



SOUTH CAROLINA
CENTER *of*
EXCELLENCE *in*
ADDICTION

Best Practices for Community
Action Planning: An
Introduction to Non-Violent
Communication

Phillip M. Wilder, PhD

Jodi Manz, MSW

Tuesday, March 25, 2025



Welcome and Housekeeping

- Please keep your lines muted
- Feel free to put questions in the chat box, or hold them for Q & A at the end of the presentation
- Slides will be posted to www.addictioncenterofexcellence.sc.gov

South Carolina for South Carolina

The Center of Excellence in
Addiction is a collaboration of
state agencies and universities
that is **maximizing**
South Carolina's **opioid** and
addiction knowledge and
resources.



Center of Excellence Goals

| | |
|--------|--|
| Goal 1 | Create innovative approaches to addressing SUD/ODU in South Carolina through research and evidence. |
| Goal 2 | Increase knowledge of opioid abatement and OUD/SUD mitigation strategies among South Carolina's county and municipal leaders and their partners. |
| Goal 3 | Improve access to evidence-based SUD/ODU treatment across South Carolina. |
| Goal 4 | Create sustainable infrastructure. |

Importance of Strategizing for Community Engagement



Consensus building



Community Action
Planning



Needs Assessments



Coalition
development and
progress



Navigating
implementation

Today's Speaker



Phillip M. Wilder, PhD.
Associate Professor of Literacy,
Clemson University

Objectives

By the end of the webinar participants will:

- Understand how Non-Violent Communication (NVC) provides a tool for community action planning that addresses a current “crisis of connection” and empathy gap within communities facing SUD/ODU.
- Understand the four components of Non-Violent Communication and communication practices that impede interpersonal/intrapersonal connection.
- Learn NVC practices for cultivating greater interpersonal/intrapersonal connection within their spheres of influence including Community Action Planning Committees.

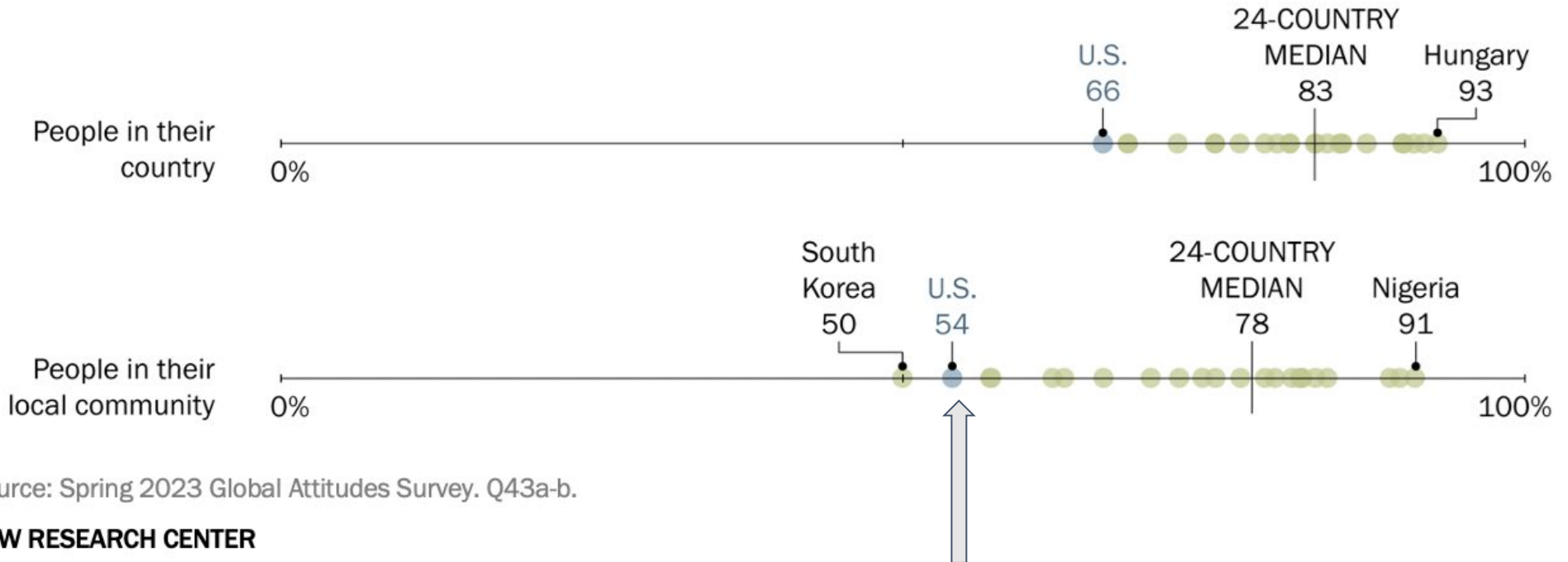
A Crisis of Connection

- Way et al. (2018) described a “**crisis of connection**” where people are increasingly disconnected from themselves and others resulting in alienation, isolation, and decreased empathy.
- 39% of American youth experience “persistent sadness or hopelessness” (up from 26% in 2009) and have the highest rates (62%) of anxiety and depression (NIH, 2019).
- 36% of all adults reported feeling lonely “frequently” or “almost all the time or all the time” in the prior month and 51% of mothers with young children reported chronic degrees of loneliness (Weissbourd, et al., 2021).

Americans are less likely than others around the world to feel close to people in their country or community

Comparatively few Americans feel close to others in their country, community

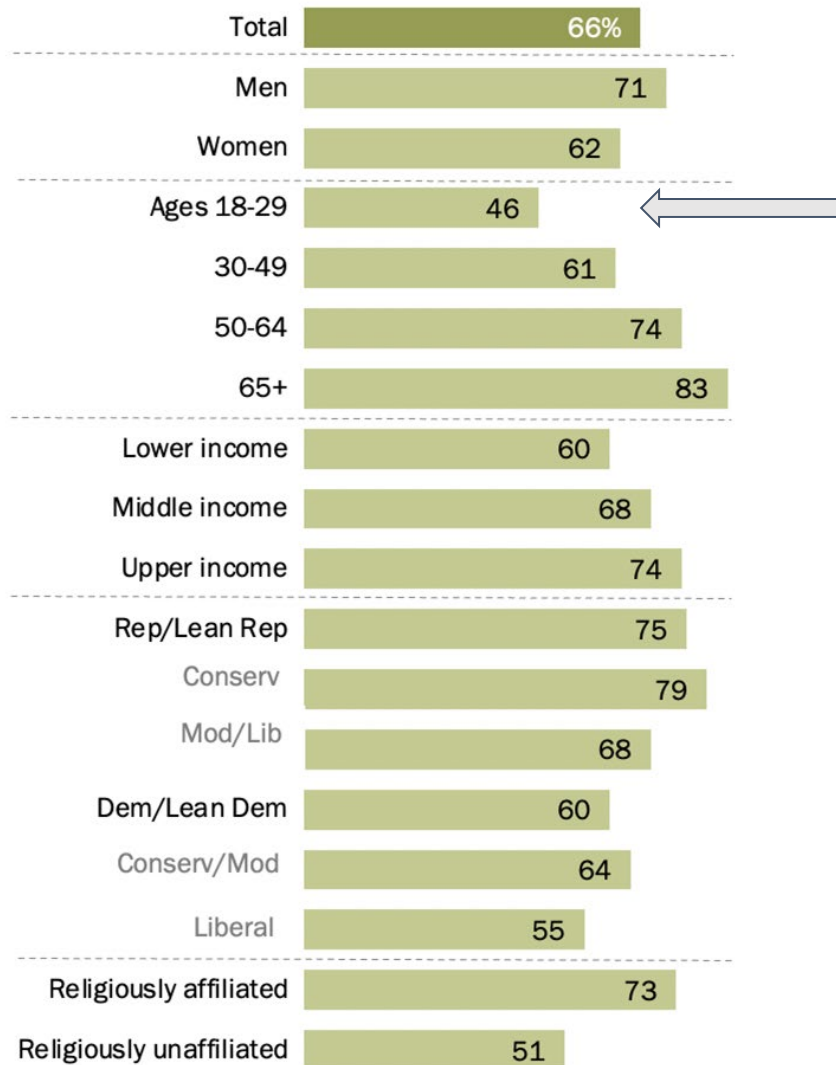
*% who say they feel **very/somewhat close** to ...*



Source: Spring 2023 Global Attitudes Survey. Q43a-b.

Fewer than half of U.S. adults under 30 feel close to other Americans

% of U.S. adults who feel close to other Americans

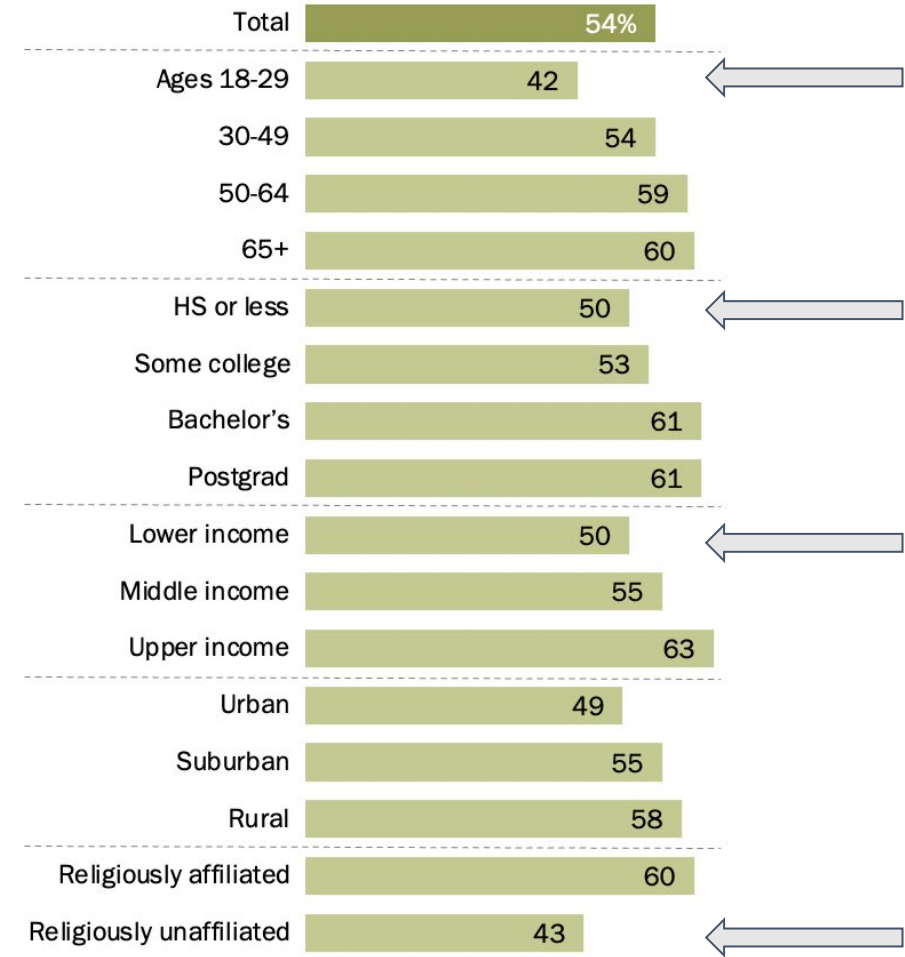


Source: Spring 2023 Global Attitudes Survey. Q43b.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Americans differ by age, education and other factors in feeling close to other people in their community

% of U.S. adults who feel close to people in their local community



Source: Spring 2023 Global Attitudes Survey. Q43a.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Empathy Gap



Opinion
Jennifer Rubin

We are suffering from an empathy gap, but we can fix it

February 15, 2023

That's not just me talking. Extensive research on empathy has measured its decline. A landmark study in 2010 found that Americans were less empathetic than their counterparts 30 years earlier:

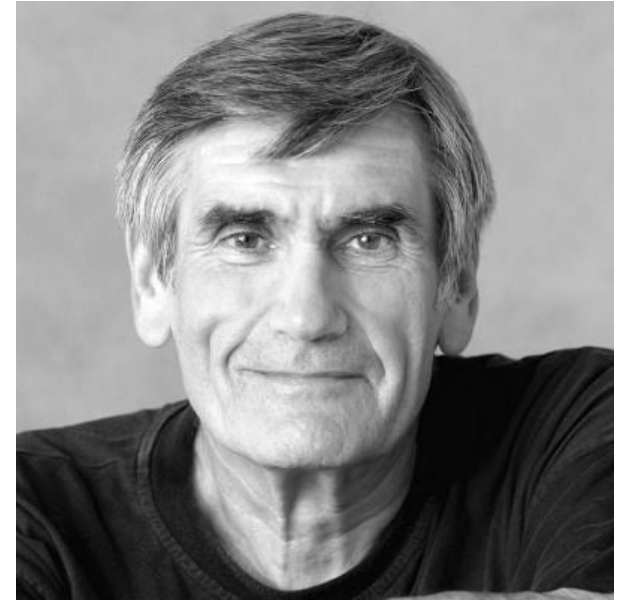
The authors examined the responses of nearly 14,000 students who had completed a questionnaire measuring different types of empathy. The results show that the average level of “empathic concern,” meaning people’s feelings of sympathy for the misfortunes of others, declined by 48 percent between 1979 and 2009; the average level of “perspective taking,” people’s tendencies to imagine others’ points of view, declined by 34 percent over the same period. There was a particularly steep decline between 2000 and 2009.

Empathy and Substance Use Disorder

- Only a handful of studies have considered the relationship between empathy and SUD (Le Berre, 2019), but in those few studies, stimulant users, polydrug users, and those with alcohol use disorder **all show diminished empathy** (McCown, 1990; Massey et al., 2018; Robinson et al., 2018).
- Individuals with SUD may devalue the consequences of use on the welfare of their families and continue to use without regard to the pain and distress their actions are causing others (Robinson et al., 2018).
- Deficits in empathy may not only be a consequence of SUD but **may be a precursor to the development of an addiction** (Massey et al., 2018).

Nonviolent Communication

- Nonviolent communication (Rosenberg, 1999) provides a framework for interpersonal connection through *speaking honestly* and *empathetic listening*.
- “The purpose of Nonviolent Communication is to create and maintain quality of connection where everyone’s needs matter.”
- All humans share *universal needs* with every human action an effort to consciously or unconsciously meet needs.
- All violence is a tragic expression of *unmet needs*.
- NVC advocates using four components during discourse: a focus on *observations, feelings, needs, and requests*.



Dr. Marshall Rosenberg was an American psychologist, mediator, author and teacher.

Disconnective Communication at a Collaborative Meeting

Sara: You are wasting our time here because, I know you're new here, but the city has been delaying the delivery of resources for the second straight month. People are in harm's way and apparently the city thinks we have all the time in the world.

Joe: The city doesn't give me any options. And, you know we don't have endless resources, right?

Sara: You really don't have to tell me how things work around here. This isn't my first year. And, while we sit trying to figure out why the city doesn't care anymore, lives are being lost.

Joe: Until the city council processes the spending, I can't do much, Sara. You know, not everyone agrees to giving out free syringes and medicine. So, being pushy with me isn't gonna work.

Sara: Well people who have great health care and are born with resources surely don't need to be pushy. Those of us trying to actually serve the community need to be pushy or nothing gets done.

Sara has directed a Non-Profit for the past 21 years and currently advocates for harm reduction practices.

Joe is a 1st year city assistant administrator who was just appointed to the collaborative group by the mayor's office.

Life-Alienating Communication

“Every conflict is a great opportunity to either get closer to, or to move further from, another person.”

“Most of us grew up speaking a language that encourages us to label, compare, demand, and pronounce judgements rather than be aware of what we are feeling and needing.”

“Analysis of others are actually expressions of our own needs and values.”

“Thinking based on ‘who deserves what’ blocks compassionate communication.”



Life-Alienating Communication

Our communication can separate us from our *natural state of compassion*, promote disconnection, and contribute to behaving violently towards each other and to ourselves.

- 1. Moralistic Judgements:** imply wrongness by those who don't act in alignment with our values; (i.e. “**The city doesn't care anymore**” or “**being pushy with me isn't gonna work**”); Not same as *value judgements* which are qualities we desire in life (i.e. honesty, freedom).
- 2. Making Comparisons:** a form of judgement rooted in self-criticism which blocks compassion for self and others; (i.e. “**Those of us trying to actually serve**”)
- 3. Denial of Responsibility:** our language obscures awareness that we are each responsible for our thoughts, words and actions (i.e. “**You are wasting our time here**” or “**The city doesn't give me any options**”)

“If you are willing to look at another person’s behavior towards you as a reflection of the state of their relationship with themselves rather than a statement about your value as a person, you will, over a period of time, cease to react at all.”

—Yogi Bhanjan



Do You Want to Be Right or Do You Want to Be Connected?

Four Components of Non-Violent Communication

| Expression | Empathy |
|--|---|
| Observation <i>When I see/hear . . .</i> | [Observation] <i>[When you see/hear . . .]</i> |
| Feeling <i>I feel . . .</i> | Feeling <i>Are you feeling . . .</i> |
| Need <i>Because I need . . .</i> | Need <i>Because you need . . .</i> |
| Request <i>Would you be willing...?</i> | [Request] <i>[Would you like...?]</i> |

Observation (vs Evaluation)

Use of our senses to separate specific observations (“I saw...” or “I heard...”) from evaluations.

“When we combine observation and evaluation, people are apt to hear criticism” (Rosenberg, 2015, p.26)

Judgements/Evaluations are often rooted in stories about our self and the other as we desire to explain why something occurred.

NVC doesn't mandate we refrain from judging/evaluating but that we maintain a conscious separation between the two.



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Feelings (vs Thinking)

Feelings are energy connected to an experience illuminating our met or unmet needs.

“Our repertoire of words for calling people names is often larger than our vocabulary of words to clearly describe our emotional states” (Rosenberg, 2015, p.37)

Instead of independently creating a story about why something happened, allowing ourselves to feel and express our feelings with others can help resolve conflicts.

NVC distinguishes feelings from thoughts about feelings or our interpretation of others (i.e. “I feel like a failure” or “I feel ignored”)



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FEELING

When my needs are met:

- expanded
- amazed
- cheerful
- content
- curios
- delighted
- enthusiastic
- exited
- grateful
- happy
- hopeful
- interested
- joyful
- relieved
- rested
- satisfied
- surprised
- touched

When my needs are not met:

- contracted
- afraid
- anxious
- apprehensive
- concerned
- confused
- desperate
- disappointed
- fearful
- helpless
- hesitant
- hopeless
- lonely
- pained
- sad
- sorrowful
- tense
- worried

Needs (vs Strategies)

Needs are universal with needs at the root of all unpleasant or pleasant feelings.

“From the moment people begin talking about what they need instead of what’s wrong with another, the possibility of finding ways to meet everyone’s needs is greatly increased” (Rosenberg, 2015, 54)

Instead of clinging to/insisting upon on a specific strategy to meet our need, jointly determining strategies to meet everyone’s needs can help resolve conflicts.

NVC distinguishes between needs and strategies with attachment to a specific strategy creating conflict.



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NEED

The real root of my feeling:

connection

- belonging
- care
- cooperation
- encouragement
- feedback
(celebration
or mourning)
- friendship
- intimacy
- restoration
- support
- tenderness
- understanding

evolution

- adventure
- challenge
- creativity

meaning

- clarity
- contribution

integrity

- love
- self-acceptance
- self-actualization

nurturance

- air
- health
- liquid
- movement
- physical safety
- rest
- sensuality
- sexual expression

enjoying life

- beauty
- comfort
- ease
- emotional safety
- fun
- harmony
- peace
- play
- simplicity
- stability

autonomy

- equal
opportunities
- freedom
- mutual respect
- space

Requests (vs Demands)

Request is asking for present-moment and doable action that might fulfill our needs while honoring the other person's choice and needs.

“Requests may sound like demands when unaccompanied by the speaker's feelings and needs” (Rosenberg, 2015, p. 73).

“When the other person hears a demand from us, they see two options: to submit or rebel” (Rosenberg, 2015, p. 79).

The goal isn't to get our way; it is to cultivate relationships based on honesty and empathy where our connection fulfills everyone's needs.



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Nonviolent Communication

Without NVC: We blame the other for our unmet need and cling to a strategy.

- **Sara:** Fixates on a strategy (city payment for harm reduction resources); thinks the city causes her feelings and Joe is responsible for her need being met.
- **Joe:** Reacting defensively; feels pressure to defend Sara's strategy.

With NVC: We identify our needs, consider their needs, and explore strategies.

- **Sara's Feeling:** Frustrated / Fearful
- **Sara's Need:** Clarity / Safety
- **Joe's Feeling:** Confused / Concerned
- **Joe's Need:** Clarity / Transparent Communication

Nonviolent Communication at a Collaborative Meeting

Sara: When I received your email, Joe, I **felt frustrated** and **need some clarity** about the timing of the city's delivery of resources.

Joe: Yeah, after our conversation at last month's meeting, I anticipated it could be hard for you to digest. Unfortunately, I don't have much of an update for the group.

Sara: When I see the email, I **feared** the resources were being pulled away without explanation because city leadership no longer supports this approach. I'm **really worried** how further delay will impact lives.

Joe: **I'm concerned too, Sara.**

Sara: **Would you be willing to explain what you do know?**

Joe: I would but **I'm also confused** and don't **understand our process** compared to my last city admin job in North Carolina. I noticed that process had a quicker turnaround.

Nonviolent Communication at a Collaborative Meeting

Sara: I don't envy your seat, Joe. There can be a steep learning curve here. I'd be happy to share how it's worked here in the past. **Would that be helpful right now?**

Joe: That would be great but, first, I need to be transparent about the limits of what I can do. Let me see if Eric, the procurement officer, can jump on a call with us. **How does that sound?**

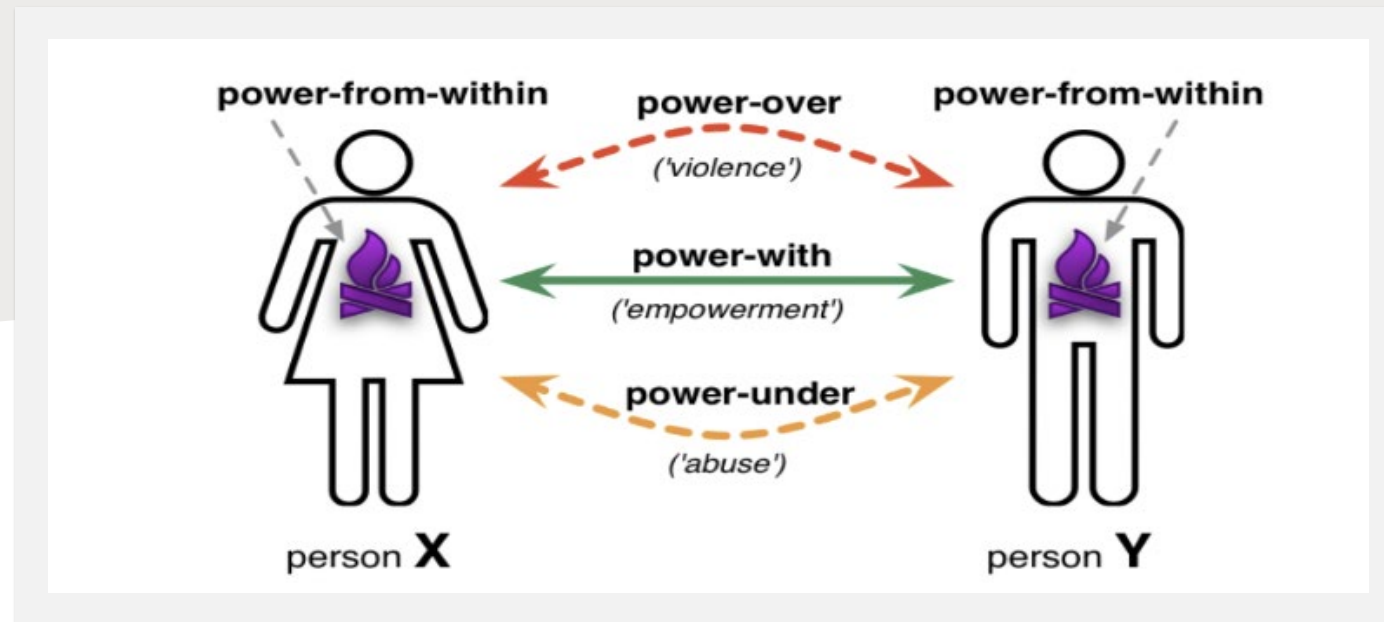
Sara: That's worth a shot. At the very least, Eric could explain the timeline of his involvement and whether there has been a pause placed on the delivery by other city officials.

Joe: Yeah, I assumed I would be notified of a pause but maybe not. **I really work best with transparency** no matter what the reason. At least I would **understand the official process.**

Sara: I'm with you there. I'm getting daily updates from my staff about how this delay is impacting people and **I'm really worried** about their **safety.**

Joe: I hear how heavy that is sitting on you today. Let me see if I can get Eric on the phone so we can figure out what to do.

Power Over vs Power With



Real connection considers the needs of each person. We can create power with others.

Navigating Conflict

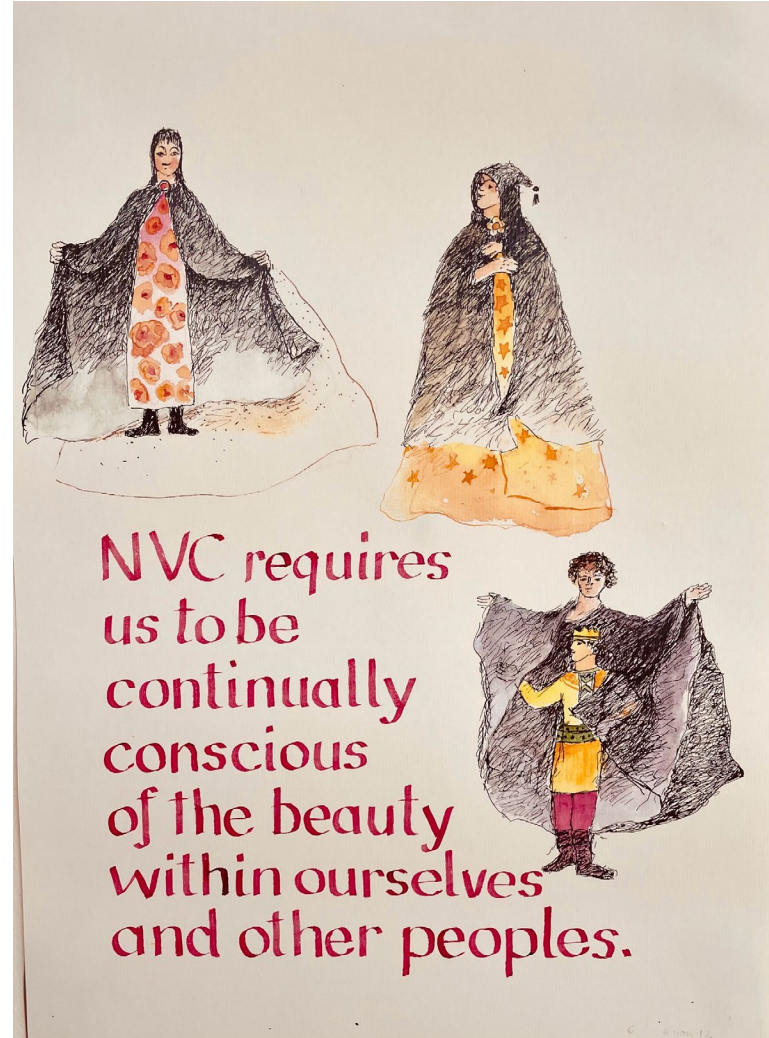
Think about an experience related to addressing SUD/ODU in your community where you did not like what someone else did. Choose an event somewhere between a Level 1 (no impact emotionally) and a Level 10 (intense traumatic experience). Write what happened. You will have the choice to share or not share your experience.



*Always listen
to what people need
rather than
what they are
thinking about us.*

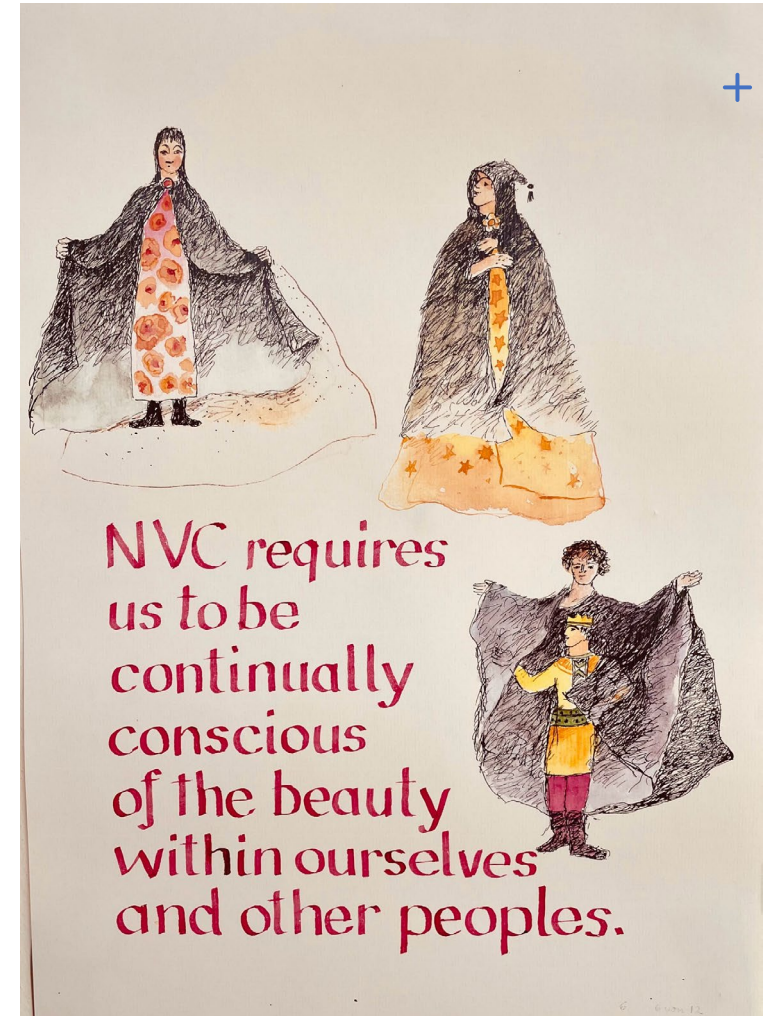
Community Action Planning Scenario

You run an established nonprofit substance disorder care facility that incorporates MAT medication assisted treatment into care, including community members newly released from detention centers. Today, you received an email from a medical colleague asking you if you had been aware of a \$2 million grant RFP for MAT. The deadline has now passed and one of the members of your Community Action Planning team was awarded the grant for her similar nonprofit in a neighboring county. This member did not discuss this potential shared work together nor was the RFP discussed at any prior CAP meetings.



Four Options for Hearing a Negative Message

- **Disconnecting:**
 - Blaming Myself (self-victimization, regret, guilt, shame)
 - Blaming Others (anger, assumption of intention)
- **Connecting:**
 - Empathy for Self (connecting with my feelings and needs)
 - Empathy for Others (considering their feelings and needs)



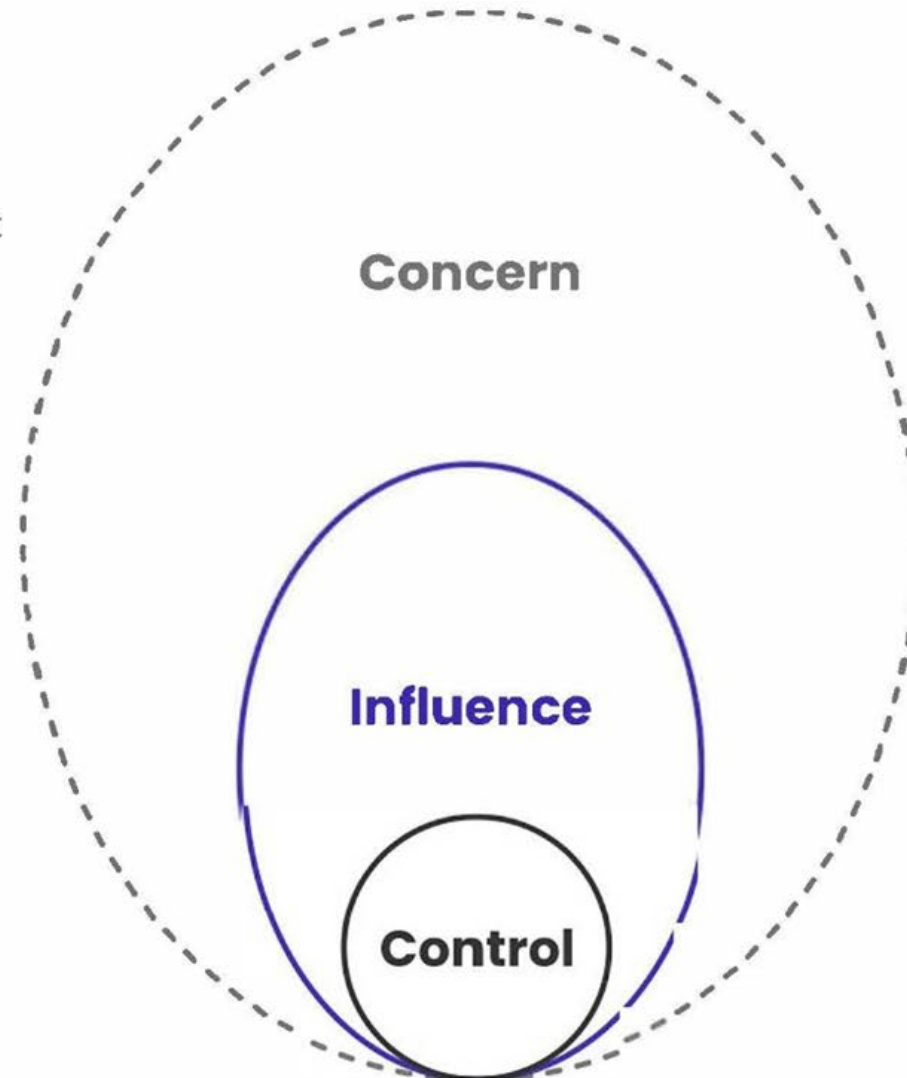
Spheres of Control, Influence, Concern

Sphere of Concern

The biggest sphere refers to anything that might be of interest or concern to you, but is fully outside of your control and your ability to influence.

Sphere of Influence

This includes all areas where you can affect outcomes and engage with others, but where you don't have direct control. What sits within this sphere are things you can actually take action on in your organisation.



The Three Spheres of Influence

Sphere of Control

This is the smallest sphere, because the only thing you can truly control in life is yourself: your actions, your decisions, your behaviours, and your words.

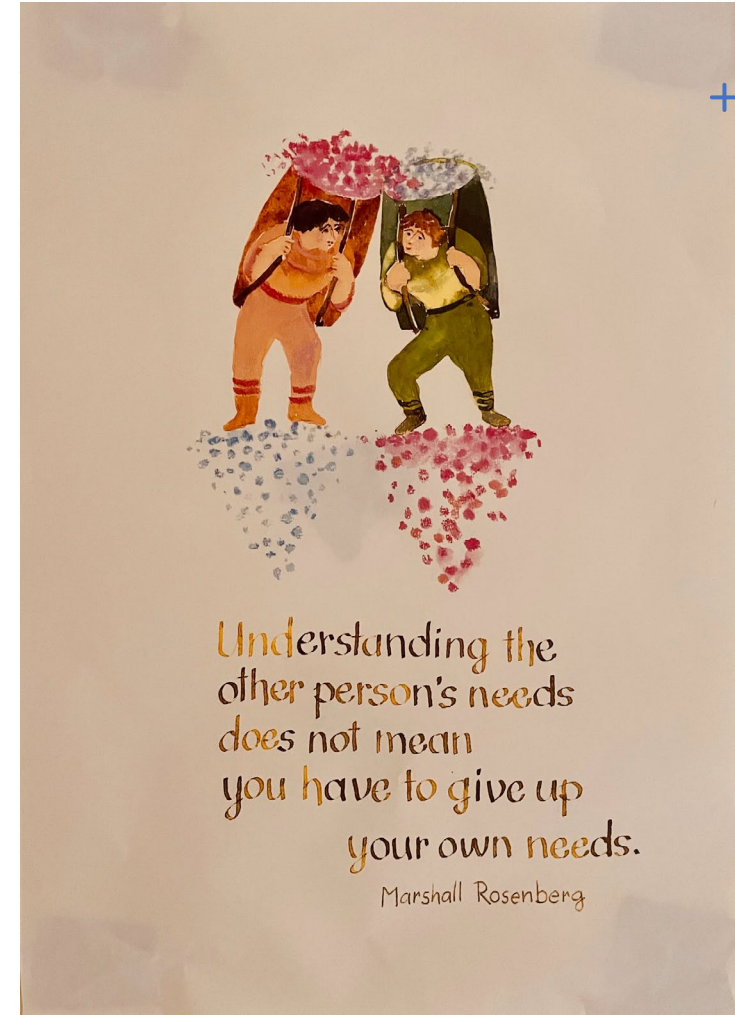
Nonviolent Communication Script

Honest Expression:

- *Observation*: When I saw/heard...
- *Feeling*: I felt...
- *Needs*: because I would like...
- *Request*: Would you be willing....

Empathetic Listening:

- Do you feel _____ because you're needing _____?





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humansofsanquentin Whitney, 33 years old
Incarcerated: 3 years

Housed: Mcpherson Unit, Newport, Arkansas

I was on drugs and alcohol which led me to a fatal mistake. I started hearing voices and seeing things that weren't there. Some things seemed real, like the TV began to talk. I was going back and forth between men. All of my relationships were raunchy. I was so lost and caught up in sex and drugs, that I couldn't see what was happening. I was so ashamed and hurt by my actions that I tried to commit suicide. One day my old case worker asked if I would like to try and talk to my kids. I said no, I was sure they didn't want to speak to me. I have four kids and one is deceased. My oldest was upset with me for a while. The other two were not upset as much. I look back with regret everyday on the choices I made. I'm still talking to my kids. It's been rough for all of us. I can't sleep at night sometimes because I question myself. The guilt consumes me. After I came to prison I got my GED. I didn't think I could do it. That's the way I've felt all my life, like I couldn't accomplish anything. I love to write poetry about how I feel. God has changed my life and is still working on me. I look at these prison walls and think this is what I left my kids for. I miss being around them so much. They are so smart and funny.

Common Behaviors that Impede Connection

- **Advising** (“I think you should...”)
- **One-Upping** (“wait till you hear what happened to me.”)
- **Educating** (“This could become a positive experience if...”)
- **Consoling** (“It wasn’t your fault.”)
- **Story-Telling** (“That reminds me of the time...”)
- **Shutting Down** (“Cheer up.”)
- **Sympathizing** (“Oh, you poor thing.”)
- **Interrogating** (“When did this begin?”)
- **Explaining** (“I would have called but...”)
- **Correcting** (“That’s not how it happened.”)

“I look back with regret everyday on the choices I have made. I can’t sleep at night sometimes because I question myself. The guilt consumes me.”

Whitney, 33



Listening Empathetically

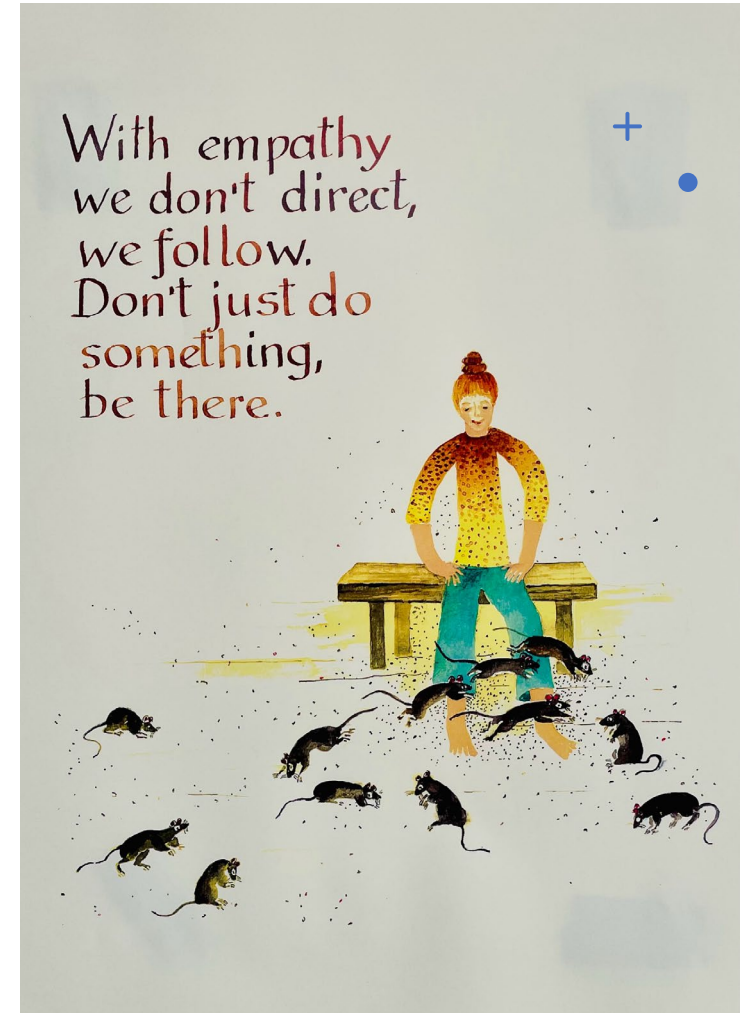
Empathy is respectful understanding of what another person is experiencing (p. 70)

Intellectual understanding blocks empathy (p. 42)

We need to receive empathy to offer empathy (p. 43)

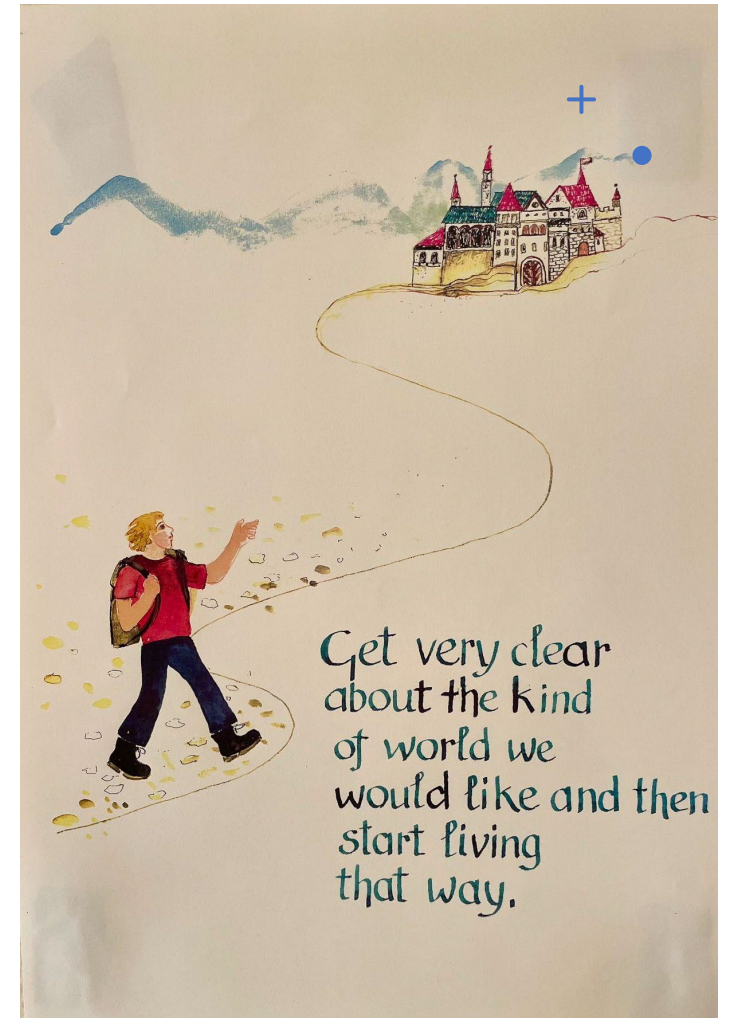
When we judge others, we contribute to violence (p. 47)

Empathy lies in our ability to be present without opinion (p. 58)



Nonviolent Communication for Community Action Planning

1. Speak Honestly (observations, feelings, needs, requests)
2. Listen Empathetically for Unspoken Needs
3. Separate Observations from Judgements
4. Cultivate Power With through Shared Strategies
5. Honor your Spheres of Control, Influence, and Concern



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Questions & Comments

Center of Excellence Resources



- Free consultation and connection with technical experts on opioid abatement strategies and implementation
 - [TA Form](#)
 - Monthly Needs & Leads meetings
- Bi-Weekly Community Opioid Response Initiatives ECHO
 - [Link to sign up](#)
- Clinical warmline
 - Free, confidential, **clinician-to-clinician**
 - **consultation** on opioid, alcohol, and other SUDs
 - Call **864-914-1301**, Mon – Fri, 9 am – 5 pm