

“Compassionate Connection: Attachment Parenting And Nonviolent Communication”

by Inbal Kashtan (edited by KK for length and most references to attachment parenting since that is not why I'm quoting this article. For full version of article, visit the "Articles" section of www.cnvc.com)

We... want our son to develop the resources to care for himself and to meet his needs effectively. We also want him to be deeply connected to himself and to others, to become interdependent as well as independent.

...

How do we deal with a two year old when he grabs every toy his friend plays with? What do we say to a four year old who screams in rage when her baby brother cries? How do we talk with a ten year old about the chores he has left undone, again? What strategies will keep our teenager open with us—and safe?

Nonviolent Communication (NVC), sometimes referred to as Compassionate Communication, offers a powerful approach, ... a process for connecting deeply with ourselves and others, and for creating social change, NVC has been used worldwide in intimate family settings as well as in organizations, schools, prisons, and war-torn countries.

...Two key premises [of NVC]:

1. Human actions are motivated by attempts to meet needs, and
2. Trusting relationships are built through attentiveness to those needs.

...Instead of focusing on authority and discipline, ... NVC provide[s] theoretical and practical grounds for nurturing compassionate, powerful, and creative children who will have resources to contribute to a peaceful society.

human needs and human actions

...NVC shifts attention away from judgments about our own and others' actions (as manipulative, wrong, bad, inappropriate—or even good), focusing instead on our own and others' feelings and needs. (See bottom of page, “The Steps of NVC.”)

Consider the following common situation. A child, Anna, leaves her clothes and toys strewn about the house. Dad may reprimand, remind, offer incentives, or punish. These tactics may or may not lead to the immediate outcome he intends. They will, however, likely result in unwanted long-term outcomes, such as hindering Anna's intrinsic desire to keep her home orderly and impairing the sense of connection and trust in the family.

Anna's mom may choose to say nothing out of confusion about what might work. Not getting her needs met, and lacking trust that her needs even matter to Anna, Mom might feel resentful and frustrated. The relationship is again impaired, and Anna loses the opportunity to practice finding solutions that will work for everybody—a powerful skill she needs in order to live in harmony with others.

NVC offers parents two key options that foster connection:

1. empathy for others' feelings and needs, and
2. expression of one's own.

In this situation, Dad can guess—and thus connect with—Anna's deeper feelings and needs. He can ask, “Are you excited because you want to play?” Or, “Are you annoyed because you want to choose what to do with your space?” Often, simply shifting to an empathic guess of the

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child's feelings and needs eases the parent's reaction. Dad no longer sees Anna as an obstacle to getting his needs met; rather, he is ready to connect with this other human being.

For Anna, having the experience of being understood may nurture her willingness to listen to Dad's feelings and needs and to contribute to their fulfillment.

Mom may choose to express her own emotions. She may start with an observation: "I see clothes, books, markers, and toys on the living room floor." The observation, instead of an interpretation or judgment ("The house is a mess"), can make a tremendous difference in Anna's readiness to hear Mom's perspective.

Then, when Mom follows with her feelings and needs instead of going immediately to a solution, she humanizes herself to Anna: "I feel frustrated because I enjoy order in the house." Mom clearly expresses that her feelings are caused by her own unmet needs, not by Anna's actions, thereby taking full responsibility for her feelings and for meeting her needs. She continues with a doable request: "Would you be willing to pick up your things and put them in their places?" Or if she wants to explore the broader pattern: "Would you be willing to talk with me about how we can meet your needs for play and choice and my need for order?"

Even if Anna were not willing to talk at that moment, her parents could continue to use empathy and expression until mutually satisfying strategies were found—in that moment or over time. In fact, one of the most profoundly connecting moments in relationships can occur when one person says, "No" and the other empathizes with what that person is implicitly saying "Yes" to: "When you say you don't want to talk about this, is it because you want more confidence that I care about your needs?"

Every interaction we have with our children contains messages about who they are, who we are, and what life is like. The parent who takes a toy away from a toddler who just took it from another child while saying: "No grabbing," teaches her child that grabbing is okay—for those with more power. The parent who unilaterally imposes a curfew implies that his teenager can't be trusted to make thoughtful decisions about his life. Instead, in both words and actions, a parent could convey three key things: I want to understand the needs that led to your actions, I want to express to you the feelings and needs that led to mine, and I want to find strategies that will meet both of our needs.