

Quotes from women in Empowerment groups

"I used to dread bedtime because that's when he would start blaming me for everything. Now, I say 'I need safety.' I take the crib mattress that [my therapist] gave me and go to sleep in my daughters' bedroom. He said, 'Don't go to that group anymore. You're going crazy!'"

"I used to feel guilty coming to the group because my husband doesn't like it. I don't anymore. Now I tell him 'I need support. I'll be back at 8:15' and leave."

"I thought it was my duty to have sex when he wanted so I made myself available and then got depressed. Not anymore. I decide about my body. I have choice [autonomy]."

The women in the group learned to acknowledge their partners' needs, which, not surprisingly, increased their safety in the relationship.

"Last night, my husband got mad that dinner wasn't ready when he came home and started yelling. I said, 'I get that you're hungry; I'll make you a snack. And I need respect. Would you please lower your voice?'"

Quotes from men who learned to connect with their experience

"I used to be blocked emotionally, and I went to a retreat that helped me unblock. Then, I learned NVC [] and now I can name my feelings and understand the cause. 'Oh, yes, I'm longing for that.' When I feel something weird in my belly, it helps me a lot to identify my feelings and needs. It's not like the feelings go away, but I feel peace. I remember a time when I talked to some people expressing my feelings and needs and I was able to cry, and cry, and cry. At this time, I'm about to change jobs and I get some feelings from I don't know where. So, I connect with myself and I'm able to center. It's been very beneficial."*

"I studied human development and Gestalt therapy, so I knew how to connect with my feelings. However, connecting with my needs has been a great gift. In the past, I used to be mindful of the needs of others. Now, I can connect with my needs also. And I have learned that there are thousands of ways to attend to my needs. It's been a gift."

"NVC has helped me transform all the significant connections in my life through empathy and honesty. But before I could access empathy for others and know what my honesty was, I had to start with self-connection. And before I could de-escalate conflicts with other people, first I had to de-escalate myself. Now, I can approach people in so many different situations and connect with them in order to have a mutually beneficial outcome."

Testimonial from a woman who went through divorce

Myra's unique application of Nonviolent Communication in therapy came to my rescue, quelling intense emotions during my divorce and helping forge a path of communication that our whole family benefits from to this day. I'm sharing a little bit of my personal story here so that you can be inspired to use NVC-inspired therapy to help other people through some of the darkest moments of their lives.

When I first contacted Myra, it was the day after my now ex-husband and I had had "the talk." I was feeling a desperate urgency mixed with hope. I had this burning feeling in the bottom of my throat where my clavicles create a hollow, as if I wanted to speak and be heard in a way that I just couldn't get to on my own. At the time, I knew enough about NVC to seek out Myra to act as a couple's therapist to guide us through separation and co-parenting.

She met with me and my ex separately first, for one session each, then for multiple sessions together, acting as a mediator. Using NVC she heard and empathized with each of us. Then, she had us practice hearing, reflecting back, and empathizing with each other after she had modeled how, in what I came to refer to as giving us the "Cliff's notes."

In later sessions, she even had us practice breaking the news to the kids as she played their role, asking follow-up questions so that we could be prepared with our responses. It's something I can barely think upon without tears in my eyes, but oh how it worked. Because of the magic of Myra, we were able to stay present, empathize, and grieve with our kids in that moment. She gave us the gift to be present with our own and the kids' intense sadness, which some might instinctually want to avoid by hurrying out of the room, attempting to cheer them up artificially, or hardening ourselves to our own pain, thereby appearing stiff and cold.

Myra made it safe to be sad.

But first she made it safe to be angry. In our initial meetings, a major disagreement was darkening the commitment my ex and I had made to surround our kids as much as possible with loving co-parents, doing familiar family activities together as a "family of four."

Again, Myra used needs-based empathy, this time as a superpower to meet anger. But she didn't meet it right away. First, she provided a safe space for each of us to express our anger safely, and then, and only then, did the unmet needs behind the anger begin to surface. And once the needs were out, she gave them empathy. And she taught us how to do the same for each other.

This was very different from my experiences with prior therapists, both individual and in couple's therapy. In those sessions, the therapist gave the space for anger, resentment, sadness, and frustration to vent, sure. But I found that venting without the needs surfacing was just recreating and reigniting anger and resentments. In individual therapy, it felt good in the moment to burn bright with indignation and to feel validated in my grievances. I left with my need for validation met. But I left unchanged in my perspective and without the tools to effect change. I didn't know the needs. I didn't know the purpose of my anger. So I couldn't imagine, as NVC does, less costly and more efficient ways to meet those needs.

In traditional couple's therapy, it had been even worse. Burning bright with indignation—without a magical Myra to empathize and soothe each of us in turn and provide us with those Cliff's notes to give each other empathy—left us angrier still. Without a focus on the unmet universal needs sparking the anger, it just didn't work. I wonder how it can ever work as effectively to leave people "vented" but (without needs-based empathy) so vulnerable afterwards.

It's not that my ex and I always get along or that we don't have conflict—as co-parents who have different personalities and approaches, we have plenty of occasions to disagree. We may even have as many breakdowns in communication as we have successes. But the successes are never flukes—they're always attributed to one or both of us using what we've learned of Nonviolent Communication; and the breakdowns are our predictable human failures to use those skills in the heat of anger, fear, or frustration.

By the way, that was me using self-empathy!

Writing this foreword has met my need for perspective, seeing how far we've come as we prepare to spend the holidays for the fourth year in a row as a separated but together four-person family.

And it has met my need for hope—hope that as you read this testimonial, you'll be inspired to use Myra's book and the unique tools that she sets forth in her personal, warm writing style to create a whole bunch more magical Myra moments in the world. We all need you.

Evangeline, Chicago, USA