

## Chapter 9. Communicating with Adults and Children in Crisis Situations

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During the trainings, teachers raised many questions about communication under wartime conditions. These questions reflected not only technical difficulties, but also deep emotional strain. Broadly, they concerned the following three areas:

### 1. Emotional coping in front of students.

Teachers asked how to speak when their own emotions were overwhelmed—for example, when discussing war-related literary works and experiencing trembling voices, choking sensations, or sudden tears.

### 2. Communicating with students

Questions focused on how to respond to apathetic or withdrawn students, how to address painful topics without causing further harm, how to communicate with adolescents under prolonged war stress, and how to bridge gaps between different generations.

### 3. Communicating with parents

Teachers described difficulties when parents misunderstood teachers' intentions, held unrealistic expectations about teachers' responsibilities, or expressed unmotivated aggression.

These questions show that communication in crisis situations cannot be reduced to technique alone. It requires emotional awareness, flexibility, and care.

### Main Ways of Communication

Communication generally takes three forms:

1. Problem solving. communication aimed at identifying a problem and finding a concrete solution. Teachers often rely on this approach because it feels practical and responsible, especially during wartime.
2. Facilitating insight. Communication that encourages awareness by observing facts, asking questions, and helping the other person reflect on their situation and feelings.

3. “Being with”. Communication that conveys the message “I am with you.” This may involve silence, calm presence, eye contact, or simply staying nearby, rather than speaking.

### Communication Styles and Misunderstandings

Differences in communication styles can easily lead to misunderstanding. Some people prefer to think things through alone before speaking, while others expect immediate discussion and emotional sharing. When these styles clash, one side may feel pressured, while the other feels ignored or dismissed.

Teachers may unintentionally push for answers in the belief that this is responsible behavior, while the other person experiences it as overwhelming. Recognizing these differences allows teachers to shift their approach and reduce unnecessary conflict.

Gender differences in communication also exists. For example, ‘Husbands on the run and wives in pursuit’. Men, because of the education they have received and their need to be ‘masculine’, cannot discuss casually and prefer a style where they think things through on their own before declaring to others, which they consider to be a responsible and considerate approach. Women, on the other hand, find it irresponsible, unfair and irritating. We should therefore also make effective use of insight facilitating and 'being with'. One way to do this is through NVC.

### Nonviolent Communication (NVC)

Nonviolent Communication (NVC), developed by Marshall Rosenberg, is a framework that has been widely used in conflict and crisis settings. It is particularly helpful under harsh conditions, where emotional resources are limited.

The key elements of NVC can be summarized as follows:

1. Core orientation: compassion offered from the heart

2. Common obstacles: moralizing, judging, comparing people, blaming others for one's discomfort, and forcing one's own desires

3. Four elements of communication: observation, feelings, needs, and requests

1) Observation

Observation means describing what is happening without evaluation or judgment. This distinction is difficult but essential. For example, saying "You are irresponsible" is an evaluation, whereas saying "You did not submit your homework as promised" describes an observable fact. Learning to separate observation from evaluation requires practice, and mistakes are part of the learning process.

\* Observation or evaluation (exercise).

Evaluation: "You are irresponsible." ✕

Observation: "You did not hand in your homework as promised." ✓

Evaluation: "He has always been apathetic in class recently." ✕

Observation: "He often looked down or away during class. Occasionally, he raised his eyes, but he did not make eye contact with me." ✓

Evaluation: "He is a selfish person." ✕

Observation: "He made the decision alone this time, without consulting us about what was important to us." ✓

2) Feelings and 3) Needs

Expressing feelings may feel uncomfortable or embarrassing, yet it often reduces conflict. NVC emphasizes that feelings arise not directly from others' actions, but from unmet needs. For instance, anger when someone is late may reflect a need for respect or a desire not to waste time.

When teachers receive negative messages, they may instinctively blame themselves or blame the other person. NVC encourages another option: noticing one's own feelings and needs, and, when possible, recognizing the feelings and needs behind the other person's words.

\* Express feelings (exercises).

The following examples show the difference between evaluating the other person and expressing one's own feelings.

Evaluation: "You hate me." ✕

Feeling: "I feel sad and deeply hurt." ✓

Evaluation: "When you were silent, I felt neglected." ✕

Feeling: "When you were silent, I felt lonely and worried." ✓

Evaluation: "I am misunderstood by you." ✕

Feeling: "I feel disappointed when I hear you say that." ✓

#### 4) Requests

A genuine request respects the other person's autonomy and allows refusal. The purpose of a request is not to control behavior, but to build connection and trust. Requests are most effective when they focus on specific, observable actions rather than abstract traits.

\* Express requests (exercises).

The purpose of a request in Nonviolent Communication is not to control the other person, but to create connection and mutual understanding. A genuine request is concrete, doable, and leaves room for the other person's choice.

Request (respecting autonomy):

"I have expectations of you, but I want to respect your wishes." ✓

Evaluation / Abstract demand:

“I want you to be more confident.” ✕

Concrete request:

“I would like you to speak up in front of other students.” ✓

Vague or coercive request:

“I want you to tell me the honest truth about today’s meeting.” ✕

Clear and specific request:

“Could you tell me what you thought about what I said at the meeting, and if there is anything you would like to see changed?” ✓

Empathy: Listening With Presence

Empathy has strong healing power. Empathy means to empty your mind and listen with your whole being. Not having to do anything, just being there. Listening to the other person's experience with respect (Rosenberg, 2012).

Teachers also learned that when it feels difficult to empathize with others, it may be because their own need for empathy is unmet. Briefly acknowledging one’s own pain or taking a short pause can make it easier to be present again.

How to empathize? Pay attention to all the other person's messages. Give the person enough time and space to express themselves to their satisfaction and to feel understood. Do not encourage or give advice (as this can be frustrating for the other person). Empathize with their 'no' or silence. It is important for the listener to know what is really happening inside the other person (feelings and needs) and to be with them.

Barriers to empathy: giving advice (intellectual understanding), superciliousness, comforting, commiserating, self-talk, cutting the conversation short, correcting mistakes, interrogating ('when did it start').

What to do when it's hard for you to empathize?

The cause of the unwillingness to empathize with others often includes the fact that one's own desire for empathy with others is not being fulfilled. Countermeasures are.

- 1) Confide in the other person that you cannot empathize with them because of your pain. This may help the other person to empathize with you.
- 2) (Emergency measures) Empathize with yourself. Listen to your inner self and know what is happening inside you. Then, conversely, you can better hear what is happening outside, and in just a few seconds your energy will naturally be released, and you will be able to be there for others.
- 3) (Emergency measures) Once physically gone.

5, Express your anger

Stop and take a deep breath → realize what you are assuming → know your needs → empathize with the other person and express that your feelings and needs are not being met.

6, Communicate with yourself: caring for yourself too.

When we fail, instead of reprimanding ourselves, we find clues to growth by following a process of grieving (looking back on the past, grieving and knowing our needs) and forgiving ourselves (sympathizing and accepting both our regret for our past behaviour and the self that made us take that behaviour).

Transform yourself out of a genuine desire to contribute to the wellbeing of others and yourself.