

Making Requests of Others

The fourth component of NVC involves making a request to others. We are asking them to do something to satisfy a need of ours. Our requests are strategies through which we might get our needs met. Needs are universal. The strategy through which we are asking to get our needs met is specific - we are asking to get our need met by a specific person, in a specific way, often at a specific time.

In ordinary communication **we often confuse the level of 'needs' with the level of 'requests'**. We don't mention our need but ask for the strategy as if it were a need, e.g. 'I need you to turn off your radio' (our actual need here is for peace and quiet). Confusing the need with the request can contribute to conflict. Separating our need from the request helps us to be determined about getting our need met, and flexible about the way in which that need is met. This in turn gives the person we are in conflict with the opportunity to be flexible - to meet our needs in a way that will also meet any needs they have.

A useful and clarifying rule to return to is: hold tight to the needs, and loose to the strategies. For example, imagine you are in a room with another person who is feeling too hot, but you are feeling cold. The other person wants to open the window to let in a cool breeze, but opening the window is a strategy that does not meet both your needs. Instead, you could put on a jumper, and the other person could put on some lighter clothes. By flexibly exploring other strategies with a focus on needs, everyone's needs can get met.

Our requests are more likely to be met with a 'yes' if they:

- are specific - specifying exactly what you want, and when, with who, and where, makes your request easier to act on.
- offer choice - people enjoy the respect involved in being asked. The phrase 'would you be willing to...?' captures the spirit.
- are positive - are in the form of a 'do' rather than a 'don't'.
- are doable - in manageable, bite-sized chunks.
- take the other person into account - getting a sense of what is going on for them is important for making requests that meet our needs as well as theirs.

There are three types of request we can make of others:

1. Request to connect empathically: "How do you feel when you hear what I just said?"
 2. Request for another person to connect with you: "Would you be willing to tell me what you understand me to have said (so I can check I've made myself clear)?"
 3. Action request (for them to actually do something): "So, would you be willing to...(e.g. Take your shoes off when you come into the house)?"
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