

# Couples Handout

## Needs Language

Marshall Rosenberg talks about needs in his book NonViolent Communication.

Feel free to give us a call after you read this. Everyone could benefit from polishing their language, the way they communicate, their verbal precision. Give Michelle, the Office Manager, a call at 585.544.5342 and let's have you get results in an atmosphere that doesn't favor one person over the other. Both feel comfortable and safe to grow.

Conflict often involves anger, so let's investigate and be curious about what is underneath anger.

He writes that unmet needs are often what is under anger. We can focus on the anger or meeting needs. Just matter of fact...

### **How do you do that?**

**Think about what you need instead of telling your partner how they messed up.**

*This handout has a bunch of needs that you might not have even known you have. We all have needs.*

We may pretend we don't have these needs and that warps communication.

We might wish we didn't have to rely on others to help us meet needs based on past experiences of disappointment. We might see ourselves as the helper, not the one who needs others. We might see ourselves as the rock and we made a vow to never have needs, as if that is possible.

*Consider your audience. Always a good idea before you speak.*

Some people don't know what they are going to say until it comes out of their mouth and they have to practice this, just like any other skill that requires practice.

If I complain, will they be able to hear it or will they see me as attacking and therefore defend themselves? If I say that I have a need and want their assistance meeting a need, they are more likely to hear it as an opportunity to shine for you.

Will they better hear your need or that they are a horrible person who doesn't care about you?

**Most partners want to make their partner happy.**

They feel satisfied and confident and content that they know how to make their partners happy. They want to make their partner happy. *The brainwashing for some of us is that if our partner is not happy, we are somehow bad people.* “It is my fault that my partner is not happy,” is a common idea mistakenly taught to people.

Help your partner with this.

**When you tell your partner what you need, you help them succeed.** That way they feel better and you feel better.

When you appreciate and thank them for meeting the need, they feel better and because you're focusing on gratitude you feel better. Everyone wins. Win-win is the goal.

## Healthy Example

“I really want you to understand me. Can I ask you to listen to understand me? I don't need you to play devil's advocate, or fix me because I am not broken. I just really need you to listen to me so that you understand where I'm coming from. That's a basic human need that I have right now. Thank you for doing that for me.”

Some people are highly successful when they understand how you work, your context, your owner's manual. They want to help you and support you and are guessing how to do so. Take away the guesswork.

## Healthy Examples

“I just need to connect right now. I am feeling lonely and sad. I could really use connection right now. How I would like to connect is...”

“I would really like to just hold each other on the couch while we watch TV or a movie. The show doesn't matter. I just need human connection and physical affection. I don't mean sex- I mean just holding and feeling safe in your arms. I want to feel emotionally safe with you, and being in your arms really connect me to you. If you want to be sexual another time, that would be better than trying to be sexual just because we are touching now. I need to know we can touch and I can ask for touch without being obligated to be sexual.”

“I see that you are hurting and want to support you. Is there something you need from me?”

“I'm angry at you and then I see you are also suffering. Seeing you as someone who is also hurting, I let down my walls. You're not bad, I'm just mad. I can see the little child in you when I see your pain. I, too, have a hurt and scared child inside sometimes.”

## Verbal precision

“I am feeling neglected” is me **accusing** you of doing something.

*“Neglect” is not a feeling.*

It’s an accusation that you did not do what I wanted you to do.

How did you feel when you told yourself that your partner was rejecting you?  
Answer that question with a one word feeling word. That is how you really felt. That is very precise, no ambiguity, no guesswork.

**Do the same for other accusations** and correct your speech.

I feel attacked

I feel rejected

Accused

Blamed

Criticized

Abused

Belittled

Harassed

Disliked

Abandoned

Betrayed

Bullied

All of these are accusations- you are telling them what they did, not how you felt. Tricky, this language thing...

**Help partner express (not spew) pain and hurt better and more precisely with multiple repetitions.**

“I feel \_\_\_\_\_” is an example of **expressing** a feeling.

“You are a ...” is you **spewing** the feeling rather than directly expressing it. The feeling is in there somewhere and you can find it if you search. Too much guesswork and **no one likes being sneezed on. That is what it feels like when someone spews an emotion.**

We are usually better, more practiced at expressing positive emotions.

“I have the right to feel and express feelings.”

“I have a responsibility to not spew. “

Not attack or criticize

Move towards expressing -not harassing or nitpicking or *defining reality for your partner.*

“You are doing this because you ....” Is rarely going to be helpful.

**Avoid these statements because they are harmful:**

“You do it, too”

“What about what you do?”

Ask instead, “How can we improve the situation?”

**I am opening my heart to what is alive in both you and me:**

## **Two basic options when we are talking about feelings**

### **1. Empathy**

“Are you feeling— (put one word here- an emotion, not a feeling or judgment) because you need— (look through the basic needs)?  
Would you like me to—(can you anticipate what your partner might need based on similar situations in the past? If not, tell them you would like to help and are unsure what you can do to help.)“

### **2. Self-expression**

“When I see/hear— (fill in the blank with what the event was that brought up your feelings),  
I feel— (fill in the blank with one word-a feeling, not an accusation or thought) because I need— (if you are unsure what you need, please learn what the basic needs are and prompt yourself. It is my job to know what I want. You can help me, but that is my responsibility.)

Would you be willing to— (ask for what you need. This can be hard for people trained to not do this. Then get out of the way and allow yourself to receive. If you do not ask for your need to be met, you are asking them to mind-read or guess. Take away guesswork for the healthiest relationship.)”

## **Another Healthy Model**

I need:

I might poorly have expressed it initially:

I will more directly express my feelings:

I feel (one or more of the following)

*Now you try it*

**I need:** (choose one of the following)

Nurturing (I know you are not my mom)

Connection

Support

Belonging

Caring

**When I express my need poorly, it might sound like:**

"I feel abandoned"

**I will more directly express my feelings:**

I feel (one or more of the following) terrified, hurt, sad, bewildered, frightened, lonely

**Try again** -practice, rehearse. Chances are good that you will use most of these in your lifetime. Try them on and get good at expressing yourself so that your partner has less guesswork. Imagine yourself approaching your partner with these words and feel the feelings that go with it. Rehearse telling them what you need. Try ten repetitions per feeling and watch how it comes out more naturally when you do it in real life.

**I need:**

Choose one- caring, nurturing, support, emotional safety, physical safety, consideration

**I might poorly have expressed it initially:** I feel abused (which is an evaluation, judgment and accusation- not a feeling. I can't "feel " abused because that word is not an emotion.)

**I will more directly express my feelings:** angry, frustrated, frightened

**Try again** and practice it, not just reading. Reading it, without practicing it is not an effective approach.

**I need:**

One or more of the following needs goes with the sense of abuse  
inclusion, community, belonging, contribution, respect

**I might poorly have expressed it initially:** unaccepted

**I will more directly express my feelings:** Scared, lonely, hurt, anxious

*Same model, different need*

I need: Safety, consideration

I might poorly have expressed it initially: I feel attacked (attacked is not an emotion- it is an evaluation of what I experienced, a judgment, an accusation or criticism)

I will more directly express my feelings: I felt scared, angry, defiant, hostile (or a combination of those)

***You are getting the pattern, right? We often express it poorly, catch ourselves, look for what the needs and feelings are.*** We get second chances to do it right. "Can we do this again? I think I know how to do this better."

I need: Respect, autonomy, seen for true self, acknowledgement, appreciation

I might poorly have expressed it initially: I feel belittled

I will more directly express my feelings: Angry, frustrated, tense, distressed

***How many repetitions are necessary before we hit mastery*** and really own the skill? I am not going to make you do it 10,000 times- that is up to you. How good do you want to be with communication?

I need: Trust, dependability, honesty, honor, commitment, clarity

I might poorly have expressed it initially: I feel betrayed

I will more directly express my feelings: Angry, hurt, disappointed, enraged

## **A few more examples**

You know how to do this and how to be successful. Keep practicing and watch what happens with getting your needs met.

I need: fairness, justice, Accountability, causality

I might poorly have expressed it initially: blamed

I will more directly express my feelings: hurt, Angry, scared, confused, antagonistic, hostile, bewildered

I need: autonomy, safety, choice, consideration

I might poorly have expressed it initially: I felt bullied

I will more directly express my feelings: I feel Angry, scared, pressured

I need: reliability, Honesty, fairness, justice, trust.

I might poorly have expressed it initially: I feel cheated (I accuse you of cheating me- is not a feeling)

I will more directly express my feelings: Resentful, hurt, angry

I need: understanding, acknowledgement, recognition, accountability, respectful communication

I might poorly have expressed it initially: I felt Criticized (I am judging you, evaluating- not expressing emotions)

I will more directly express my feelings: in pain, scared, anxious, understanding, frustrated, humiliated, angry, embarrassed

I need: inclusion, Connection, appreciation, understanding, acknowledgment, friendship

I might poorly have expressed it initially: I feel disliked

I will more directly express my feelings: Sad, lonely, hurt

\*Keep this handy, copy and paste to the "notes" section of your phone so you always have it accessible.



## ***More needs words***

### **TRANSCENDENCE**

Presence  
Inspiration  
Evolution  
Beauty  
Harmony  
Flow  
space

### **WELL-BEING**

Healing  
Peace of Mind  
Ease  
Trust  
Space

### **HONESTY**

Authenticity  
Self-Connection  
Self-Expression  
Clarity  
Learning

### **AUTONOMY**

Freedom  
choice  
Creativity  
empowerment  
Power with

### **REGENERATION**

Celebration  
Gratitude  
Mourning  
Leisure  
PRay

### **EMPATHY**

Understanding  
Connection  
Love  
Acceptance  
Compassion

## **INTERDEPENDENCE**

Cooperation  
Community  
inclusion  
Mutuality  
Support

## **MEANING**

Purpose  
Contribution  
Competence  
Integrity

## **SURVIVAL**

Sustenance  
Nurturance  
Procreation  
Sensory Stimulation

## **PROTECTION**

Security  
Safety  
Justice  
Respect  
Consideration

## **Needs:**

1. Resources required to sustain and enrich life
2. Needs are universal.
3. Needs make no reference to any specific person doing any specific thing.
4. Key Distinction: Need vs. Strategy

Inspired by the work of Marshall Rosenberg. Ph.D. and Manfred Max-Neef PhD