

Learning Self-Care



Let's take a look at another example from the Graduating From Guilt class. This participant felt guilty about the fact that he had needs. Universal Needs are at the heart of Nonviolent Communication, but many people grow up being told they should be selfless, generous, and charitable toward others. When these folks start learning NVC, they can feel quite guilty about having needs at all.

Step 1: Identify the Guilt

Roger was one such person. While attending the Graduating From Guilt class, he wanted to work through guilt around his new awareness that he actually had needs.

Step 2: Name the "Shoulds"

When asked to expand on the idea that he shouldn't have Needs, Roger came up with two groups of statements that seemed in opposition. The first group: "I shouldn't meet my needs at the expense of other people," "I shouldn't inconvenience or hurt others," and "I should use my talents for the good of others."

This group of needs was followed by guilt from his inner advocate, telling Roger to stick up for himself—"I should follow my bliss," and "I should be more clear and courageous about what I need and want." Just for good measure, Roger judged himself for his confusion, with "I should be able to sort through these issues more clearly."

I read Roger's list back to him, and the statement that touched him most tenderly was "I should be more clear and courageous about what I need and want."

Step 3: Connect With the Unmet Needs

I invited Roger to connect with his unmet needs by asking him, "What needs of yours are unmet when you are not clear and courageous about what you need and want?"

Roger had no problem answering. "Acceptance for my own sense of authenticity. I'm out of touch with my autonomy, creativity, self-expression, and self-empowerment. When I don't act on what I want in life, I miss out on fulfillment, joy, purpose, meaning, and direction. I really care to grow, and that need is not being met either. And if I'm not expressing myself authentically, how can anyone offer me empathy or understanding?"

Step 4: Experience the Feelings of the Unmet Needs

I captured these needs in list form and said, "I'm going to read your list back to you very slowly. I'll pause between each need so you can let each word settle into a deep place within you." We took a breath, and I continued: "Acceptance, authenticity. Autonomy, creativity, self-expression, and self-empowerment. Fulfillment, joy, purpose, meaning, and direction. Growth. Empathy and understanding. When these needs are not met, how do you feel?"

Roger replied, slowly and quietly, "Sad and tired. Also torn. Anxious and frustrated, too." We paused for a few moments so Roger could experience these feelings.

Step 5: Connect With the Positive Motivations

"Roger," I continued, "I'm quite sure that there are some beautiful needs that have kept you in the pattern of meeting other people's needs before your own. Are you ready to discover what they might be?"

“Yes, well, definitely connection. I keep a lid on my own needs because it seems an easier route to harmony, peace, and love. Not only that, but I also enjoy the nurturing and contribution when I meet other people’s needs. I see that respect is somehow involved—it’s like I respect others’ needs, and they respect my contributions. In that way, a need for acceptance is also met. Doing what others want distracts me from taking a chance on something new, so I guess that meets my needs for safety and security.”

By the end of this list, Roger seemed relaxed yet engaged.

Step 6: Check In and Make a Request

I could tell that the mourning (steps 3 and 4) and self-forgiveness (step 5) processes had worked their magic. Roger launched himself right into the final pieces in step 6—Observations, Feelings, Needs, and Requests. I wrote Roger’s words on the board.

- ✓ **OBSERVATIONS:** “When I think about doing something, and I’m not clear if it would lead to an unmet need for the other person . . .”
- ✓ **FEELINGS:** “I feel anxious and torn . . .”
- ✓ **NEEDS:** “because I need clarity.”
- ✓ **REQUESTS:** “Would I be willing to tell the other person my plan and check in with them, such as ‘I’d like to postpone our meeting until Monday. How does that affect you?’”

“It seems so simple!” Roger concluded. “It feels really good to be able to stick up for my own needs without trampling over the needs of others.”

Graduating From Guilt

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Learning Self-Care

❶ What do you feel guilty about?

I feel guilty for having needs.

❷ What are you telling yourself you should or shouldn't do?

I shouldn't meet my needs at the expense of other people.

I shouldn't inconvenience or hurt others.

I should use my talents for the good of others.

I should follow my bliss.

✓ I should be more clear and courageous about what I need and want.

I should be able to sort through these issues more clearly.

❸ What needs are not met by the choice you made?

acceptance

joy

authenticity

purpose

autonomy

meaning

creativity

direction

self-expression

growth

self-empowerment

empathy

fulfillment

understanding

4 How do you feel when you get in touch with these unmet needs?

sad

anxious

tired

frustrated

torn

5 What needs were you attempting to meet by the choice you made?

connection

contribution

harmony

respect

peace

acceptance

love

safety

nurturing

security

6 What are your Observations, Feelings, Needs, and Requests in the present moment?

O When I think about doing something, and I'm not clear if it would lead to an unmet need for the other person,

F I feel anxious and torn

N because I need clarity.

R Would I be willing to tell the other person my plan and check in with them, such as "I'd like to postpone our meeting until Monday. How does that affect you?"

If you still feel guilty, choose another should-statement and repeat steps 3–6.