

# Taking Responsibility in the Face of Guilt and Judgment: Summary

## 1. From Self-Judgment to Self-Acceptance

- Finding and connecting with needs that give rise to the painful strategy of self-judgment, such as the desire to learn and grow, making sense of the world, protecting ourselves from even more painful options, and others.
- Stretching towards self-acceptance by understanding our actions and connecting to the needs that led us to act as we did; recognizing our full humanity and hence full beauty

## 2. From Guilt and Defensiveness to Mourning

- Finding and connecting with needs that give rise to defensiveness, such as acceptance and self-acceptance, to be seen in our full humanity even when we act in harmful ways, emotional safety, and others.
- Finding and connecting with needs that give rise to guilt, including protecting ourselves from the deep mourning that arises from our care, harmony, making sense of the world, and others.
- Opening our hearts by mourning our actions - connecting to the needs that were not met for us in acting as we did

## 3. Opening to Hearing Those Affected by Our Actions

- Learning to observe our actions and their effect on others instead of closing our hearts to protect
- Practicing hearing feelings and needs even when expressed as blame and judgment
- Transcending the desire to be seen and hearing feelings and needs through inaccurate representations of our actions

# Mourning, Healing & Reconciliation - Keys

## *Internal Work - Mourning and Healing:*

- a. NVC invites us to shift our relationship to things we regret from one of guilt, self-recrimination and the like to mourning and understanding.
- b. Self-recrimination and guilt arise out of self-judgments. The key to transforming self-judgments is to recognize the needs underneath our self-judgments - the needs that weren't met by our own behavior.
- c. Mourning in NVC involves recognizing the needs that weren't met by our behavior and taking time to mourn how our needs (including our need for contribution to others) were not met.
- d. Making space for self-compassion (self-acceptance, self-understanding) is another crucial process toward healing, involving understanding the needs we were trying to meet by our behavior. This is not the same as condoning or agreeing with our behavior - it's a matter of shifting our relationship to our actions such that we meet ourselves compassionately, knowing that we did the best we could to meet needs, however tragically.
- e. When we explore needs in relation to a past action, it's important to give ourselves the time to explore our feelings and integrate what we learn. Healing emerges out of the growing self-connection, self-compassion and self-trust that this process enables.

## *Relational Work - Reconciliation:*

We can use NVC to heal pain and rifts in trust between us and others. The following three steps relate to situations where we mourn our own actions and recognize their impact on another person, rather than when we want to express our pain about others' actions. This work supports the process of healing and reconciliation, and can be done with the other person or as a role play.

- a. **Empathic connection.** Invite the other person to share their pain however they express it. Connect empathically with the present pain in the other person, opening your heart to them without defensiveness. Maintain this focus as much as you can until the person is complete and expresses a desire to hear what arises in you. (You may check with them if they're complete and would like to hear how you feel.)
- b. **Expression - mourning.** What arises in you may be quite complex, but for the purpose of taking responsibility for your actions, focus here on expressing your own

mourning, sharing what needs of yours were not met by the actions you took. As much as you can, connect deeply with your unmet needs so you can share yourself without defensiveness. Check how the person feels when you're done, and see if they are interested in and ready for the next step.

- c. **Expression - understanding.** Some of the pain we experience when others' actions don't meet our needs has to do with bewilderment about how someone could possibly act that way. There is a deep need for understanding and re-opening our hearts to others' humanity even when they have acted in ways that were painful for us. This step is intended to meet this need for understanding. Share your understanding of the feelings and needs that led you to take the actions that contributed to pain for the other person. Focus on contributing to the other person, not on wanting to justify or even receive their understanding or forgiveness. You are still focused on the other person even though you are sharing your own pain. Therefore, again, the more you can connect deeply with your own humanity, the more you'll be able to speak without defensiveness, and with full compassion and care for both of you.

As always with NVC, continue to check in with your heart and to connect with the other person's heart. These steps are a general guideline, but in real life may include much more back and forth.

# Self-Judgments: Mourning and Self-Compassion

1. Think of something you've done that you feel regret about. Write down what it is in observations (without judgments).
2. What are judgments you have of yourself in relation to what you've done? Write them down, as much as possible without editing.

## **Mourning:**

3. How do you feel in relation to what you did? Notice and note both emotions and physical sensations in your body.
4. What needs of yours were not met?
5. Take a moment to breathe and check in with yourself. Do you notice more judgments? If yes, write them down.
6. Again, identify feelings and needs behind these judgments. Pause each time you identify a feeling or a need to experience it as much as possible.

## **Self-Compassion:**

7. Now shift your attention to the needs you were trying to meet when you did the thing you've regretted. Write them down and spend time connecting with them. You may also recall feelings from that time.
8. How do you feel as you notice the needs you were trying to meet? Again, connect as much as you can with both emotions and physical sensations.
9. Take a moment to breathe and check in with yourself again. How are you feeling now? What needs are met or not met in this moment?
10. Do you have any requests of yourself at this moment that may support you in meeting your needs?
11. If you notice any self-judgments arise, connect once again with the feelings and needs behind them. Continue to shift back and forth between mourning and self-compassion until the mourning is free from self-judgments.