

Using Nonviolent Communication to Heal from the Events of September 11 and their Aftermath

by **Gary Baran,**

Executive Director of the
Center for Nonviolent Communication

Those who are striving to live in accordance with the principles of Nonviolent Communication™ can make a number of contributions in the aftermath of the attacks of September 11. We can help meet many needs. First, we can offer empathy—empathy both to ourselves and to others impacted by this tragedy. By doing so, we can facilitate the healing process, a process that may well take the rest of our lives. Each of us can stay connected to our own feelings and (unmet) needs that are the source of those feelings, and we can ask others: “Are you feeling frightened (and needing safety) or “...confused, and needing to understand how this could happen?” Or we can just silently and respectfully tune into what we sense others are going through, just being with them as they go through it.

We can also offer empathy to others for the joy and relief they may feel, for example when they discover their loved ones are safe, or when they witness heroic or compassionate acts that demonstrate the underlying beauty of human beings. Sharing in these celebrations of needs being met is a gift we can give.

We can remember, and offer a reminder, that each person is processing this experience in his or her own way, that it would be a mistake to assume that, at any given moment, we all feel the same about what happened. Some will be grieving for a long time, others will feel other things, for example, frustration, anger, confusion, relief, etc. We can honor this uniqueness and help avoid judgments that some feelings are better or worse, more or less appropriate, etc. Some will be laughing when others are crying. We can accept this, operate outside of the right/wrong paradigm that so often contributes to violence, and demonstrate a new way.

We can honestly express our own observations, feelings, needs and requests, confident that our vulnerability will encourage others to do the same.

We can help clarify the critical difference between the protective and the punitive use of force, so that those who understandably seek to meet their need for safety see an alternative to punitive actions that perpetuate cycles of violence.

We can use these horrific incidents as reminders of the interdependence of all life and the urgency of finding ways to meet everyone’s needs. There is an old saying that whenever any are bound, none are free. Likewise, whenever any are excluded, none are secure.

We can highlight examples of hope, signs of the underlying generosity of spirit in human beings who naturally love to give to each other and do so joyfully when they are not coerced into doing so.

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We can remind ourselves and others to take our time to connect with life-serving feelings and needs within ourselves and others before settling upon strategies to meet our needs, to be sure that our thinking is not life-alienated thinking designed to hurt others, but thinking designed to meet needs.

We can help meet the need for understanding how other people could do such awful things and why others would rejoice about the devastation. We can remind ourselves and others that all human behavior is motivated by a desire to meet needs, needs we all have, so even the most horrific actions can be understood (not condoned) as catastrophically poor strategies to meet needs. We can help raise fundamental questions such as: What needs were those who committed these horrific acts trying to meet, and why could they not see other ways to meet those needs than through wholesale destruction? What kind of pain must have driven them? How could they have become so desperate and apparently indifferent to the enormous suffering they caused? What must have happened to them to distort the basic natural care we have for our fellow human beings? How did this come about? What failures over the years have been involved and how has the U.S. contributed to this? What responsibility do we bear for this? What can be done differently to prevent such actions in the future? What kind of thinking needs to change? How can we transform thinking and language that leads to violence—dehumanizing labels, language that obscures our responsibility, demands, and the notion that people deserve to be punished—into thinking, language and action that serves life by meeting needs?

We can help in understanding the pain of those who seek revenge, who believe that evil can be eliminated from the world through new acts of violence.

We can assist people to translate enemy images into (their own) painful feelings and unmet needs, and the feelings and needs of those they have seen as enemies, thereby providing a foundation for engagement with them or those like them.

We can offer a vision for social transformation toward a system that more reliably meets the needs of all, not just a relatively small number.

We can help people formulate requests to those in power whose views and actions we oppose, thereby increasing the likelihood of the various sides hearing each other and coming to a resolution that will meet the needs of all concerned.

Gary Baran, is the executive director of the Center for Nonviolent Communication and a CNVC certified trainer. For more information about CNVC and Nonviolent Communication, visit www.cnvc.org



About Nonviolent Communication

From the bedroom to the boardroom, from the classroom to the war zone, the Nonviolent Communication (NVC) process is changing lives every day. NVC provides an easy to grasp, effective method to get to the root of conflict, violence and pain peacefully. By examining the unmet needs behind what we do or say, the NVC process helps reduce hostility, heal pain, and strengthen professional or personal relationships.

The NVC process is now being taught in corporations, classrooms, prisons and mediation centers around the globe. And it is affecting cultural shifts as institutions, corporations and governments integrate NVC consciousness into their organizational structures and their approach to leadership.

International peacemaker, mediator, author and founder of the Center for Nonviolent Communication, Dr. Marshall Rosenberg spends more than **250** days each year teaching the NVC process, including some of the most impoverished, war-torn areas of the world. More than **180** certified trainers and hundreds more teach this life-enriching process in **35** countries to approximately **250,000** people each year.

About the Center for Nonviolent Communication

The Center for Nonviolent Communication (CNVC) is an international nonprofit peacemaking organization whose vision is a world where everyone's needs are met peacefully. CNVC is devoted to supporting the spread of Nonviolent Communication training and consciousness around the world.

Access local, national and international training opportunities, download trainer certification information, connect to local NVC communities and purchase a variety of other NVC learning materials at:

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- **For the Press**—Journalists and producers can access author bios and photos, recently published articles in the media, video clips and other valuable information.
- **Help Share NVC Community Forum**—Scheduled for launch in mid-2005, the Help Share NVC Community Forum provides an online space to support the continued spread of the NVC consciousness worldwide. Join our forum today at www.ShareNVC.com