

Universal Needs

When you hear the word need you likely get the idea of lack, weakness, or “neediness”. This isn’t how we are relating to needs in NVC. Universal needs are the guidebook for your life. I remember feeling so lost at times in my life and wondering how the creator could have dropped me into this world without guidance. The guidance was there all along in the form of universal needs. Here’s a simple example. When you’re thirsty you connect with the need for water and get yourself a drink. Listening to your need and taking action from it, you contribute to your own aliveness which in turn makes you more available to contribute to others.

You can think of needs as guiding energies that come up in your consciousness to let you know what is out of alignment. Let’s look at a less concrete need like *being heard*. Imagine you tell your partner about a big success you had at work and s/he responds with a distracted “oh, that’s nice.” You feel your heart sink and a sense of disappointment alerting you to a need not met. You take a moment and ask yourself what you needed in sharing that with your partner. When you name the need to be heard, you have a sense of how to get back in connection with your partner. You might say something like, *“I am wondering if you are in a space to hear this because it’s big for me and I am really wanting to share it with you and know you hear me.”*

Making decisions from present needs is different from what I call trial and error living in which you take action from a guess about what might work, what you have seen others do, or what someone advised you to do. Knowing exactly what needs are alive in a given situation, it is much easier to choose effective action. Sometimes connecting with a need is the effective action itself. Just feeling the energy of a need can meet it, that is put you back in aliveness and alignment.

Perhaps the most revolutionary part of becoming conscious of universal needs is knowing that everyone in every action is attempting to meet or align with a life giving universal need. The more you are able to recognize this in others and yourself the more compassion arises naturally. You are set free from having to judge people and put them in the appropriate box (e.g., nice, helpful, obnoxious, criminal, racist, fanatic, etc.). Your ability to relate to others in a fluid and authentic way increases.

A big part of having a sense of freedom and power in your life is knowing the difference between a need and the strategies that meet a need. Identifying a need gives you a sense of limitless options. When you are thinking a strategy is a need, or thinking there is just one strategy (or person) that can meet your need you often feel stuck and hopeless about getting your needs met. You can begin to cultivate a needs consciousness by working with the exercises below.