

THE FOUR COMMUNICATION CHOICES

When we use a language based in human needs, at each moment we can draw on NVC's four communication choices. Two of these focus attention on ourselves; two focus on the other person. When we focus our attention on what is going on inside us, we can do so silently or out loud. Likewise, when we focus on what is going on in the other person, we can keep our guesses to ourselves or guess out loud. Central to all four choices is bringing our attention to the present moment, to what is happening now inside us and others.

- **Self-empathy (silent/focused on self)**

Silently naming our own observations, feelings, needs, and requests (OFNR). This is the foundation for empathy and expression with others.

- **Self-expression (out loud/focused on self)**

Expressing our observations, feelings, and needs and requesting what we would like without blame, criticism, or demand.

“Classical” NVC construction: “When I see ____, I feel ____ because I’m needing ____.
Would you be willing to _____?”

“Idiomatic/street” NVC: Expressed in natural language that springs from self-empathy.

- **Empathy (silent/focused on the other)**

Silently guessing the other person's observations, feelings, needs, and requests. This is a way of listening, of placing our attention on another person in an attempt to understand his or her experience.

- **Empathy (out loud/focused on the other)**

Asking the other person what they are experiencing in the current moment; that is, listening for and guessing the other person's observation, feelings, needs, and requests, taking care to do so without intending blame, criticism, or demand.

EXAMPLE:

Julie calls her friend Tracey on the phone.

Tracey: Julie: Tracey:

“Hello.”

“Hi, Tracey, it's me, Julie. How are you?”

From Mediate Your Life Training Manual, 5th ed., www.johnkinyon.com, www.ikelasater.com

“Why are you calling now? You missed my birthday, and I haven’t heard from you in months. I figured you didn’t care anymore.”

Julie begins considering the four communication choices.

Self-empathy (silent/focused on self)

“I am hearing Tracey say that I missed her birthday, I am feeling embarrassed, and I have a need for connection. My request to myself is that I consider each of the four communication choices in hopes that Tracey and I will meet our needs for connection.”

Empathy (silent/focused on the other)

“I am hearing Tracey say that she figured I didn’t care anymore. I wonder if she is feeling sad or hurt and if she wants to know she matters and is cared about.”

Self-expression (out loud/focused on self)

“Tracey, I’m embarrassed about that because our connection really matters to me. Would you be willing to talk about this with me for a few minutes?”
Tracey: “Okay, I am willing to talk for a few minutes, and I am really upset.”

Empathy (out loud/focused on the other)

“Thanks, Tracey. I am really grateful that we can talk about this. I am hearing that you are really upset. Are you feeling hurt because you want to know you matter and are cared about by your friends?”

The conversation could continue with Julie using these four choices until each person has a sense that she has been heard and understood by the other in the way she wants to be.

	Silent	Out loud
Me	<p>Self-empathy</p> <p>Naming to ourselves our observations, feelings, needs, and requests (OFNR)</p>	<p>Self-expression</p> <p>Saying how we are and requesting what we would like without blame, criticism, or demand</p>
Other person	<p>Empathy</p> <p>Guessing the OFNR of the other</p>	<p>Empathy</p> <p>Guessing how another is feeling and what they might be requesting without blame, criticism, or demand</p>