

Connection Superhighway

Finding Solutions that Work for All

by Myra Walden

The Connection Superhighway process can assist us when there is conflict in a relationship. Its purpose is to create the quality of connection in which everyone's needs matter and can be met through natural giving. Connection can be established swiftly by revealing our needs and acknowledging the needs of others—with care. The process has three parts: (1) Self-Empathy, (2) Needs Identification, and (3) Dialogue. The first two you will do on your own (although they can be internalized to the point that they're a mental routine that can be run on the fly). The last is done with the person on the other side of the conflict.

1. SELF-EMPATHY: CONNECTING WITH UNMET NEEDS

Engage in this practice to transform anger, release pain, increase clarity about your needs in a difficult situation, and gain insight about how to meet your needs.

Situation Write down what happened without adding your thoughts, feelings, or interpretation about the situation. For example, "My son said, 'I can't take this' and left the house" or "My supervisor said that I need to improve my productivity rate."

Judging and Blaming If you are feeling angry, write a letter addressed to the person, and express any and all judgments, criticism, and blame—uncensored. Express judgments without justification ("I have a right to be angry") or self-condemnation ("I shouldn't judge people"). Continue in this manner until you experience an organic shift. Then, tear up the letter.

Sensations Bring your attention to your body. What physical sensations do you notice? Use the sensations inventory (Appendix 5.4), to help you.

Feelings How do you feel now about the situation? Write it down.

Needs What needs of yours are/were not met in this situation? What is the most important need in this situation? Write it down.

Mourning Connect with this need in your body. What are your physical sensations? Experience the pain of the unmet need fully; feel the sorrow; cry, if you are able. Spend plenty of time here.

Inner Silence When you experience a shift, and not before, place a hand on your chest next to the heart, and find inside a place of silence. Rest there for three minutes. If you are unable to find this universal place of silence, go back to the first step and write down thoughts and judgments, and find the unmet needs underlying the judgments. Then, come back to the inner silence.

Strategy Ask yourself, “What can I do at this time to meet my needs in this situation?” Rather than thinking about the answer, allow a response to arise from intuition. If a response arises from intuition, write it down. If not, keep the question alive in you until the action becomes clear.

2. NEEDS IDENTIFICATION

In the Self-Empathy process, you identified your unmet needs in this situation. Write them down on a separate sheet.

Now, put yourself in the other person’s shoes. What do you imagine their needs could be in this situation? Write them down. Use the needs inventory (Appendix 4.3), if helpful.

3. DIALOGUE

Now that you have given yourself empathy, have clarity about your needs, and have a guess about the other person’s needs, you are ready to engage in a dialogue. Before you speak with the other person, ask yourself, “What is my intention?” “Do I want to connect or do I want to get my way?” “Am I willing to stay in the dialogue until we find a solution that works for both of us?” If your intention is to connect, proceed. If not, ask yourself what is preventing you from wanting to connect, e.g., “Am I afraid that my needs won’t be met if I don’t assert myself?” “Do I have difficulty trusting this person’s good will?” “Do I believe that they don’t care about me?” When you are ready to seek connection before solutions, follow these steps:

1. Ask the person: “I’m guessing that you’re longing for (wanting, wishing, needing, hoping, yearning for) [their possible needs] in this situation. Is that so?”
 - a. If they agree, proceed to step 2.
 - b. If not, continue to try to guess and connect with their needs until they let you know that you do understand what they are wishing for in the situation.

2. Respond: "I understand what you want. And I'm needing (wishing, wanting, hoping, longing for, yearning for) [your needs] in this situation." End with one of these questions:
 - a. If you have not established connection yet, say: How do you feel hearing this?
 - b. If you have attained connection, say: "I'd like us to talk about what we can do to meet both of our needs. Are you willing?" or "Shall we?"

Adapted from the work of Marshall Rosenberg | Center for Nonviolent Communication | cnvc.org

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