

## **The Tao of Empathy: Four Elements of Empathic Connection** by John Kinyon

I have found the following elements very valuable in creating empathic connection:

### **Presence**

I define presence as the ability we human beings have of being aware of what is happening inside and outside of us, including witnessing our thoughts and beliefs. I see presence as a central goal of NVC, where we connect with the life and aliveness in us and others, and where we have choice about how we would like to respond to situations and internal reaction patterns, habits and social-cultural conditioning.

### **Understanding/Meaning**

This element of empathy for me is about attempting to understand someone in the way they would most like to be heard, in the language that best reflects what they are trying to communicate about what is true for them, in their world, their reality. It is the attempt to receive someone exactly where they are in terms of the meaning to them of their experience, following and supporting rather than leading and directing the language they are using to express what is alive in them.

This is not agreement. You may not agree with what someone is saying or even perceive the same reality they do. It is about demonstrating understanding and acceptance of another's subjective frame of reference, focusing our subjectivity toward that of another and attempting to articulate back to them what is true in that other's subjective world. This may involve reflecting back to the person some of their judgmental thoughts and their story, but to do this in a way that does not support the idea of an external truth or reality but rather maintaining the focus on this person's internal frame and what would help them feel heard and understood as they would like.

### **Need Language**

This element is about focusing our listening attention and verbal reflection on the needs alive in this person as they are speaking, and connecting their observations, thoughts, feelings and specific wants to their needs. It may be a matter of reflecting back the needs we are hearing in what the person is already expressing, or we as listener may want to attempt to translate their thoughts and guess the needs we are sensing.

### **Deepening into Needs**

Once we have connected with the person's needs, we could linger a bit on those needs, pausing to "savor" them with the person, either in silence or continuing to reflect the needs back, perhaps in slightly different aspects or nuances of the words that seem to resonate most strongly and deeply with the person. This is a way of making the space to help the person more deeply connect with themselves, with the life within them.