

Witnessing Humanity: Summary

1. Transforming Judgments of Others

- a. Distinguishing observations from judgments
- b. Turning inward to connect with what our judgments tell us about what matters to us
- c. Suspending our belief in our stories through recognizing multiple possible interpretations
- d. Choosing the NVC interpretation: other people's actions point to their needs
- e. Opening our hearts to the beauty of human needs

2. The Gift of Presence

- a. Focus: connection with person we are with (e.g. not multi-tasking)
- b. Purpose: Clarity of purpose for being present
- c. Determination: Staying present despite triggers, intensity, or challenge
- d. Gentleness: care and tenderness in responding
- e. Honesty: About our experience and authentic capacity for focus, purpose, determination, and gentleness

3. Staying Present in the Face of Intensity and Distress

4. Opening to others being exactly where they are without being attached to contributing to them feeling better

5. Discerning when to respond verbally and when to rely on our non-verbal presence

6. Responding with empathy instead of sympathy, identification, reassurance, advice giving, and fixing

7. Deepening empathy skills for increased effectiveness in being with others

Consciousness: Transforming Judgments and Enemy Images

KEYS:

- a. Judging someone is an indication that a need of ours is not met. The first step in transforming judgments is to recognize and connect with our unmet needs.
 - b. The action we're judging is itself an attempt to meet needs. The second step is connecting with the needs of the person we're judging so we can open our hearts with compassion.
 - c. When we experience challenge in transforming our judgments, we can reflect on what needs we might be trying to meet by holding on to our judgments. Connecting with this set of needs may be essential to enable the previous two steps to proceed.
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1. Write down a judgment you have of someone else that you would like to explore. This may be something you think about that person that you completely believe is true.

 2. Think of a time or situation when you are likely to have this judgment come up, and write an observation of what this person is actually doing at that time.

 3. What needs of yours are not met in relation to that person's action? How do you feel when these needs are not met? Explore this sufficiently to experience the relief of self-connection.

 4. Explore the possibility of opening your heart to this other person. What needs do you imagine this person might be trying to meet by taking this action? How might this person be feeling? Explore this sufficiently to experience the relief of compassion.

 5. Check in with yourself about your original judgment. Is it still alive? If yes, return to connecting with your own needs or with the other person's needs - wherever you're experiencing a "charge." If the judgment is still alive after that, consider: What needs might you be trying to meet by holding on to

this judgment? What feelings arise in relation to this? Again, connect with yourself sufficiently about these needs to experience some relief.

6. Check in with yourself again about the judgment. If it's still alive, consider the following set of questions:
 - a. Is there any way in which you believe the judgment to be "the truth"? If so, explore what needs might be met by this belief, and what needs might be met by letting go of this belief.
 - b. Are you afraid to express this judgment? If yes, what needs are you afraid would not be met by sharing it, and what needs might be met?
 - c. Are you judging yourself for having this judgment? If yes, explore any way in which you're telling yourself that you should not have this judgment. Connect with your choice about whether or not to work any further on transforming this judgment, and explore any needs that might be met by continuing to work on transforming the judgment, or letting go of working on it. (You may also want to work with the "Transforming Self Judgments" worksheet.)
 - d. Reflect on your feelings, needs, and any requests you have of yourself or of the other person in this moment.

Deepening Empathy Skills

(Selections from the full document)

II. 1. Empathy vs. Sympathy and Identification

We distinguish between *empathy*, which is focused on the other person, and *sympathy* and *identification*, which shift the focus back to us.

When in sympathy, we are focused on our feelings about what is going on with the other person (even if those feelings are ones of care and concern).

When in identification, we are focused on our similar experiences, feelings, or needs.

Neither sympathy nor identification are wrong; we are simply distinguishing between them and what we're referring to as empathy in NVC. Both sympathy and identification can serve to open our hearts, but are unlikely to serve the same depth of connection and healing that empathic connection serves.

Journal - Empathy vs. Sympathy and Identification

- 1) Can you identify a time when you offered sympathy or were identifying, instead of empathizing?
- 2) 🛎 Explore - what was going on in you? What were your feelings and needs?
- 3) Were you meeting your need for contribution? If yes, what needs were met for the other person?
- 4) What might have been a few lines of empathy that you might have offered in the situation?
- 5) 🛎 Reflecting on your experience with this journal, what feelings and needs do you connect with? Do you have any insights or learnings that you want to document or explore further?
- 6) Do you have any requests of yourself in connection with this experience?

III. 2. Meeting Intensity

When we are with someone who is experiencing or expressing some form of emotional intensity, many of us feel some discomfort. Our habit is usually to want to get the other person *out* of the intensity, and/or to focus on getting the person to "feel better." Yet, more often than not, what is most helpful to someone in distress is simply the spacious presence of another.

You may have experienced this yourself. What do you long for when you have intense feelings? Have you ever longed to be met with spacious presence? To have the opportunity to fully express the intensity, without trying to "feel better" or suppress any of the intensity? Few of us have had the experience of being welcomed in the fullness of our emotions when growing up, or even as adults.

Accordingly, the most significant aspect of meeting intensity is the capacity to remain present and calm, so we can shift into a stance of simply witnessing the humanity of the other's expression. In addition to cultivating presence, we may want to work on our capacity for matching the energy (section III.8) and on the balance between verbal and non-verbal empathy (section III.5)

Journal - Meeting Intensity

- 1) Remember or imagine a time when you have experienced challenge or discomfort about being in empathic space with a person expressing intensity.
- 2) What thoughts or other reactions contributed to your challenge or discomfort?
- 3) 🛎 What are the feelings and needs expressed in your reaction? Take a moment to connect in full with the needs that lead you *away* from presence.
- 4) 🛎 Are there needs that would be met by increasing your presence with this person? What feelings arise when you imagine staying present?
- 5) Any requests of yourself?

III. 5. Pacing and Silence

There is no "rule" about how many empathy guesses to make and with what frequency. By starting from opening our heart and focusing on the present moment, we can develop sensitivity to what is wanted by a particular person at a particular moment.

When we focus on the quality of connection in the present moment, we might find that we often don't need to make many verbal empathy guesses. We can offer our full presence, and make verbal guesses if and when they contribute to connection. With other people we might find that the verbal guesses greatly contribute to a sense of connection and support, and that the person gets lost without the verbal connection.

When the other person is actually connecting with emotions, we can notice whether verbal empathy becomes distracting from self-connection or contributes to it, and adjust our pacing accordingly. In particular, if we notice that we are uncomfortable with silence, we can consider exploring this discomfort during our own empathy time so we can be more fully present when we offer empathy to others. Getting comfortable with silence can greatly contribute to our quality of presence and connection.

Journal - Silence

Think of a time when you have offered empathy and the person was silent in response.

- 1) 🛎 What feelings arose in you? What needs were these feelings connected to?
- 2) If you experienced discomfort, consider:
 - a) Do you have any judgments about the silence (or the person)?
 - b) 🛎 If yes, what are the feelings and needs behind these judgments? Explore these until you have a sense of what might be going on for you leading to the discomfort.
- 3) Do you have any requests of yourself about how you might face this situation in the future?

8. Matching Energy

At times, though our identification of feelings and needs may accurately capture someone's experience, our empathy guess nonetheless does not click for that person. This may be because the *energy* of our guess is not matching the person's experience.

Tone of voice and body language can be crucial in supporting the other person's sense of fully being heard and understood. Another way of matching energy is to intensify our own expression by using modifying terms such as "... because you *really* want ..." or "... because you long for ... *so much*".

Journal - Matching Energy

In relation to the following statement:

"I hate it when people don't show up authentically!"

- 1) What might be your initial empathy guess?
- 2) If the person expresses with a lot of intensity, how might you match the intensity with modifying terms?
- 3) How might you use tone of voice or body language to match intensity?
- 4) 🛎 Reflecting on your experience with this journal, what feelings and needs do you connect with? Do you have any insights or learnings that you want to document or explore further?
- 5) Do you have any requests of yourself in connection with this experience?