








Team Check-in

Strengthening trust and collaboration through Nonviolent Communication

COLLABORATING | Trust

→ What you will need:

-  3-30
-  Group & individual
-  30 mins preparation
-  1.5 hrs execution
-  pen and paper

→ Menu:

- I. Overview
- II. Learning Activity
- III. Assessment
- IV. Key Advice
- V. References



→ Related Tools:



Deep Listening



The Volcano of Change



Triggering Team Trust



“

Check in. Speak up. Move forward. Through real listening and honest sharing, this tool uses Nonviolent Communication to build trust, clear the air and strengthen collaboration within your team.”

—Maïke Verhagen





I. Overview

Every team, at some point, experiences tension, disconnection or simply the need to pause and reset. Nonviolent Communication (NVC), developed by Marshall Rosenberg (Rosenberg & Chopra, 2015), offers a structured approach to create space for honest expression and empathetic listening within a team.

This tool isn't exclusively for teams in conflict; it also serves as a ritual for team maintenance and reconnection: a moment to realign and bring to light what often goes unsaid.

The process relies on psychological safety, with clear boundaries. Students practice expressing themselves, listening with openness and respond with curiosity rather than defensiveness.

NVC encourages students to speak from their own experience, focusing on observations, feelings, needs and requests, instead of blame or judgement. This shift opens the door to deeper understanding, trust and more meaningful team dynamics, even in challenging moments.

Learning outcome

- ✓ The student is able to apply the principles of Nonviolent Communication to maintain or strengthen trust in team settings





II. Learning Activity

A structured team check-in based on Nonviolent Communication principles to improve trust, mutual understanding and collaboration.



1. Introducing Nonviolent Communication 20 mins

Begin by introducing the core principles of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) as a shared foundation for this activity. Explain that NVC fosters open, respectful dialogue, even in moments of tension or frustration. It helps team members express what's important to them without blame and listen to others with empathy.

Present the four steps of NVC using the handout and the Feelings and Needs Inventory:

- Observation – What do you see or hear, without judgment?
- Feeling – What do you feel in response?
- Need – Which need is or isn't being met?
- Request – What concrete action could help that need?

Model NVC yourself throughout the activity. For example: *"I notice that we're drifting into side conversations. I feel a bit distracted. I need more focus in the group. Would it be okay if we returned to the main topic?"*

Tip: tailor the introduction to the group's experience. Offer a brief refresher if students are already familiar with NVC or consider introducing it more thoroughly if it's new to them.





2. Setting the Tone for Trust 10 mins

Make sure there is a foundation of psychological safety. Remind the group of the Seven Golden Guidelines for Safe Learning and explain that this activity requires openness and vulnerability.

Introduce the following ground rules and ask the group to explicitly agree to them before continuing:

- Our intention is to strengthen team relationships and collaboration.
- We speak only from our own experience.
- We separate behaviour from the person.
- We aim for honesty with tact.
- No shaming, blaming or naming.
- The facilitator leads the process.

Clarify that upholding these agreements helps create a safe and meaningful atmosphere for dialogue.

Tip: if needed, explain the role of the facilitator, who may be a prepared team member or, in case of conflict, someone external to the group.



3. Practising Appreciation 15 mins

Students will practise the first two steps of Nonviolent Communication: making observations and expressing feelings when needs are met. Refer to the Feelings and Needs Inventory.

Introduce one of the following prompts:

- *“What helps me function or thrive in this team is...”*
- *“What I enjoy about working in this team is...”*

Explain that each team member will write three short, sincere and specific sentences using the prompt. Encourage them to focus on concrete behaviour or situations (observations),



the feeling it evoked and the need that was met.

Example: "What helps me thrive in this team is that when I make a mistake, nobody judges me, and I get offered help. This makes me feel safe in my learning process and supported."

Give the group a few quiet minutes to reflect and write.

Once everyone is ready, guide a sharing round. Each team member reads their sentences aloud, one by one. There are no reactions, no comments or discussion, just listening to each other. Reassure the group that there will be space for response and dialogue later.

Tip: this sets a tone of gratitude, mutual recognition and connection, and helps establish psychological safety before moving into more challenging reflections.



4. Surfacing Frustrations and Needs 15 mins

Students will practice the second half of the NVC model: expressing feelings when needs are not met, and translating these into clear, behavioural requests. Refer to the Feelings and Needs Inventory.

Introduce the first prompt: *"What I sometimes find frustrating in this team is..."*

Ask students to write three short, sincere and concrete sentences. Emphasise that they should focus on specific behaviours or situations—not on diagnosing or labelling others—and clearly describe how these experiences make them feel.

Example: "What I sometimes find frustrating in this team is when people check their phones while I am talking. It makes me feel invisible and disconnected."

Give the group a few quiet minutes to write.

Then, introduce the second prompt: *"What would help me function better (or thrive more) in this team is..."*

Ask students to write three short, sincere and concrete sentences. Students now turn their unmet needs into constructive, actionable requests. Remind them that these should relate to behaviour, not personality or attitude.



Example: *"What would help me is if we agree to keep phones away during meetings, so I feel more present and heard."*

Reassure them that these are invitations, not demands. Requests open the door to dialogue and mutual understanding.



5. From Insights to Agreements 20 mins

Now that all appreciations, frustrations and requests have been shared, open the floor for a guided group dialogue and reflection.

You might say: *"You've now heard each other's appreciations, frustrations and needs. Before we make any agreements, let's take a moment to reflect. What stood out to you? What do you recognise? What do you want to understand better?"*

Encourage students to ask each other open, respectful questions and to respond with curiosity, not defensiveness. This is the first moment where interaction is invited – ensure the tone stays constructive and grounded in the principles of Nonviolent Communication.

Use prompts such as:

- What patterns or shared needs do we notice?
- Where do we see opportunities to support each other better?
- What do we want to take with us as a team?

Keep this part focused. The goal isn't to solve everything now, but to surface what matters most and lay the groundwork for stronger collaboration.

After the group reflection, help the group translate insights into concrete, shared agreements. These may include small behavioural shifts, new team norms or ground rules, or practices to support one another.

Facilitate a short round of suggestions. For each proposal, ask: *"Does everyone support this?"*

Aim for consensus, ensuring that everyone feels comfortable supporting the decision. If someone hesitates, invite further dialogue using a Deep Democracy prompt such as: *"What would it take for you to come along with this decision?"*

This allows space for minority voices and strengthens collective ownership.



Close by summarising the agreements and checking that everyone feels clear and aligned. If helpful, appoint someone to follow up or remind the team of what was decided.

Tip: as a check-out, you may consider inviting team members to indicate the extent to which they agree with the following three statements. This can be done non-verbally (e.g. holding up a number from 1 to 5 with their fingers), and without comment:

- *"I feel relief that some challenges and needs that had been lingering were addressed."*
- *"I feel closer to my teammates now."*
- *"I have clarity on how we will move forward in our team collaboration."*



III. Assessment

In pairs, students exchange peer feedback to reflect on how they contributed to building trust during the activity. Afterwards, each student writes a brief individual reflection on their use of Nonviolent Communication and their role within the team dynamics.



Purpose

Assessment *as* learning aims to strengthen the learning process and the development of metacognitive skills. It empowers students to direct their own learning and to become independent, critical self-assessors.



Roles

Self-assessment & Peer assessment



Characteristics

Self-regulated learning



Materials

Peer Feedback & Individual Reflection



Assessment

Feedback in Pairs (15 mins)

First, pair up with someone from your team. Begin with a moment of silent reflection on how your partner contributed to trust during the session. Then, take turns sharing your thoughts using these three prompts:

- *“You contributed to building more trust in the team when you...”*
(Describe a specific action or moment.)
- *“Something I’d like to see more of in you is...”*
(Focus on a concrete behaviour or quality.)
- *“What I wish for you in future teamwork is...”*

The person receiving feedback listens without responding. After hearing all three prompts, they may reply with one of the following:

- *“What touched me was...”* or *“What resonates with me is...”*
- *“What I take with me is...”*

Afterwards, switch roles and repeat.

Individual Reflection (10–15 mins)

Then, write a short individual reflection using the following prompts:

1. Which words from others stayed with you?
2. What did you learn about your role in building trust within the team?
3. How did you apply the principles of Nonviolent Communication?
4. What would you like to practise or strengthen in future team settings?





IV. Key Advice

The Nonviolent Communication handout (Step 1), **Seven Golden Guidelines for Safe Learning** (Step 2) and the **Feelings and Needs Inventory** (Steps 1, 3 and 4) can be downloaded below.





Key Advice

Nonviolent Communication

Nonviolent Communication (NVC), developed by Marshall Rosenberg, is a method for communicating with honesty and empathy. It is particularly useful in situations where there may be disagreement, tension or frustration. NVC is not about being polite or avoiding conflict. Instead, it helps people stay connected while expressing themselves clearly and listening to others with openness.

The goal of NVC is to foster mutual understanding and trust. It helps people express what is alive in them: their needs, emotions, and experiences, without blaming others or making assumptions. In team settings, this creates a space where participants feel safe to speak honestly, take each other seriously, and create an optimal environment for meaningful collaboration.

The Four Steps of NVC

At the heart of NVC is a simple but powerful structure consisting of four steps. These steps guide us in expressing ourselves clearly and listening attentively.

1. **Observation**

Describe what you see or hear without adding interpretation, judgment, or blame.

Example: "In the last three team meetings, we started about ten minutes later than planned."

2. **Feeling**

Name what you feel in response to what you observe. Focus on your emotional experience, not on your thoughts about others.

Example: "I feel frustrated and restless."

3. **Need**

Identify the need that is connected to your feeling. Needs are universal human values¹ such as safety, clarity, appreciation, or autonomy.

Example: "I have a need for structure and clarity."

4. **Request**

Formulate a clear, concrete, and doable request that could help meet your need. It should be stated positively and be open to negotiation.

Example: "Would you be willing to start our meetings on time from now on?"

¹ If students struggle to find the right words, you can refer them to the Feelings and Needs Inventory, based on the work of Marshall Rosenberg.



The power of NVC lies in making a shift from blame or judgment toward self-connection and constructive dialogue.

Examples

- Positive team moment: *“What really supports me in this team is that I can make mistakes without being judged. That helps me feel safe and encourages me to keep learning.”*
- Tension or frustration: *“When I get interrupted while speaking, I feel frustrated and disheartened. I need more space to express my thoughts. Could we agree to let each person finish before responding?”*





Key Advice

Seven golden guidelines to create a safe learning environment

Creating a safe and inclusive learning environment is an ongoing process. By implementing these guidelines, you can foster open communication, a sense of belonging and collective learning:

1. Set clear expectations

Clearly communicate your expectations and routines from the beginning. Ensure that students understand what behaviour is acceptable and what is not. Encourage them to participate in creating these expectations, promoting a sense of ownership and responsibility.

2. Build trust

Establish a trustworthy and secure environment by emphasising that anything shared within the group should remain confidential. Encourage students to make their own decisions about sharing personal experiences and respect their individual levels of comfort.

3. Foster active listening

Emphasise the importance of truly listening and understanding. Foster an environment where students feel free to express themselves without fear of judgment or criticism and discourage interruptions. Strengthen active listening skills by teaching non-verbal cues and using prompts.

4. Encourage empathy

Encourage students to consider the feelings and experiences of others and to respond with kindness, acceptance and understanding, even when perspectives differ from their own. Foster an inclusive and respectful environment where empathy is valued and embraced as an essential aspect of communication and mutual understanding.

5. Be a role model

Lead by example and embody the behaviour you expect from your students. Treat all students with respect, fairness and kindness, and appreciate their diverse backgrounds, individual strengths and contributions. Ensure the safety and well-being of all students by promptly and decisively addressing any form of harassment or discrimination. Reflect on mistakes and offer apologies when necessary.





6. Adapt the pace and intensity

Recognise when emotions escalate and become overwhelming, adjusting the pace or intensity of the activity as necessary. For example, implement the "five-minute rule", where each student can express their controversial view in a respectful manner, or offer a short break for students to journal and reflect on their emotions, enabling them to regulate their feelings.

7. Follow up and check-in

Encourage students to reflect on the impact of the experience on themselves as well as the group. Provide individual or group follow-up and inquire about the well-being of students. Offer the opportunity for further discussion or support if needed. If you believe that the emotional intensity or well-being of the students exceeds your expertise, do not hesitate to seek advice from a student advisor, mental health professional or the appropriate support services provided by your institution.





Key Advice

Feelings and Needs Inventory by the Center for Nonviolent Communication

Feelings when needs are satisfied

Excited Amazed Animated Ardent Aroused Astonished Dazzled Eager Energetic Enthusiastic Giddy Invigorated Lively Passionate Surprised Vibrant Refreshed Enlivened Rejuvenated Renewed Rested Restored Revived	Exhilarated Blissful Ecstatic Elated Enthralled Exuberant Radiant Rapturous Thrilled Joyful Amused Delighted Glad Happy Jubilant Pleased Tickled	Peaceful Calm Clear-headed Comfortable Centered Content Equanimous Fulfilled Mellow Quiet Relaxed Relieved Satisfied Serene Still Tranquil Trusting Grateful Appreciative Moved Thankful Touched	Affectionate Compassionate Friendly Loving Open-hearted Sympathetic Tender Warm Inspired Amazed Awed Wonder Confident Empowered Open Proud Safe Secure	Engaged Absorbed Alert Curious Engrossed Enchanted Entranced Fascinated Interested Intrigued Involved Spellbound stimulated Hopeful Expectant Encouraged Optimistic
--	--	---	--	---



Feelings and Needs Inventory by the Center for Nonviolent Communication

Feelings when needs are not satisfied

Afraid Apprehensive Dread Foreboding Frightened Mistrustful Panicked Petrified Scared Suspicious Terrified Wary Worried Confuse Ambivalent Baffled Bewildered Dazed Hesitant Lost Mystified Perplexed Puzzled Torn Tense Anxious Cranky Distressed Distraught Edgy Fidgety Frazzled Irritable Jittery Nervous Overwhelmed Restless Stressed out	Annoyed Aggravated Dismayed Disgruntled Displeased Exasperated Frustrated Impatient Irritated Irked Disconnected Alienated Aloof Apathetic Bored Cold Detached Distant Distracted Indifferent Numb Removed Uninterested Withdrawn Vulnerable Fragile Guarded Helpless Insecure Leery Reserved Sensitive Shaky	Angry Enraged Furious Incensed Indignant Irate Livid Outraged Resentful Disquiet Agitated Alarmed Discombobulated Disconcerted Disturbed Perturbed Rattled Restless Shocked Startled Surprised Troubled Turbulent Turmoil Uncomfortable Uneasy Unnerved Unsettled Upset	Aversion Animosity Appalled Contempt Disgusted Dislike Hate Horried Hostile Repulsed Embarrassed Ashamed Chagrined Flustered Guilty Mortified Self-conscious Fatigue Beat Burnt out Depleted Exhausted Lethargic Listless Sleepy Tired Weary Worn out	Pain Agony Anguished Bereaved Devastated Grief Heartbroken Hurt Lonely Miserable Regretful Remorseful Sad Depressed Dejected Despair Despondent Disappointed Discouraged Disheartened Forlorn Gloomy Heavy-hearted Hopeless Melancholy Unhappy Wretched Yearning Envious Jealous Longing Nostalgic Pining Wistful
---	--	---	---	---



Feelings and Needs Inventory by the Center for Nonviolent Communication

Needs

Connection Acceptance Affection Appreciation Belonging Cooperation Communication Closeness Community Companionship Compassion Consideration Consistency Empathy Inclusion Intimacy Love Mutuality Nurturing Respect/self-respect Safety, security Stability Support To know and be known To see and be seen To understand and be understood Trust Warmth	Physical Well-being Air Food Movement/exercise Rest/sleep Sexual expression Safety Shelter Touch Water Honesty Authenticity Integrity Presence Autonomy Choice Freedom Independence Space Spontaneity Peace Beauty Communion Ease Equality Harmony Inspiration Order	Meaning Awareness Celebration of life Challenge Clarity Competence Consciousness Contribution Creativity Discovery Efficacy Effectiveness Growth Hope Learning Mourning Participation Purpose Self-expression Stimulation To matter Understanding Play Joy Humor
--	---	--



V. References

Center for Nonviolent Communication. (n.d.). Feelings and needs inventory.

<https://www.cnvc.org/store/feelings-and-needs-inventory>

Kashtan, I., & Kashtan, M. (n.d.). Basics of Nonviolent Communication. The Fearless Heart.

Retrieved July 11, 2025, from

[https://thefearlessheart.org/nvc-reference-materials/basics-of-nonviolent-communication /](https://thefearlessheart.org/nvc-reference-materials/basics-of-nonviolent-communication/)

Rosenberg, M. B., & Chopra, D. (2015). Nonviolent communication: A language of life: Life-changing tools for healthy relationships. PuddleDancer Press.

