

The Empathy Call

The Empathy Call is a form for practicing NVC that many practitioners find to be a tremendous support towards everyday self-connection and learning. It's also an easy way for those of us who aren't in everyday contact with NVC-ers to find connection, companionship, and community with others who are doing this work.

General Suggestions for Creating the 'Container':

- In planning this call, consider that you're co-creating a **sacred meeting space**, like a meditation room, as opposed to a business meeting or a casual chat.
- Schedule a forty minute phone call for a time when both you and your empathy buddy are willing and able to be present for one another.
- Before the call, take a few minutes to reflect on what you might like to have support with.
- Take the call in a quiet place with few external distractions.
- Use a landline if possible.
- **Just be on the call** when you're on the call, as opposed to multi-tasking, eating, folding laundry, etc.
- **Be honest** if you're feeling disconnected/ disengaged from the conversation that's taking place. Work with your partner to find strategies that are mutually supportive.
- Remember that **there's no 'wrong' way to do this**. When in doubt, connect to your present feelings and needs and those of your partner to see where to go next.
- Be with each other as you would in a sacred place. These calls often bring up deep vulnerability and intimacy. Hold each other, from beginning to end, in a way that promotes safety and trust.

Suggested Call Flow:

A. OPENING

1. **"Hello"**: Check to see if your partner was expecting the call and if it's still a good time for your partner to speak. If not, reschedule.
2. **"What's alive right now"**: Briefly check-in with each other on *present* state of feelings/needs and any requests that you have for your time together.
3. **"Who wants to start"**: Decide who will share first and how you want to divide the time (i.e. 20 minutes each, or whole forty minutes for one situation).
4. **"What would really help me ..."**: Before starting to share, the Sharer makes any requests that would help meet needs for safety/ trust/ reassurance (i.e. *"would you be willing to let me know if you start getting triggered by what I'm saying?"*).

B. SHARING AND EMPATHY. Suggested Form:

- * The Sharer shares the situation that's alive for them. If it's hard to find the juice, Sharer might try letting go of any filters and fully expressing their Jackals (judgmental thoughts, blame, shame, etc.) about the situation.
- * Receiver tunes into the **present** feelings/ needs of the Sharer, as opposed to how the Sharer *felt* in the past when the situation occurred (i.e. *So, right now, as she's telling me this, she's feeling sad ...* as opposed to *So, she felt sad yesterday ...*).
- * Receiver verbally **guesses** feelings/ needs when either wanting to confirm their own understanding or because they sense the Sharer wants a confirmation/ reflection. Otherwise, the Receiver offers silent empathic presence.
- * For verbal guesses, Sharer will confirm whether or not the words "fit".
- * Continue until Sharer feels complete, often indicated by a relaxing of the energy.
- * It's important in this process that the Receiver follow the Sharer's lead and does not try to volunteer a different understanding without asking first.

C. CLOSING

1. "What I'm really appreciating right now is...": Share any learnings and appreciations from the call with each other, including how your partner contributed to your life (i.e. "Your reflections really helped me to get more connected to my needs, taking this huge weight off my shoulders!"). Also, share any disappointments (i.e. "I noticed that I wasn't as present to you as I'd like to be and I'm feeling sadness about that.").
2. Follow-up?: Set a time for the next call, if desired.

EMPATHY is our "innate" ability to be with the feelings and needs in ourselves and others. "Giving" empathy, we are simply returning us all to Life as it is. Empathy can only occur when our preconceived ideas and judgments are put aside and there is an openness to serving as witness to someone else's experience. Words are used when either the giver or receiver wants verbal confirmation that the giver is clearly seeing the receiver.

Other kinds of responses:

- Give advice/ Judge/ Fix the problem ('if I were you, I would...')
- Explain it Away / Correct the other person's understanding
- Console / Sympathize / Reassure
- Evaluate / Educate
- Shut down feelings / Take their mind 'off the problem' ('let's go see a movie')
- Investigate / Interrogate (i.e. 'when did this start to happen?')
- Tell your Story ('that reminds me of when...') / One-up the other person