareness of awareness. It is to let your perceptual field be as soft and wide and open as you can. In doing this, there is a relaxing of attention, as opposed to the focusing of attention on sense perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. Using the analogy of a flashlight, it would be like opening wide a beam of light from narrowly focused to a fully diffused circle of soft light. Another way to experience this is to be aware of the space-around you, its formless and infinite quality, and to imagine how space extends unbroken out into the boundless Universe.

By expanding awareness, you perceive reality more as one whole rather than only separate parts. Here is where I like to use the word consciousness. I define consciousness as awareness and its contents — a single unified field in which the perception of separate parts of reality, subjects, and objects fades to the background. From this perspective, everything is made of consciousness. Every seemingly separate "object" of experience is a modulation of consciousness. This actually corresponds to what neuroscience tells us. Whether in a dream state or the waking state, everything we experience is constructed by the brain/mind. What appears in consciousness is also made of consciousness.

Mindful Request in Conversation: Creating the Life and World We Want

From connection with needs and need energy, and experiencing this expanded field of awareness, requests for new ideas and possibilities to meet needs can emerge from what I like to think of as the field of pure potential and creativity. There is a subtle, mindfulness-based way this can happen in which you can listen for an answer to come from your unconscious mind. Sometimes it's just about repeatedly asking questions: "What do I want?" "What do we all want?" "Is there a request?" We keep pointing our attention towards what's important, what matters, what we care about. We might not even get an answer for a while from our unconscious, but it can feel quite good to just keep asking questions, like a meditation, being open, receptive, and listening, focused towards positive, life-enriching possibility.

When you are generating ideas and solutions from consciousness, it feels different than when you're doing normal mind-based, problem-focused thinking and planning. The mindfulness version has the quality of emerging spontaneously, creatively in a flash or spark of inspiration. It is usually accompanied by the feeling of excitement and positive energy. It feels fresh and new rather than recycled from past habit and conditioning. In my experience, this component is about listening to both the problem-solving mind and also to the intuition and inspiration of the unconscious dimensions of consciousness. In this way, you can see where creative emergence for compassionate giving and receiving leads you to take the next step of making requests to create the life you want and the world you envision.

As creative ideas emerge, there is then a narrowing and focusing of attention into specific, concrete, action-oriented requests of yourself and others to contribute to one another's well-being from the heart, from the enjoyment of giving and receiving.





Have the Needs List to look at if you would like.

Take a deep breath and relax.

Ask unconscious mind if there is a situation you are struggling with in some way now or were in the past that you would like to work with.

If a situation appears, feel your experience of your body (emotion, sensation, energy). Do this for a few breaths or more.

Ask yourself for feelings and needs words (starting with asking what you want, and then what we all want). Look and listen for them coming to you in your mind. You can also look at the Feelings and Needs Lists in the Appendix.

Expand awareness to the whole field of your perception. Be aware of the totality of space around you that holds everything. Be aware of its formless and infinite quality. Imagine too the tremendous spaciousness within everything as well as surrounding. Experience consciousness as a unified field in which space and objects of your perception become one. Do this for a few breaths or more.

EXERCISE



REQUEST AND CREATIVITY : PRACTICING WITH YOURSELF

Connected now with needs, ask again for you what you would like, what you want more specifically. You can ask yourself. You can ask others.

Requests are the power of focusing on what we want (rather than on what we don't want), imagining it, then asking, inviting, inspiring action to meet it.

As you do this, notice if a creative insight, idea, action, or solution to a situation emerges.

If nothing comes yet, try asking your unconscious mind for an answer, solution, idea, or request.

EXERCISE

Remember that requests are specific and action-oriented. So, if the idea that emerges is more general, you could ask yourself how it could be more specific.

Once you get an answer, you could imagine it in your mind as if it's happening. How do you feel as it happens? Deepen into the mental, emotional, bodily experience of imagining your needs being met. Life will take the course it takes in the future, but this sets up clear communication within you, and it contributes to you feeling a state of well-being and fulfillment now in the present.

Sometimes we don't receive an answer right away. If you didn't yet, shift to doing something else and wait to see if a creative idea, solution, or request emerges later.

Debrief. What did you notice about creativity emerging from awareness of energy and consciousness? What was your experience of connection, flow, ease, and enjoyment in doing this exercise? Take a few minutes to reflect on your experience. I recommend journaling.

Practicing with Another Person If you'd like, ask someone to do this exercise with you, taking turns supporting each other to move through the steps, asking for what specifically you would like to give and receive.

EXERCISE

Putting It All Together & Next Steps



Putting It All Together

We are in conversations all day long, either with other people or internally in our minds and bodies. Even at night as we sleep we move in magical and amazing ways through different conversations in the dream world. There are verbal and nonverbal conversations. There are “outer” conversations and “inner” conversations. In the end, however, they are all just conversations that happen in us, within the field of awareness, presence, and consciousness. With the approach I’m offering, in the reality of your day-to-day, moment-to-moment life, how do you relate to these conversations mindfully and with OFNR — Observation, Feeling, Need, and Request?

Let’s start with the conversations within you, in your mind and body. Almost any moment is a chance to notice the conversations of the mind thinking and the body reacting, and you being the awareness of these conversations. You are not the conversations, but you are deeply intimate with them. They are arising in you to be seen, cared for, and made whole. You are the compassionate presence that can warmly receive and gently hold all that appears in you. There is healing in this, and peace.

You can Observe perception and thinking happening. You can Feel your body communicating and sense deeper into universal Need energy. Then, perceiving the wholeness of your perceptual field of the world, there are Requests to and from this open space of possibility.

As you are aware of being aware, there is OFNR language that goes with it: ways to describe what you are observing and feeling, and linking these to words for universal needs and specific requests. You do this with your own experience, and you can use it to sense or imagine what others are experiencing. Every thought, feeling, or action that passes into awareness is an opportunity to be awake and notice, and to ask yourself if you would like to put words to the experience or just witness, feel, and hold in consciousness. It is so simple yet so difficult to do. It is so easy to slip into “unconscious” automatic thinking and reacting, and yet there is so much ease and joy in being aware and inviting language from this place. I myself am continually “falling asleep” and “waking up,” again and again. Every moment is a new chance to start again.

Putting It All Together

In addition to mindful conversation with yourself, you can use OFNR while you are in conversation with others. You are probably in conversations on and off throughout the day. Each one is a chance to observe and feel and connect with need and request in yourself and the other person. It's actually, essentially, no different than noticing the inner conversations. The "outer" conversations are in you too, in your awareness. There is speaking and listening happening with words, body language, and actions. Every interaction with another is a chance to remember who you are (and who they are!), and to unite, heal, and make whole what has been estranged and fragmented. As you do this, something changes — something is different and better, more beneficial and powerful. The doing happens through us, I like to think, in a way that's more connected with the whole of life. The Taoists call this non-doing doing.

Lastly, you can do exercises and practices, and access more learning resources. Here are some recommendations for you:

- Remind yourself often throughout the day of the OFNR components. Use them to help you bring mindfulness into conversations with yourself and others throughout the day.
- Regularly do the exercises in this Workbook, perhaps just one exercise or practice each day. If you haven't already seen it, there is an extended story example in the Appendix.
- Practice with the Feelings and Needs Lists in the Appendix. There are also feelings and needs cards that you can get online (search GROK cards or Empathy Set), which I highly recommend.
- Focus on just one of the OFNR components for the day or for the week.
- Build empathic community of connection, learning, and support. As people to practice with you, even if only to use the simple structure of taking turns speaking and listening. OFNR applies to your experience and also to what others are experiencing.
- Another thing you could do in conversation is, once the other person has finished speaking, reflect back what you heard them say before you talk about what you want to say. As you reflect back, practice the language of OFNR, but do it from mindful awareness, without trying to get the words right. Just let the words flow from your presence, and keep noticing the words that are being spoken by you, and how well they seem to support connection.

Putting It All Together

Continued:

- See programs and courses I'm offering at www.johnkinyon.com, and check out the Learning Resources page.
- For more in depth support with the language of OFNR, see the book I've co-authored called Choosing Peace, which you can find on Amazon or go to www.mediateyourlife.com/choosingpeace/.
- There are many NVC learning resources available. NVC is taught and offered in a myriad of different ways. What I recommend is finding which ways best resonate with you. If you're interested, I suggest starting with these three websites:
 - o www.cnvc.org
 - o www.nonviolentcommunication.com
 - o www.nvcacademy.com

Conclusion

Thank you for being with me on this journey to empathic connection through the OFNR communication components in a way that shifts identification from thinking, feeling, and acting to awareness, presence, and consciousness. From awareness, language and actions can flow in a different way. We can bring mindfulness into the moment-to-moment focus of attention and the use of our words. The practice is about building the habit of "waking up" from the trance of being unconsciously lost in the content of our mind and the vividness of our body's reactions, and how this can happen through the very ordinary back and forth unfolding of conversation with ourselves and others. There is ease and flow, and also great enjoyment and fulfillment, in speaking and listening this way.

Physicists and mystics tell us that the Universe is connected, that it's actually one unified whole, and not only the fragmented separateness that we normally perceive. It seems to me that our human task is to learn how to hold both of these realities together so we can experience deeper and greater well-being, resilience, creativity, and collaboration. Being able to do this gives me hope. New creative ideas can emerge for finding solutions together to our most difficult and pressing problems and to the enormous challenges humanity now faces.

Next Levels of the Training

In addition to learning and practicing with the support of this Workbook, I offer Level One trainings that can support you at this level of learning. Once you have practiced and built a foundation at this level, there is Level Two (intermediate) training to support you when you become disconnected or in conflict with yourself or others. In Level Two, there are a number of inner and outer conversation structures for different types of disconnection based on emotion circuits/networks and thinking patterns in the brain. There is also Level Three (advanced) for learning how to coach and mediate with these skills and structures. For more information go to www.johnkinyon.com.

Appendix

Story Example of the OFNR Components

Download the Feelings, Faux Feelings, and Needs sheets by clicking below.

[Click HERE](#) for Feelings and Faux Feelings sheet

[Click HERE](#) for Feelings and Needs sheet

Observation

To give a simple example, let's say you're at a social gathering and you see your close friend and colleague arrive. You see him talking with others, but he doesn't come over to talk with you. You walk over to where he is talking with a group of people. He looks up, sees you, and walks away to another part of the room. This is a description of what you observed. If I asked you what happened, however, you might tell me that you observed him "ignoring you" or "being rude." I would call these judgments. With awareness you could observe that you were thinking these thoughts about him, and that what you saw him do was talk to others and not you and to walk away when you approached. You might also notice some memories in your mind, images of sharing connecting experiences together. You might observe other judgments, saying to yourself things like, "I thought he was my friend. He is so inconsiderate. Maybe he doesn't really care about me after all. Maybe he's upset about that disagreement we had. Wow, he's so sensitive and reactive. How immature..." What makes talking about these evaluations and judgments observational is being aware of them as thoughts rather than descriptions of objective reality.

Feeling

Going back to our simple example, your close friend/colleague has come into the social gathering, talked with others but not you, and walked away when you approached. In terms of your feelings, let's say you are experiencing sensations of tightness in your jaw and clenching in your stomach. However, if I asked you how you are feeling about it, you might say something like, "I feel like this is really ridiculous," "I feel that that was a rude thing to do," or "I feel ignored and disrespected." These are sometimes referred to as faux feelings. They are presented as feelings but actually can be seen as thoughts. You might also go into a story about how you "feel" that this is probably about an argument you recently had, that he's overreacting and being immature (due to childhood issues), and that he's unfairly punishing you. From a place of awareness, you would talk about your feelings in terms of body sensations, or you might talk about your emotional experience, such as saying you feel upset and angry.

Appendix

Need

Returning to our example, you observe your close friend/colleague at the social gathering talking with others and moving away from you when you approach. You also observe your thoughts, and you are aware of experiencing certain feelings in your body. If I asked you what your needs are in this situation, without you knowing the distinctions I'm offering, you might tell me that you need your friend/colleague to not be so childish and to stop avoiding you. I would say this is what you don't want (your friend not doing something) rather than a universal need. To connect with needs, you could start with asking yourself what you want in this situation, rather than what you don't want. The answer may come that you want to know what's going on with your friend/colleague, why he's behaving as he is. You may want him to tell you how much you and your relationship are important and matter to him. From what you want at the strategy level, ask yourself what your needs are, what you want that all human beings want, anywhere on the planet. From what you've already said you want, and from listening to your thoughts and feelings, it sounds like you want to understand your friend and have him give you importance and mattering. So, your needs, separate from your friend, are understanding, importance, and mattering. As you connect with these needs, you can feel a shift and opening in you, a softening of your heart and a feeling of connection. Once you connect with needs, you can ask yourself what you would like to meet them. Our creativity and effectiveness tends to flow more powerfully when we are consciously connected with needs. You can also wonder about what needs your friend might be trying to meet by doing what he is doing, even though you don't like the way he is going about meeting those needs. Perhaps his behavior is motivated by similar needs that you are wanting met? This realization opens your heart further.

Request

So we saw that your needs in relation to your friend were understanding, importance, and mattering, and you guess that perhaps his behavior could be motivated by similar needs. This realization could lead you to remember some of the things you said during your recent disagreement that now you see could have felt hurtful to him. Now you ask yourself about what request you might have of him, of yourself, or someone else. Let's say what comes to you is to ask your friend if he is upset about the particular thing you said during your disagreement and would he have a conversation about it? Let's say he says that he doesn't want to talk about it. Now, if it's a true request from you, you'll respect his no and not try to pressure him into talking with you. However, what you could do is empathize with him, hearing what is behind his no, what needs are keeping him from saying yes. Let's say he says he doesn't want to make things worse by talking. Hearing this from him, another request might come to you: to say to him that you'd like to just listen and hear him out without reacting or commenting, that you'd like to listen and understand and reflect back to him what you're hearing to make sure he feels understood and that you understand. And that after he's done, you'll check with him if he wants to hear from you, and it's ok if he doesn't. At this point, you feel really good about offering this because you want to contribute to the understanding, importance, and mattering between you, and let's say he feels good about doing this too.