

WORKBOOK



MINDFULNESS IN CONVERSATION

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

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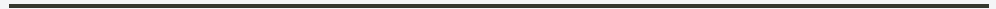
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Part One

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

