# Expressing Feelings & Needs

## Expressing Feelings

To build trusting relationships in our communities, we can start by expressing feelings. NVC instructor Daren De Witt explains the powerful impact this can have: "expressing our feelings can have a profound effect on others, enabling them to see us in a more human way. Expressing our feelings to others and reflecting back their feelings fosters empathy, understanding and trust."



**Developing a feelings vocabulary**

The more precisely we can identify and express feelings, the more effective our communication can be. It can be helpful to choose from the lists of words below and practice using them to express your feelings and help others to express theirs. You can gradually add to these lists and extend your feelings vocabulary.

**Basic feelings:**

- Positive- happy, joyful, ecstatic, thrilled, delighted, elated.
- Negative- sad, angry, worried, scared, embarrassed, annoyed, frustrated.
- Neutral- calm, peaceful, content, neutral, curious, observant.

Generally speaking, our culture places considerably less value on the expression of feelings than on the expression of ideas. Consequently, there is often confusion around the accurate expression of our feelings. Some of the commonest mistakes are:

A thought masquerading as a feeling: e.g. 'I feel that you aren't listening to me'. To clarify feelings in these instances, ask 'How would I feel if I weren't being listened to?' You may feel frustrated, sad or upset.

Confusing feelings with how we think others are behaving towards us: E.g. 'I feel manipulated by him'. This is an interpretation of behaviour. How might I feel if I interpreted his behaviour this way? Annoyed or confused, perhaps.

Confusing feelings with evaluations of ourselves: E.g. 'I feel useless at this task'. 'Useless' is an evaluation or judgement. How might we feel if we thought we were useless? Dejected or disappointed, perhaps.

Confusing feelings with needs: E.g. 'I feel understood'. If my need for understanding had been met, I might feel relieved, grateful or satisfied.

Expressing our feelings as if they were caused by others: E.g. 'I feel irritated by you'. Others may be the stimulus or trigger for our feelings, but they are never the cause. The cause is our unmet need. E.g. 'I feel irritated because I am needing some peace and quiet.' Confusion and conflict can be avoided if we own our feelings rather than blaming others for them, or thinking they are responsible for them.

# Expressing Needs

"When we're in conflict with others, we often feel angry, and we criticise and blame them and ourselves. This often results in others feeling angry too. As a result, we are less likely to get what we want. A more effective approach is to pause, take a deep breath and work out what our need is, and then communicate it. The other person will better understand where we are coming from, and we are more likely to get our need met or have a constructive discussion about it."

Feelings are clues as to what our needs or others' needs might be. For example, a person might feel irritated and distressed if their need for respect is not being met. Pleasant feelings are clear signals that our needs are being met; painful feelings indicate unmet needs. Being able to recognise feelings will help us to uncover needs.

**Some Needs We All Share:**

- Play- engagement, fun, freshness, spontaneity, stimulation, rhythm, variety, comfort, ease, relaxation.

- Meaning- purpose, contribution, awareness, beauty, mystery, wholeness, adventure, challenge, creativity, growth, learning, achievement, completion.
- Love- care, nurture, affection, closeness, intimacy, touch, sexual expression.
- Community- belonging, connection, friendship, contact, inclusion, participation, solidarity, loyalty, help, support.
- Subsistence- food, water, light, air, space, warmth, movement, rest, health, hygiene.
- Clarity- knowledge, awareness, to understand, reassurance, simplicity, order, accuracy, competence, efficiency, skill.
- Autonomy- independence, freedom, choice, control, power, authenticity, integrity.
- Protection- containment, safety, security, peace.
- Empathy- understanding, sympathy, acceptanc, acknowledgement, recognition, to be valued, consideration, respect, trust, celebration, mourning.
- Equity- equality, fairness, sharing, cooperation, collaboration, honesty, openness, keep to agreements, reliability, consistency, justice, tolerance, balance, harmony, unity.

**Different Ways of Saying Needs:**
I need…
I would like…
I value…
I want…
I love…
It's important for me to have…
I would be really grateful to have some…
I really enjoy…
I long for…
I'm hoping for some…
I could really do with some…
…is fun for me
…matters to me
Some…would mean/do a lot for me
Some…would be really helpful to me
Do you need…?
Would you like some…?
Do you value…?
Does…matter to you?
I'm wondering if you might be wanting some…?
Is it important for you to have…?
Would you be grateful for some…?
I'm guessing that you're longing for…?
Are you hoping for some…?
Is this all about…for you?
Is this issue to do with…for you?
Would some…make a big difference for you right now?