



Symposium on Educational Excellence 2025

Nonviolent communication in healthcare: humanizing our work

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Keywords

Empathy, Emotions, nonviolent communication, feelings, needs

Abstract

Background: “Nonviolent Communication” (NVC) is a concept that was developed by Marshall Rosenberg (1934-2015) as a tool for communicating across differences and conflict. For a basic overview of the NVC model, see Rosenberg’s book, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*. Nonviolent Communication is an approach to communicating feelings and needs based on trauma-informed nonviolent principles. This is not a technique for ending disagreements between people, but the goal is to increase empathy and improve the quality of life for people who communicate using these tools, as well as the people around them. Melanie Sears’ book, *Humanizing Health Care: Creating Cultures of Compassion With Nonviolent Communication* (Puddle Dancer, 2010), applies this concept of NVC to the realm of healthcare work environments, giving examples from her own experiences of how NVC has reduced burnout and radically improved the quality of relationships among staff and between staff and patients.

Purpose: As a follow-up to last year’s workshop on “Nonviolent Communication in the Classroom,” this interactive workshop will discuss the application of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) in health care workplace environments. Our discussion will circle around the book *Humanizing Health Care: Creating Cultures of Compassion With Nonviolent Communication*, by Melanie Sears, RN, MBA, PhD.

We will discuss some sample stories from Sears’ book, as a way to engage in self-reflection on our own communication styles, and how we might benefit from the NVC model. In our discussion, we will engage in the following topics drawn from her book chapters:

- Understanding Nonviolent Communication
- From Domination to Partnership: The Evolution of Health Care Systems
- The Language of Diagnosis, Judgement, Analysis, and Labeling
- From "Power Over" to "Power With"
- Compassion, Empathy and Honesty: Creating Life-Serving Systems of Care

Methods:

- Powerpoint presentation of nonviolent communication, feelings and needs (30 minutes)
- Overview of the Melanie Sears' book, Humanizing Health Care (10 minutes)
- Practice differentiating between feelings and needs (10 minutes)
- Small-group interactions through role-playing (30 minutes)
- Reflections/Shares (10 minutes)

Results: Participants will:

- be able to explain the basics of nonviolent communication.
- have a basic understanding of the difference between feelings and needs.
- gain skills for using nonviolent communication in the workplace
- walk away with tools for introducing nonviolent communication in healthcare settings that will help to reduce staff burnout and turnover.

Learning Objectives

1. Learn about the fundamentals of nonviolent communication, and why this style of communication is effective for healthcare workplace environments.
2. Understand the difference between feelings and needs.
3. Practice talking about feelings and needs with some role-playing activities.

International Resources for Nonviolent Communication (NVC):

- The Center for Nonviolent Communication: <http://www.cnvc.org/>
- Nonviolent Communication: <http://www.nonviolentcommunication.com/index.htm>
- NVC Academy: <https://nvctraining.com/>
- Nonviolent Communication in Schools: <https://www.cnvc.org/about-us/projects/nvc-schools/nonviolent-communication-schools>
- The No-Fault Zone Game: http://www.thenofaultzone.com/the_no-fault_zone.html

Local (Oregon/Portland) Nonviolent Communication (NVC) Resources:

- Portland-based NVC Trainer LaShelle Lowe-Chardé:
<http://wiseheartpdx.org/>
- Oregon Network for Compassionate Communication:
<https://orncc.net/>
- NVC Book Practice Meet-Up Group (SE Portland):
<https://www.meetup.com/NVC-Book-Practice-Group/?gj=ej1b>
- Northwest Compassionate Communication:
<http://nwcompass.org/new-website/>

Book Resources:

- Humanizing Health Care - by Melanie Sears:
<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/10737924-humanizing-health-care>
- Life-Enriching Education - by Marshall Rosenberg:
https://www.amazon.com/Life-Enriching-Education-Communication-Performance-Relationships/dp/1892005050/ref=pd_sim_14_3?_encoding=UTF8&pd_rd_i=1892005050&pd_rd_r=1AXK6RCQQAD4VNAFDGMS&pd_rd_w=6OIRU&pd_rd_wg=e8Hid&psc=1&refRID=1AXK6RCQQAD4VNAFDGMS
- Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life - by Marshall Rosenberg
https://www.amazon.com/Nonviolent-Communication-Language-Life-Changing-Relationships/dp/189200528X/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1492802254&sr=1-1&keywords=nonviolent+communication+marshall+rosenberg
- Teaching Children Compassionately - by Marshall Rosenberg
https://www.amazon.com/Compassionate-Classroom-Relationship-Teaching-Learning/dp/1892005069/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1492802164&sr=8-1&keywords=The+Compassionate+classroom
- The Compassionate Classroom - by Sura Hart & Victoria Kindle Hodson
https://www.amazon.com/Compassionate-Classroom-Relationship-Teaching-Learning/dp/1892005069/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1492802164&sr=8-1&keywords=The+Compassionate+classroom
- The No-Fault Classroom - by Sura Hart & Victoria Kindle Hodson
https://www.amazon.com/No-Fault-Classroom-Conflict-Relationship-Intelligence/dp/1892005182/ref=pd_bxgy_14_img_2?_encoding=UTF8&pd_rd_i=1892005182&pd_rd_r=T74K7BM7YQCCZ3K5YMQ2&pd_rd_w=UFpsD&pd_rd_wg=J7nqy&psc=1&refRID=T74K7BM7YQCCZ3K5YMQ2