

# BEHIND EVERY ACTION THERE IS A NEED

## TEACHERS' HANDBOOK Supplementary material for the film

Practice exercises, suggestions and games for teachers to use at home and in school

FREE EXERCISES



# BEHIND EVERY ACTION THERE IS A NEED

## TEACHERS' HANDBOOK

Supplementary material for the film

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# ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

Hopefully, having seen the film, you are excited by the idea of applying some of what you have seen in your own classroom. In that case, this Handbook is for you! The games, exercises and procedures suggested here fall into two groups:

The first group is for you the teacher to use in order to learn and practise some of the skills demonstrated by the teachers in the films. Most of them relate to the working situation and to how you interact with your students. However, the same methods apply to interactions with other adults, and I strongly recommend that you practise them first with colleagues and friends before trying them on your students.

In the second group, the focus is on the children's learning, and the games and exercises are for you to use with your students, either in small groups or with a whole class, to help them absorb similar skills at an age-appropriate level.

There is an overlap between these two groups of suggestions: together they can be a start on the road to building what I call a 'Culture of Peace' in your school.

Learning to handle conflicts in such a way that they can become the foundation for better connection is not a quick or easy process. At some point you might notice that you would like to study NVC with someone who has more experience in applying this process. In this case, consult CNVC.org to find an NVC training near you. I also recommend you study the book 'Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life' by Marshall Rosenberg. Meanwhile, I hope that this Handbook can offer some ideas and inspiration for how it might be to start applying the principles of NVC in your classroom

The crucial element in the process of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is to find our own and others' needs. When our dialogue is based on needs, we can enjoy better communication. What we mean by 'needs' here are the universal inner needs which motivate human behaviour (such as safety, respect, caring, understanding...), without reference to external things, specific people or defined actions.

## WHEN YOU START USING THESE EXERCISES

When you start using these exercises with students, it may feel awkward, and it may take time before you feel they are working for you. Once the children start to trust that their needs are truly important to you, the process will seem more natural and will flow more smoothly. It's not enough just to say that you understand the children and care about their needs. They have to see it and experi-

ence it for themselves before they can believe it. So in these exercises we focus a lot on the relationships between children and adults.

Nevertheless, the same principles and the same exercises can be used in any relationships we have with other people. Instead of 'students' or 'children', I could have put 'parents', 'colleagues', 'your own children', 'your partner', 'the Minister for Education' or anyone else.

The Handbook is designed to go with the film "Behind every action there is a need", which is available for free at:

[www.kommunikationforlivet.dk/GB/Schools/NVC-film](http://www.kommunikationforlivet.dk/GB/Schools/NVC-film)

The exercises assume that you have watched the film. Some of the exercises use **feelings cards** and **needs cards**, which can be downloaded from the same website.

**The most important exercise of all is simply: Find the needs!**

*I hope you have fun exploring this work!*

*Warm regards,*

*Kirsten Kristensen, LIVKOM*

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# TEACHERS' EXERCISES

- for your own self-development

Please read 'About this Handbook' on page 1 before starting!

## 1. SELF-EMPATHY

**If you are frustrated or not satisfied with yourself and what you're doing.**

Take a few deep breaths and remind yourself that you're doing the best you can right now to meet your needs. Identify 3-5 needs which are important for you in this situation (see the list at the back of this booklet) and allow these needs to fill your consciousness for at least a minute, while you continue to breathe deeply.

If you are unable to reach a relaxed state in this way, consider asking for support from a colleague who will do the Listening Exercise with you (see exercise 2).

This exercise sounds very simple but it can have remarkable results. Simply breathing deeply can help you accept yourself and your values more easily. It can also support you to hold a space to explore other actions you could take which might meet more needs for yourself and others. You may even get ideas about how you can do something differently next time.

## 2. JUST LISTENING

**When someone else is very frustrated, angry or sad.**

Listen to the person for several minutes without doing anything more than repeating a few words of what you hear (active listening). Show with your body language that you are present – relax your body, breathe deeply and offer eye contact. Continue until you see that the person slows down and relaxes and you guess that he has expressed what was most important to him at that moment. This often happens much sooner than you might expect.

You maybe cannot immediately solve the other person's anger or upset, but just by listening you contribute a lot to meeting some very basic needs: to be seen, to be heard and to be understood. This already brings both of you to a better place. In the school situation you will often find that these are key unmet needs for your students.

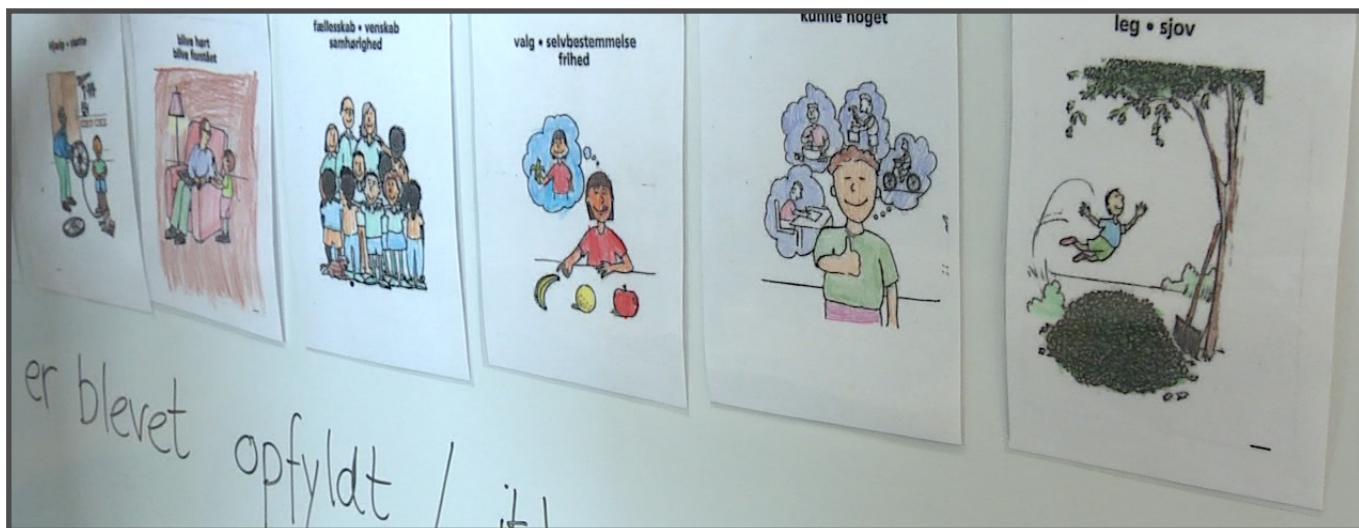
## 3. FOCUS ON THE NEEDS

**When a child says or does something you don't like.**

Find your Feelings and Needs Lists. Sit with the child and look together for one or more needs which the child might be trying to meet by means of the action you have reacted to. Use the needs words to understand the child. Perhaps you don't

need to say so much, just to show your presence and acceptance. In the same way, find your own needs which were challenged by the child's behaviour. When you've found both the child's and your own needs, direct your attention to what would be satisfying for both of you.

Next give the child ideas and guidance as to how he can meet his needs in ways that are not at the cost of others. Look for actions which work for all parties. Often it can be hard to 'stay in the now' when we're affected by other people's actions which we don't like. Be kind and patient with yourself as you practise this!



If you repeat this exercise over time it will help the child to trust that what he has to offer is welcome. This in turn can nurture a more relaxed and calm learning atmosphere.

#### 4. FOCUS ON CONNECTION

##### **When you want better connection and understanding with a student.**

Tell the child you want to talk with her in order to understand better how things are for her. Ask or make guesses about what you think she's experiencing and feeling. Use the Feelings List as guide if you like. Listen to her and repeat as accurately as possible what you hear her say. Look at the Needs List together and find needs which have not been met in the situation she describes. Talk about what you both wish for and what you could do together which will be supportive for you both.

The result of this exercise may be that you have a better connection with each other and the child sees that you care about her experience of life.

## 5. HANDLING PHYSICALLY VIOLENT BEHAVIOUR

**When you have used (protective) force to stop a student from hurting himself or others or causing damage to property.**

Wait till the child has calmed down and senses that he has been understood (see exercise 2).

Then explain what needs you were trying to meet with your action. For example, "I wanted you both to be safe". Listen to the child's reaction and accept it, but don't lose track of your own needs. Use Self-empathy (exercise 1) if necessary.

The aim here is to increase your chances of staying in contact with the child, which may support you to resolve future conflicts more easily.

## 6. APPRECIATION

**When a child says or does something which you like.**

Think of something specific that a child has said or done today which you liked.

Find at least one feeling you had and a need that was met for you by the child's action or words. Express your feeling and appreciation to the child, remembering that this is something about you and your enjoyment of her actions – it's not so much about her and certainly doesn't include grading or directly praising.

So, instead of giving an evaluation such as "Good girl!" or "Clever boy!", you say something about yourself and about how her action has made your life more wonderful. You let her know that she has contributed something valuable.

E.g.

(with a 6-7 year old): "I liked how you talked with your friend"

(with a 15+ year old) "I like how you were able to keep your own needs and your friend's needs in your consciousness at the same time"

Being appreciated in this way is a new and rare experience for most students, and it may help them to relax more in your presence. They may also be more willing to dialogue with you when something happens which you don't like, because they already trusts your connection.

You won't get the same result by simply praising the child, because that means putting yourself above her as the judge of when she is right/wrong or good/bad.

For more about the effects of punishments and rewards, praise and blame, see an NVC book such a 'Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life' by Marshall Rosenberg.

## 7. CARE FOR YOURSELF

**If you are sad about how things are now, and you don't know how they could be different.**

Take some time to dream about how you would really like to be with the children.

- What is your dream?
- What would you ideally like others to do (both the children and other adults involved) which would make your life more wonderful?
- What needs would such actions meet in you?



You might like to write your dream down in a journal, perhaps with a drawing or illustration. Even better if you can find a person or several people you can share your dream with. Choose carefully, as many people will jump quickly to giving you solutions for a problem or evaluations of what you say, when you are not yet ready for that. Don't be afraid to ask for the kind of listening you want – you might be surprised where you find a good listener! Would you like the other person to repeat what s/he has heard, so you know you have been listened to? Or maybe you would like a hand on your shoulder as a sign that s/he is present with you? Ask for what would suit you in the moment.

Notice if your feelings shift as you get more deeply in contact with your needs and your longings.

You may well be surprised and delighted to find that others have similar feelings and dreams, so you no longer feel so alone with your longings.

## 8. SELF-REFLECTION

### **Noticing where you are with your own learning**

Consider these questions and write down some answers:

- What does the teacher in the film do and say, which makes it easier for the children to come to her for support with their conflicts? (by meeting their needs for safety and trust)
- What do I as a teacher say and do, which makes it hard for my students to trust that I can help them handle their conflicts?
- What do I as a teacher say and do, which makes it easier for my students to feel safe and to trust that I can help them handle their conflicts?
- What would I myself as a teacher like to do differently, having seen this film?
- What specific procedures in the film could I do with my own class? What would I hope to achieve by that?
- What can I do within my circle of colleagues and with the school management to support the further development of a 'culture of peace' at our school?

## 9. PRACTISING THE LANGUAGE OF FEELINGS AND NEEDS

### **Keeping a journal**

A valuable exercise is to practise finding your own and others' feelings and needs every day, as a sort of summing up or closure to the day's activities and interactions.

I recommend keeping a journal in which you write down key incidents from the day. Identify the feelings and needs involved, with the help of the lists in this booklet. Consider if there is anything you can say to the other people involved the next day (whether students, colleagues or parents).

# NVC FOR THE CLASSROOM

- for supporting a culture of peace in your school

## Games/Exercises to do with the children

(inspired by Jean Morrison and Christine King's Kids GROK games, [groktheworld.com](http://groktheworld.com))

These can be used with the whole class or with smaller groups of children.

The aim is for the children to become aware of their own feelings and needs and to learn to express them.

To support these exercises you will need flashcards featuring feelings and needs words. These cards can be downloaded from <http://www.kommunikationforlivet.dk/GB/Schools/NVC-film> and printed and laminated at school. Feelings and Needs Cards are available in two sets, for younger children with pictures and few words and for older children with more words and no pictures.

We recommend displaying the cards in the classroom so that the children get used to them and they are always available when needed.



### 1. GETTING FAMILIAR WITH NEEDS WORDS

**Spread the needs cards out on a table or on the floor.**

Ask the children to look at the cards and pick one out which is important for them today. (Tell them that they will be invited to show their card to the rest of the class later). Two children may of course choose the same word – find a way for them to share, or have duplicates of popular needs.

Now ask the children to take turns to show their card to the others and explain what the needs word means to them in general and why the need they have chosen is important for them today. (Make it clear that it's fine if a child doesn't want to share).

This exercise can stand on its own or be used to begin a discussion on what is important for the children today, how they feel about being at school and in their class.

## 2. FINDING THE FEELINGS AND NEEDS

One child starts as the Player.

- **The Player** deals out the **feelings and needs cards** so that everybody gets at least 3 of each.
- **The Player** now describes an event (whether sad or happy) in his/her life using factual observations and as far as possible without evaluations or judgements.
- He/she should keep the story to less than one minute.
- The other participants look at the **feelings cards** and choose one or two which they think might reflect the Player's feelings. In turn they give their card to the Player and ask, "Are you feeling \_\_\_\_\_ ?" The Player listens but does not comment.
- After one or two rounds, **the Player** looks through the **feelings cards** suggested and chooses 2 or 3 which best match her/his feelings. The others are returned to the pack.
- Next the other participants look through their **needs cards** to find the ones which they think might reflect the Player's needs. Following the same procedure as above, they ask, "Do you have a need for \_\_\_\_\_ ?" **The Player** listens but does not comment.
- **The Player** chooses the ones which fit best. **The player** is now invited to express whether s/he feels heard and understood.
- The cards now move around the circle to the next child who wants to play and s/he becomes **the Player**.

## 3. ANGER GAME - UNDERSTANDING OUR ANGER BETTER

**The Player** thinks of a situation which makes him/her angry.

**The Player** says aloud: "*In this situation I feel angry, and I'm telling myself that you should / should not ...*" (can be anything, e.g. "you shouldn't shout at me", "you should have cheered the other team").

The **needs cards** are divided between the participants and they take turns to guess the Player's underlying needs, one need at a time, using the form:

*"Do you feel angry because you have a need for / because you long for ... ?"*  
(using the word on the **needs card** in the gap).

The cards suggested are placed in front of **the Player**. After one or two rounds, **the Player** tells the group which **needs cards** best reflect her/his situation. S/he can then formulate a new sentence in the form: *"I get angry, **because** my need for understanding is not being met"*.

Be aware that other feelings like sad, afraid, etc. are also likely to show up.



#### 4. TRANSLATING WORDS WHICH 'HURT'

The purpose is to translate judgements and criticism – words which others often feel hurt by – into an expression of feelings and needs.

For example if you feel like saying, "You're making too much noise!", it might create a better connection if you say instead, "**I feel** irritated, **because** right now **I need** some peace and quiet".

- **The Player** chooses a statement from the list on page 13 which s/he can identify with (or finds his/her own) and reads it out to the group.
- **Feelings** and **needs cards** are shared out amongst the other participants.
- The children look through their cards and find two which they think could describe what **the Player** is feeling and needing. They take turns to place the cards in front of **the Player** and ask, "Are **you** feeling ... **because you** are needing ...?"

- **The Player** answers each suggestion in one of three ways:  
 "Yes, I am angry, because I need respect and consideration"  
 "Yes, I am angry, but my need is to be heard!"  
 "No, I am not angry, I feel hurt!" (In this case move to the next person in the cirkel for a new needs guess)

Note: this exercise is not about getting the 'right' answer, it's about guessing in the direction of feelings and needs.

- After one or two rounds, **the Player** goes through the cards that have been selected and chooses 3-6 which match his/her feelings and needs best. Then the game goes on to the next person.

## 5. GUESSING THE NEEDS BEHIND A STRATEGY

**The player** draws a **needs card** from the face-down pack and holds it up so that the others can see it but s/he can't.

Without using the word on the card, the other participants in turn give examples of how they might meet the need, in other words what strategies they might use.

**The player** has 4 or 5 goes to guess the need, and if s/he doesn't succeed, s/he turns the card round to see the answer.

At the end, take a few minutes talking about strategies.

## 6. CELEBRATING A NEED THAT HAS BEEN MET

**The Player** chooses a **needs card** without anyone else seeing, and describes a situation s/he has experienced in which the need was met. The other participants now try to guess the need in question.

If a guess is close to the need on the card but not exactly right, **the Player** can say, "Yes, and I'm also thinking of another need", until the correct word is guessed. If nobody in the group guesses correctly within, say, two minutes, the Player shows the card and the turn moves on.

## 7. ACTIONS/STRATEGIES THAT ARE OFTEN CONFUSED WITH NEEDS

Needs are abstract and don't refer to specific people or actions. Strategies are possible ways of acting in order to meet a need. Distinguishing between the two is a basic skill in NVC which allows us to see more options as to how we can meet a need.

One thing that can make it tricky to get clear between our needs and our strategies is that in everyday language we often use the words "I need..." followed by something which is not a need at all. For example: "I need to earn more money", where money is a strategy which could be about meeting a need for security, or shelter, recreation or many other things.

In particular, any time we use the words "I need" and follow up with "you / her / them" etc. (to do xyz), it is a give-away that we are talking about strategies not needs.

This exercise offers practice in distinguishing the real need behind the suggested strategies.

**The Player** chooses a statement from the list on page 13 which s/he can identify with, or comes up with one of his/her own.

**The Player** reads the statement out loud and the other participants, who each have a handful of **needs cards**, guess what his/her needs might be.

For example: With the statement "I need you to stop shouting", possible needs guesses might be: safety, respect, care, peace and quiet.

The game moves on to the next Player and continues in the same way.

# EXTRA MATERIAL FOR EXERCISES:

## **List of critical judgements for game 4: Translating words which 'hurt'**

- 1) You make too much noise / you're too loud.
- 2) You always want to decide what game we play.
- 3) You never listen to me.
- 4) Why are you coming late again?
- 5) The problem with you is that you are... (eg. lazy / stupid).
- 6) You always pick on me.
- 7) Why can't you wait for your turn like everyone else?
- 8) You will never learn.

## **List for game 7: Statements expressing actions / strategies that are often confused with needs**

- 1) I need you to be quiet.
- 2) I need you to listen to me.
- 3) I need you to help me do this.
- 4) I need more pocket money.
- 5) I need to get the ball from you now.
- 6) I need you to stop playing with my phone.
- 7) I need you to show me more respect / kindness.
- 8) I need all of you to come on time.
- 9) A need a new pair of jeans.

## Feelings list

Words to describe how you might feel when your needs **are met**:

alive	enthusiastic	optimistic
amazed	excited	pleased
astonished	expectant	proud
calm	glad	reassured
cheerful	grateful	relaxed
committed	happy	relieved
curious	inspired	safe
delighted	interested	satisfied
eager	jubilant	strong
engaged	moved	surprised

words to describe how you might feel when your needs **are NOT met**:

afraid	frightened	nervous
angry	furious	restless
confused	guilty	sad
depressed	hurt	shaken
despairing	impatient	shocked
disheartened	indifferent	tense
displeased	irritated	tired
embarrassed	jealous	uneasy
empty	lonely	unhappy
enraged	miserable	worried

## Needs list

Needs are abstract qualities which don't refer to any specific person or any specific action.

Some words which refer to possible **needs** include:

Acceptance	Emotional safety	Order
Adventure	Empathy	Participation
Appreciation	Equality	Peace
Authenticity	Fairness	Play & fun
Autonomy	Fantasy	Predictability
Balance	Feedback	Protection
Beauty	Flow	Reassurance
Belonging	Food & water	Recognition
Care	Freedom	Recreation
Celebration	Friendship	Respect
Challenge	Gentleness	Rest
Change	Harmony	Safety
Clarity	Honesty	Security
Closeness	Hope	Self-worth
Community	Influence	Sexual expression
Compassion	Inspiration	Shelter
Competence	Integrity	Spontaneity
Confidence	Learning	Structure
Connection	Light & air	Support & help
Consideration	Love	To be seen and heard
Contribution	Meaning	To enrich life
Cooperation	Mourning	Touch
Creativity	Movement	Trust
Ease	Mutuality	Understanding
Effectiveness	Openness	Warmth

fællesskab • venskab  
samhørighed

valg • selvbestemmelse  
frihed

færdigheder • kompetence  
kunne noget

leg • sjov



## Behind every action there is a need

This booklet has been published by the Danish Association for Life-enriching Communication (LIVKOM) and is designed to support teachers to get started with NVC by themselves.

LIVKOM is a non-profit association which exists to promote Nonviolent Communication as developed by Marshall Rosenberg. Based in Denmark, we also enjoy close collaboration with trainers in many other countries.

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The films can be watched free of charge at  
[www.kommunikationforlivet.dk/GB/Schools/NVC-film](http://www.kommunikationforlivet.dk/GB/Schools/NVC-film)

