

Nonviolent Communication

A model for connection

The intention of the Nonviolent Communication (NVC) model is to bring about connection, with each other and ourselves. As we communicate, there is a constant exchange backwards and forwards, exploring what's going on for me and what's going on for you. I honestly share how I am feeling and what I need without criticizing or blaming anyone and then I empathically listen to how another person is feeling and what they need, without judgment or criticism. This leads to a connected dialogue in which we discover what is present and how we can enrich each other's lives.

This backwards and forwards flow of communication is also referred to as the Giraffe Dance and is frequently represented by a figure of eight.



Why a giraffe dance? The giraffe is used in NVC workshops as a symbol for a way of being that is connected and compassionate. The giraffe is the land mammal with the biggest heart (weighing more than 11kg!). It's has a long neck so it can see beyond what's immediately in front of it (i.e. hearing the needs behind someone's judging and blaming) and can pick the juicy leaves from between the acacia thorns. i.e. It hears the beauty in what another is expressing.

The Jackal is used as a symbol for disconnecting language. This is the static language of blame, judgment, labels, comparison, evaluation, interpretation, demand, and thinking in terms of punishment and reward. Jackal language is focused on what's right and what's wrong. The intention is not connection. Listening to and unpacking my jackal thinking can be very helpful to identify how I feel about a situation and what's important to me. When we 'own' these jackal thoughts, knowing that they are my particular reaction to a situation and consciously choose to explore them to figure out our underlying feelings and needs, we commonly refer to this in NVC workshops as "Enjoying the jackal show"



Becoming aware of the difference between jackal and giraffe language gives us greater freedom to choose how we wish to respond to others or express ourselves.