

OFNR Distinctions

For experiencing empathic connections (from the work of Nonviolent Communication NVC)

Observation vs. Evaluation/Judgment (awareness): Observation is awareness of what we perceive with our senses – sight, sound, touch, taste, smell – and also of our thoughts and evaluations. In language, we can describe purely what we are observing (i.e. words we hear, actions we see from our subjective frame of reference) separate from any words that evaluate (e.g. liking or disliking, agreement or disagreement). Often our evaluation takes the form of moralistic judgment about who/what is right-wrong, good-bad, should-shouldn't, appropriate-inappropriate, etc. Thoughts are a cognitive expression of human needs.

Feeling vs. Thinking/“Faux Feelings” (compassionate presence): Feeling is compassionate presence with internal, bodily experience of sensations and emotions, vs. thinking, such as “I feel like you don't respect me,” or “I feel that you're not listening.” Words commonly used for feelings often mix up thought and feeling (“faux feeling” language, e.g. “I feel judged, disrespected and unappreciated.”) Feelings reflect the quality of our thinking. Feeling and accepting our feelings connects us with our body and helps us process and integrate emotions. Feelings are a bodily expression of human needs.

Need vs. Action/Wants/“Strategies” (connecting with the universal): Needs are what all humans universally need to survive and thrive (e.g. safety, love, freedom). Needs are not specific to a particular person, thing, action, place, or time. All living beings in every moment are doing their best to meet needs that we all share. Need energy is life energy. Needs connect us with the universal, infinite, and formless wholeness of consciousness, source of fulfillment, well being. All our actions are trying to meet needs we all share.

Relationship of thoughts and feelings to needs, and levels of empowerment. Thoughts and evaluations express needs, e.g. “You're so selfish,” might be expressing a need for consideration. We commonly see our feelings as caused by other's actions, e.g. “I feel angry because you ...”. A deeper understanding is seeing our feelings caused by our thinking, e.g. “I feel angry because I'm thinking that” More deeply and powerfully, we can see our feelings ultimately caused by our needs, e.g. “I feel angry because of the need for respect.”

Request vs. Demand (giving and receiving): Requests flow from connection with needs and consciousness, and invite the freedom to say “no.” It is wanting the response to come from true willingness, from the heart and the desire to contribute, from compassionate giving and receiving, rather than fear of punishment, guilt, shame, obligation, reward, etc.

Empathy with OFNR for self and others: The OFNR distinctions can be used to understand our own experience, and also the experience of others.