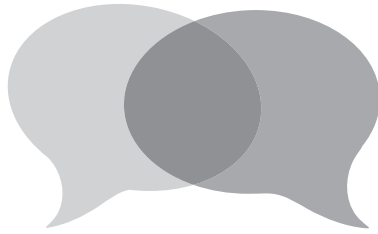


*Nonviolent*  
**COMMUNICATION™**  
*Companion Workbook*  
2nd Edition



A Practical Guide for Individual,  
Group, or Classroom Study

**LUCY LEU**

Certified Trainer  
Center for Nonviolent Communication (CNVC)



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# Practicing Together

## A—Creating a Practice Group

When joining or creating a group, it is helpful to be clear about what you hope to gain and what you are willing to give. While most NVC practice groups serve several purposes, one group might agree to focus on developing fluency in using the process while another might emphasize the sense of community inspired by the spirit of NVC. Likewise, one person may want to invest limited time and emotional energy, while another values the group as a major commitment in their life. Such differences can be reconciled and are less likely to lead to confusion and conflict if, individually and collectively, members can bring clarity and honest disclosure of needs in relation to their expectations.

The following are common motivations for joining a practice group:

- To learn or review NVC concepts
- To develop fluency in using the process
- To gain support in one's practice and commitment by belonging to a like-minded community
- To meet needs for empathy and connection
- To develop friendships that are grounded in NVC
- To be inspired and reminded of NVC purpose and consciousness
- To serve life and contribute to the community by sharing NVC through teaching or leadership skills

One way for a single person to generate a practice group is to bring together some people to watch an NVC video such as Marshall Rosenberg's "Making Life Wonderful" (See *Appendix 8. Further Resources*). Tell the group what's behind your own interest in NVC and in starting a group. Introduce the book and workbook as resources for a group to teach themselves the skills demonstrated in the video.

There are as many ways to structure a practice group as there are those who wish to cultivate and practice NVC consciousness. Suggestions are given here and in the Leader's Guide to assist you in experimenting with structure. A willingness to deviate from "the way we have always done it in the past" may increase the likelihood of more fully meeting the individual and collective needs of your particular group. Remember that by embracing discussions and disagreements about structure you are each affirming your choice to practice the process. Some groups have used this process as a major source of learning while also recognizing that the further along a group is in staying connected to the principles of NVC and mastering NVC skills, the greater the group's capacity to co-create a mutually enjoyable outcome.

To match the curriculum of this workbook, consider forming a group of five to eight members to meet weekly for two-and-a-half hours over the course of at least fourteen weeks.\* You may want to organize a preliminary meeting for people to get to know one another and to agree on basic structure, procedures, and the materials (book and workbook) to be used. At this first meeting, it may be useful to review together *Part I: Using This Workbook*, and sections A-F of *Part III: Practicing Together*.

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**\*NOTE:** Twenty-two weeks is a more preferable length since it allows another eight weeks of practice after the group has completed the basic curriculum. Please note that there have been successful groups that have been as large as twelve, as small as four, have met biweekly, or only for two hours each time.

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A recommended structure to accompany the use of this workbook is the "leaderful practice circle." The circle evokes inclusiveness, balanced participation, and community. Leadership may be rotated so that each member has an opportunity to contribute and to practice facilitating, teaching, and guiding the circle. All members are leaders in that they all take responsibility for the well-being of the circle. The tasks of defining and realizing the purpose, nature, and direction of the circle belong to everyone.

In communities where NVC trainers are available, leaderful circles can benefit by inviting trainers to lead specific parts of the meetings. In this way, members continue to “own” the circle and to rotate overall leadership while being called to practice the art of making clear requests to their guest mentors.

## B—Remembering Our Purpose and Taking Time

By choosing community as our crucible for learning, we are opening ourselves not only to the beauty and power of human connections, but also to the pain of unmet needs triggered by our interactions with one another. To fully appreciate both the joys and the hurts, and to grow from them throughout your time with one another, try to:

### 1. Find ways to remember the purpose of being together.

For example, you might clearly demarcate the time and space you share by:

- a. opening and closing each gathering consciously with a reading, candle, music, story, silence, bell, etc.
- b. creating a “centerpiece” (with a picture, flower, poem, etc.) as a reminder of that place of infinite compassion in each of us, a place where there is no separation of “me” and “them.”

You might also create frequent opportunities for the expression of appreciation (for yourself, life, others, one another, the group, etc.) and for celebration (of miracles and successes, big and small).



## REMEMBER TO TAKE TIME!

### 2. Take time.

We are changing the habits of a lifetime as we learn to speak from the heart. Are we able to welcome our own and one another’s stuttering, stumbling, and silences as signs that we are replacing automatic pilot with conscious speech? When we ask ourselves questions like the following, our words may indeed take more time to form:

- “What am I really reacting to here?”
- “What is the intention behind my opening my mouth now?”
- “What feelings are alive in me in this moment?”
- “What is the need behind my immediate desire here?”
- “Am I making a clear request of anyone?”

We might encourage a slower pace in our gatherings by, for example:

- Including moments of silence as a time for people to connect to themselves.
- Passing a talking stick (or other object) for some parts of the gathering. The person with the stick is offered the circle’s gift of attentive silence without pressure to hurry. Generally, the stick is passed in one direction without interruption or comment from others. Individuals may choose to talk, or hold the stick in silence and pass it on without talking.
- Repeating, paraphrasing, or translating into NVC what one person has said before the next person speaks. This can be especially helpful when more than one person in the group is experiencing emotional intensity. To practice, the group might allot a certain amount of time during a meeting to interact in this way. This can also serve as an effective way to train our ability to listen.
- Taking two full breaths before speaking after the previous person has finished speaking.

### 3. What Might An Individual Do?

As part of your intentional practice, it is as important for you to Remember Your Purpose and Take Time as it is for a group to do the same. Practice taking your time when you are responding to your family, friends, and co-workers.

## C—Leading the Practice Circle

Each member has an opportunity for service and self-expression when offering to the circle his or her own unique way of leading the session. Because leadership is rotated, individuals may feel freer to take risks and explore their varying leadership styles. One leader's tendency toward rigidity and another's toward levity can combine to offer the group balance and diversity over time.

*Leaders serve the circle in four ways:*

1. They uphold the purpose of the circle by creating a space, remembering to slow down, incorporating opportunities to express appreciation, etc.
2. They oversee the group's practical and logistical needs.
3. They plan the structure (schedule of activities, etc.) and guide the group through the process.
4. They put extra effort into familiarizing themselves with the week's curriculum (or the contents of any materials to be covered) so they can be a resource for those who haven't familiarized themselves with it as well as the leader has.

The number of ways in which leaders can work or play with these four areas is infinite. Seasoned leaders will hopefully draw fully from their experiences so the circle may benefit from their facility, insights, and past mistakes. For those new to leading and facilitating, the following "Suggestions and Sample Format for Leading a Circle" can serve as a guideline from which to explore and experiment. Rooted in a consciousness of needs, we might remind ourselves that there is no "right way" to lead a circle, and no wrong way. There is only: my way (today, last month), your way (last week, last year), needs met, needs unmet . . .

### Suggestions and Sample Format for Leading a Circle

The following section contains suggestions and a sample format for leading a circle that meets for two-and-one-half hours.

For the first meeting you lead, consider using the following suggestions, and on a separate piece of paper:

- make note of the suggested tasks as you complete them
- write down alternative ideas of how to proceed, while addressing the same objectives
- jot down what you plan to say in the circle at a particular step
- or organize your own plan.

### *Before the meeting*

1. Read the chapter and complete the written assignment or whatever material the group has decided to cover.
2. Create a plan for the meeting—what’s to happen, when, and how—or use the sample format as outlined below.

### *On the day of the meeting*

1. Preparing the space  
Arrive fifteen minutes early to arrange the seats in a circle so everyone will be able to see one another. If beverages are being made available, prepare cups, tea, etc., ahead of time. Arrange the centerpiece, wall charts, etc., if you choose to use these. A clock visible to all may be helpful.
2. Greetings  
Welcome each person as he or she arrives.
3. Connect with yourself  
When you are ready to begin, take thirty seconds to connect inwardly, “What do I feel and need right now?” Connect to the purpose behind what you are about to offer to the group. Be simply and fully present for one moment.
4. “Remembrance”  
Gather the group. Dedicate a moment to help us remember who we are and why we are here. Whether it’s the change of seasons

or the bombings of overseas neighbors, focus on whatever inspires you yourself to feel connected to the web of life.

#### 5. Opening the circle

Invite people to “check in” by sharing what is alive for them in this moment. Or, you might ask for a round of response to a question such as, “What kinds of NVC-related insights and experiences did you have this week?” or “Would you share something you would like to celebrate this week?” Indicate how much time you planned for the round; and then mention a general expectation of how much time you’d like each person to take. Go in one direction (clockwise or counter-clockwise). Allow the group to focus attention on each person in turn. Either pass a talking object, or suggest a word, sound, or gesture that allows people to indicate they are complete before the next person begins. Remind participants to connect with their feelings and needs as they speak.

**Example:** “I’d like to open the circle with a round of check-ins. Let’s take twenty minutes for this sharing—about three minutes for each of us. I’ll start and then I’ll pass this ‘Talking Stick’ clockwise. Let’s practice staying connected to our feelings and needs as we speak. And remember, you have the option to talk or just enjoy the silence of holding the Talking Stick until you’re ready to pass it on.”

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NOTE: After the round is complete, if you sense that someone who had shared vulnerably may still be carrying intense feelings, you might want to address them, acknowledge their words, empathize with their feelings and needs, or express your sincere reaction.

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Before moving on, briefly state the schedule for the rest of the meeting.

6. Allow about forty-five minutes for the first study or practice session. (This will likely begin about half an hour into the meeting.)
7. Mid-meeting, take a short break if desired.



8. Continue with a second study or practice session for another forty-five minutes. (Use the Leader's Guide for each assignment to plan the study or practice sessions of the meeting.)
9. Feedback, appreciations, and closing (consider allowing twenty to thirty minutes). End the meeting with another "round." You might want a moment of silence to allow people to transition out of the Study or Practice Session. Invite them to connect with any feelings of gratitude that may be inside. Get in touch with any feelings of gratitude you might have for the opportunity of having served the circle in this way today.

When you speak again, ask for feedback about the meeting. If you feel anxious when making this request, try expressing your feelings and needs and any request that might address those needs.

Formally close the circle (whether with words, music, silence, poetry, a joining of hands, or other means of your choosing).

10. Post-meeting details
  - a. Confirm who will be the leader for the next meeting and finalize other practical details.
  - b. Ask everyone to take five minutes to fill out an "Individual Feedback Form" (see Appendix 5) while the meeting's experience is still fresh in their minds.
  - c. Clean up, pack up, farewells, departure.

### *After the meeting*

Take time to ask yourself what you enjoyed and didn't enjoy about leading the circle, what worked and didn't work, and what you would want to do differently the next time. Read over the Individual Feedback Forms that group members wrote for you. Use the reverse side of your own Individual Feedback Form to reflect upon your experience.

If you sense yourself needing some empathy or understanding, you might approach a friend who listens to you well. If your pain is associated with someone's words or behavior that occurred in the circle, consider how you might protect trust in the circle while also meeting your needs for empathy and support.

If you feel joyous, elated, or proud of how you led the circle, find ways to acknowledge your growth and accomplishment. You might want to celebrate it at next week's Opening Circle.

## D–“What We Value in a Practice Group Leader”

Thirty NVC practitioners in Seattle reflected together on the topic, “What do I want in a practice group leader?” Below is a summary of their discussion. If you will be leading a group, use this list to remind yourself of qualities that participants value. You may also use this list as a way to solicit feedback from participants on various aspects of your leadership after a particular session. Do not compare yourself to the leaders being described in the quotes below. They don’t exist.

- **We value leaders who keep our group on task.**  
 “She maintains the focus and is able to track interruptions and bring us back to the point. She starts the meeting at the agreed-on time and keeps track of time.”
- **We value leaders who balance task orientation with an attention to process and who provide a clear structure, but are also able to let it go when that’s called for.**  
 “He covers the agenda without sacrificing the quality of the moment. He stays present and grounded, and sets a tone that fosters a positive atmosphere.” “She is flexible with the process and the structure so as to meet everyone’s needs.”
- **We value leaders who “lead as servant to the group.”**  
 “He is eager to learn from us what we need and is responsive to feedback. The needs of the group is what is important to him.”
- **We value leaders who pay attention to group dynamics.**  
 “She is observant of everyone in the group and of interactions among members. She helps facilitate the process and encourages the group process without taking over or ‘owning’ the group. She knows how to help the group move forward or to stand still.”
- **We value leaders who are aware of safety needs in the group and who create a space that emphasizes inclusiveness.**  
 “He encourages everyone to participate and makes sure each person has the opportunity to speak and be heard. He maintains a balance so the group is not dominated by a few members.” “She maintains a safe emotional environment and draws out the full

participation of those present so that they feel empowered to express themselves and be who they are.”

- **We value leaders who embody compassion.**  
“He is open, empathic, and patient. He listens carefully without being judgmental.”
- **We value leaders who are playful and have fun leading.**  
“She has a sense of humor and is lighthearted.”
- **We value leaders who show humility, a willingness to acknowledge their own limitations, and the courage to take risks.**  
“He is vulnerable, recognizes his own limits and fears, and is able to ask for help. He is courageous in acknowledging what he doesn’t know. He is willing to move out of the comfort zone into uncomfortable places.”
- **We value leaders who come prepared and who keep their commitments.**  
“He plans for the meetings and is well-organized and takes seriously his commitment as a leader.”
- **We value leaders who bring us back to expressing ourselves in NVC.**  
“She keeps within the process and helps us hear one another’s feelings and needs clearly, especially when friction arises.”
- **Other qualities we value in a practice group leader:**  
Clarity, Authenticity, Honesty, Creativity.

## E—Making Rules

Agreeing on a set of rules for your practice circle can save time and be a source of reassurance that everyone is “on the same page.” If you intend to post rules for your NVC practice group or organization, try the following NVC exercise:

1. Rules are strategies to meet needs—explore and express the need(s) behind the rule.
2. Ask yourselves, “Is this rule a request or a demand?” (Does anyone notice any “should, ought to, supposed to” thinking around it?)

Especially for a group that meets regularly, more satisfaction might be gained through ongoing dialogues regarding feelings, needs, and current requests than through rules—especially if the rules did not evolve out of group discussion of needs. Rules sometimes have the tendency to incline us toward judgment and blame when we encounter someone who has chosen to “break the rule.” And thus, when someone does “break a rule”—for example, by missing meetings—on top of whatever we might be feeling toward that person’s absence, we also experience an additional layer of pain regarding group rules not being respected.

If we have a need around which we are particularly anxious, e.g., confidentiality, rather than counting on everyone agreeing to a “confidentiality rule,” we could try to articulate it: “I am worried about being understood or seen in ways other than I want to be. When I share something about my life in this circle, I get scared sometimes that one of you might tell someone else what I said and they’ll get an impression of me I don’t want them to have. I’d like to hear from the rest of you—do you have such fears too?”

We might request time to explore specific situations that trigger fears such as talking about other people in their absence. What needs are we meeting and what other ways could we meet those needs? How can we cultivate deeper awareness of intention when speaking about others? How can we support one another in living our intentions when talking about others? How can we check in on people’s sense of comfort around this issue as the circle progresses?

It is possible that rules, by their identification with specific strategies, might actually hinder the cultivation of the transformative heart space where miracles take place—where joyously we let go of what a minute ago we thought we “had to have” out of the profoundly transformed realization that there is a superabundance of strategies for all needs to be met.

Of course, rules and laws do play a prominent role in our society. As NVC users, we can translate each one we come across so as to hear the need behind it as clearly as possible. More importantly, we try to stay connected to the need behind our own choice to either behave in accordance with the rule or not. In an NVC community, we know how much we will pay if anyone amongst us hears the group rules as demands, and then—woe—chooses to “follow the rules.”