

# EMPASY HANDBOOK

## ON EMOTIONAL LITERACY



Authors: Ronke Oluwadare, Petra Quast (Insieme per Mano)

Graphic design: Blancdenoir

© 2025 EMPASY Project Consortium. All rights reserved.

This publication may be reproduced, in whole or in part, for non-commercial purposes provided that the source is acknowledged. No part of this publication may be used for commercial purposes without prior written permission from the EMPASY project consortium.

# TABLE OF CONTENT

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>PHASE 1</b>	
<b>LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR EMOTIONAL LITERACY .....</b>	<b>8</b>
1.1 THE APPROACH WE CHOSE: THE NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION	
1.2 OBSERVING FACTS	
1.3 RECOGNISING FEELINGS	
<b>PHASE 2</b>	
<b>IDENTIFYING NEEDS THROUGH A SAFE SPACE .....</b>	<b>15</b>
2.1 IDENTIFYING NEEDS	
2.2 FORMULATING REQUESTS	
<b>PHASE 3</b>	
<b>ADOPTING STRATEGIES TO RESPOND TO NEEDS .....</b>	<b>21</b>
3.1 TOOLS TO EXPRESS EMOTIONAL LITERACY	
3.2 LISTENING	
3.3 QUESTIONS	
3.4 EMPATHY	
3.5 RAPPORT	
<b>ANNEX 1.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>ANNEX 2.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>42</b>

**EMPASY** (EMotional Literacy and Participatory Approaches to Support Youth Mental Health) is a two-year Erasmus+ funded initiative aimed at strengthening youth well-being by training youth workers, youth leaders, and non-formal education professionals on how to integrate emotional literacy and participatory approaches into their work. The project brings together an international consortium with partners in Italy, Belgium, Lebanon, Morocco, and Jordan.

EMPASY addresses urgent needs in MENA contexts, where young people face high unemployment, social exclusion, and limited access to psychological support. The project seeks to bridge gaps in youth support systems by promoting an integrated approach that values young people's active role in decision-making processes. Through a multisectoral network and a strong commitment to inclusion, EMPASY aims to generate lasting impact on youth well-being and the quality of educational work across Europe and partner countries.

This Handbook is one of the key results of the EMPASY project. It is designed as a practical resource for youth workers, youth leaders, and other professionals providing non-formal education opportunities to young people. Specifically, it focuses on emotional literacy in youth work and can be used alongside a complementary Handbook on participatory approaches. Both publications were piloted during an initial training cohort and developed based on a robust needs assessment conducted in Lebanon, Morocco, and Jordan, using desk research, questionnaires, and focus groups.

The Handbook is structured into three sections, each corresponding to a key phase that supports users in gradually integrating new approaches into their work:

1. **Laying the groundwork**
2. **Identifying needs through a safe space**
3. **Adopting strategies to respond to needs**

Each section includes theoretical frameworks and definitions, as well as templates, checklists, case studies, and other practical examples.





# INTRODUCTION

In our everyday life, even though we are more connected than ever, we often find ourselves struggling to connect in a deep, honest and compassionate way; with others and even with ourselves.

**Emotional literacy** is the capacity to recognize, understand, express, and respond to emotions in ways that are constructive, not destructive. It encompasses a set of skills that enable humans to understand and manage their own emotions, as well as those around them.

It is not only a personal skill, but a collective one. Fundamental for creating relationships, communities, and systems rooted in empathy, dignity, and care.

Youth workers are requested to do more than deliver programs or facilitate activities; they are required to hold space. Space for growth, for questions, for conflict, for joy. Often, youth workers find themselves navigating the invisible layers beneath what young people say or do: the unspoken emotions, unmet needs, and complex social dynamics that shape their experience.

That's why emotional literacy is essential. It gives us a shared language to understand what's happening beneath the surface in ourselves, in others, and in our relationships. It supports us in building trust, defusing tension, and modeling healthy communication in environments where many young people may not have had the chance to learn those skills elsewhere.

The key emotional literacy competencies include:

- 1. SELF-AWARENESS:** Understanding one's emotions and how they influence behavior and decision-making
- 2. SELF-REGULATION:** Managing emotions effectively, especially in stressful or conflict situations, while maintaining composure and control

**3. EMPATHY:** Recognizing and understanding the emotions of others, which is essential for building positive relationships and leading with compassion

**4. SOCIAL SKILLS:** Effectively managing relationships and social interactions, fostering communication, collaboration, and conflict resolution

This handbook is designed to support you — as a youth worker, educator, facilitator, or mentor — in developing and deepening your emotional literacy. It brings together a range of tools and frameworks that center emotional awareness, empathy, and conscious communication.

This handbook doesn't treat emotional intelligence or empathy as traits you either have or don't, but as practices. As skills that can be cultivated, reflected on, and improved with intention over time. We explore how to:

- **Recognize and name emotions (in ourselves and others)**
- **Respond to conflict with curiosity instead of control**
- **Set boundaries that are firm yet compassionate**
- **Create group cultures rooted in trust, care, and respect**
- **Support young people in developing their own emotional literacy**

Emotional literacy is not just about helping young people manage their feelings, it's about co-creating environments where everyone feels seen, heard, and valued.

We understand that working with young people requires more than theory. It requires tools that meet the real-life challenges of group dynamics, emotional regulation, social pressure, and power imbalances. The benefits of putting it into practice are many: starting with connecting with ourselves and our inner experiences, ending with understanding others and their needs and therefore more effective communication.

For this reason, the handbook is structured in three interconnected phases:

## **1. LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR EMOTIONAL LITERACY**

In this phase, we explore the main framework we chose to reflect on emotional literacy and the two basic concepts of emotional awareness: fact observation and feeling recognition.

## **2. IDENTIFYING NEEDS THROUGH A SAFE SPACE**

Emotions often point to underlying needs for connection, autonomy, safety, recognition, and more. In this phase, we focus on how to support young people (and ourselves) in naming what's really going on beneath the surface. We also explore what it takes to co-create safe, inclusive, and brave spaces where vulnerability can exist without fear of harm.

## **3. ADOPTING STRATEGIES TO RESPOND TO NEEDS**

This phase is about practice: how we respond to needs in ways that are both empathetic and skillful. We introduce tools from Nonviolent Communication, conflict resolution, boundary-setting, and relational repair. This section is highly practical, offering real-life scenarios and communication exercises relevant to youth work settings.



## PHASE 1

# LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR EMOTIONAL LITERACY

### 1.1 THE APPROACH WE CHOSE: THE NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION

**Nonviolent Communication**, also known as empathic or collaborative language, is a communication approach based on empathic and emotional connection with others. It is a method aimed to understand and resolve conflict.

This approach, developed by American psychologist Marshall Rosenberg in 1960, aims to transform the way we express ourselves and listen, encouraging communication based on empathy and mutual respect. It was designed to avoid the frequent misunderstandings that can arise from sloppy communication, promoting the creation of a win-win communication environments, where there are no losers, but only winners.

In the increasingly complex world of human interactions, Nonviolent Communication (NVC) emerges as a powerful tool to foster mutual understanding, to reduce conflict, and to promote deeper connections.

Dr. Marshall B. Rosenberg was committed to understand why humans, who value love and affection, end up generating violence and conflict. One of his conclusions is that we have been conditioned to think that when our needs are not met, it's someone else's fault. When we think this way, anger emerges, and we feel the need to blame and punish others. We may even enjoy punishing others if we tell ourselves they "deserve it."

NVC guides us to focus our attention on the feelings and needs we all have. Instead of simply being automatic and habitual reactions, our words become conscious responses based on what we perceive, feel, need, and desire. This helps us remain human, connected to our natural empathy, even in difficult circumstances.

This communication model encourages the art of dialogue, collaboration, and understanding through an exchange that takes into account the needs and feelings of all involved. When people fail to identify the most effective strategies to meet their needs, they may automatically resort to physical or psychological violence.

Nonviolent communication, on the other hand, aims for greater authenticity in communication, a deeper emotional connection, and conflict resolution.

Applying nonviolent communication may seem very difficult at first, however, the benefits of putting it into practice are many, starting with connecting with ourselves and our inner experiences, ending with understanding others and their needs and therefore more effective communication.

Nonviolent communication is divided into 4 STEPS:

1. **Observing facts**
2. **Recognition feelings**
3. **Identifying needs**
4. **Formulating requests**



# THE ASSUMPTIONS OF NVC

- \* NEEDS ARE UNIVERSAL;  
WE ALL HAVE THE SAME NEEDS.
- \* AT EVERY MOMENT, WE ARE TRYING TO MEET  
OUR NEEDS IN THE BEST WAY WE KNOW HOW.
- \* OUR FEELINGS VARY DEPENDING  
ON WHETHER OUR NEEDS ARE MET OR NOT.
- \* VIOLENCE IS THE TRAGIC  
EXPRESSION OF UNMET NEEDS.
- \* HONESTY AND EMPATHY ARE THE  
FOUNDATION OF CONNECTION.
- \* CONNECTION IS A CRUCIAL  
RESOURCE FOR OUR WELL-BEING.



## 1.2 OBSERVING FACTS

To implement this first step, it is necessary to objectively examine the elements that characterize a specific situation: **the facts; what we are seeing, hearing, or touching**. It is essential to separate observation from evaluation, categorization, and interpretation. A useful approach in this regard is to use introductory phrases such as: “I believe that...” or “I think that...”

A component of the NVC process invites us to distinguish observations from assumptions, interpretations, or evaluations. According to Rosenberg, “when we combine observation with evaluation, others tend to listen to criticism and resist what we say.”

Making an observation means describing what we perceive, such as what we see, hear, taste, touch, remember, or think. In a conversation, confusing what actually happened with how we reacted can easily lead to misunderstandings. Our interlocutors may, in turn, react by defending themselves or counterattacking.

Staying in the observation and clearly describing what we are reacting to, facilitates the creation of common ground for conversation. Focusing on observations specific to the time and context, it opens the door to understanding the different needs of the people involved.

**OBSERVATION:** Expressing one’s feelings (how I feel) and needs (what do I need to feel good?) is the heart of nonviolent communication. That’s why I highlighted them in red. Every time a person connects with themselves—acknowledging their feelings and needs—and communicates them to another, they automatically speak to the other’s heart.

This resonance, based on shared feelings and shared universal needs, allows for a profound understanding and connection.



## 1.3 RECOGNISING FEELINGS

This second step consists of identifying **the feelings, the emotions or the sensations**, free from thoughts and stories recognizing the emotions that arise from observing the facts and named them, without any moral judgment. Very often, feelings are confused with thoughts about a given situation (e.g., “I feel I didn’t get a fair deal”). Feelings can generate physical sensations and must be managed, not contained. This allows us to connect through a spirit of mutual respect and cooperation.

### EMOTIONS: A MULTI-COMPONENTS PROCESS

Emotions, or more precisely, emotional experiences, are multi-component processes that unfold over time in a structured way.

Emotional activation signals that a change has occurred—either in the internal or external environment—that is subjectively perceived as significant.

Emotions are neither good nor bad, neither positive nor negative in themselves; rather, all emotions serve essential functions that promote human survival and adaptation.

At most, we can describe them as pleasant or unpleasant.

The KEY COMPONENTS OF EMOTIONS include:

- **COGNITIVE APPRAISAL:** the individual’s evaluation of an emotion-triggering event
- **PHYSIOLOGICAL ACTIVATION (OR AROUSAL):** bodily responses such as changes in heart rate, respiration, sweating, blushing, or pallor
- **VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL EXPRESSIONS:** including emotional vocabulary, facial expressions, posture, and gestures
- **TENDENCY TO ACTION**
- **BEHAVIORAL RESPONSE:** the actual action taken to maintain or change the ongoing interaction between the individual and their environment

To fully understand emotions, we must consider the structure of the brain (see ANNEX 1).

At the deepest level, at the top of the spinal cord, lies the “**reptilian brain**”—the earliest part of the brain to evolve. It controls basic survival functions such as breathing, sleep, and hunger.

The next layer is the limbic system, or “**mammalian or emotional brain**”, which governs beliefs, attitudes, and the emotions they generate. Evolutionarily, emotional centers in the brain developed first to handle threats and ensure survival. The limbic system surrounds the brainstem and plays a crucial role in memory and learning.

The outermost layer, the neocortex, or “**primate/human or thinking brain**”, is responsible for rational thought. It evolved later, along with the amygdala, a structure on either side of the brain that acts as a storehouse of emotional memory. The amygdala gives life its emotional depth and intensity.

In a crisis, the amygdala reacts almost instantly, far more quickly than the neocortex. This “**emotional brain**” can act independently of rational thought. The amygdala amplifies emotional memories, making pleasurable or dangerous experiences vividly memorable.

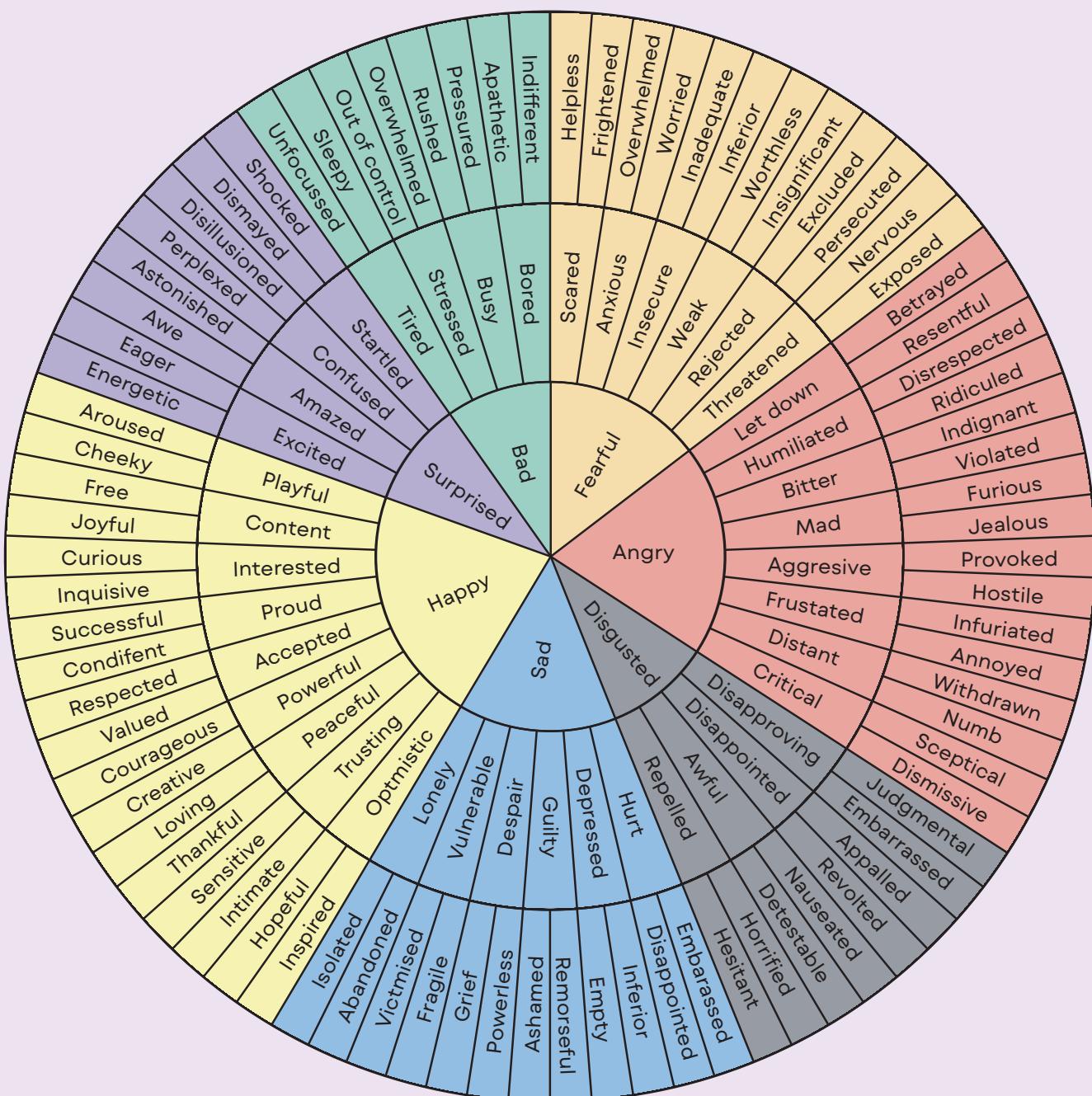
While the amygdala triggers immediate reactions, the neocortex acts as a regulator, tempering or controlling emotional impulses.

When a person experiences an “**emotional hijacking**”, the amygdala takes over, and the neocortex fails to regulate it.

Strong emotions can disrupt attention and clear thinking, but instead of suppressing emotions, individuals should aim for an intelligent balance between reason and emotion.

# THE WHEEL OF EMOTIONS

It is a visual tool that helps in understanding emotions. It visually facilitates the classification of emotions and allows for the identification of emotions in a clearer and more precise way. It also expands the view to include secondary emotions, which originate from the combination of primary emotions and develop with the individual's growth and social interaction. Their expression is therefore closely related to the individual's experience and the characteristics of the culture they belong to.



**Figure 1: Wheel of emotions**

## PHASE 2

# IDENTIFYING NEEDS THROUGH A SAFE SPACE

### 2.1 IDENTIFYING NEEDS

It is important to recognize one's needs, connected to the feelings identified. Understanding which ones, if achieved, will bring us satisfaction and well-being. It's necessary to focus on values and motivations, not on the strategies used to satisfy them.

Dr. Marshall Rosenberg, the creator of NVC, identified a **set of universal human needs** that he believed underlie our feelings and behaviors. These needs are considered fundamental and shared by all people across cultures. In the framework of Nonviolent Communication, these needs serve as a basis for understanding and resolving conflicts.

Some examples of the UNIVERSAL NEEDS:

#### 1. CONNECTION

The need for a sense of belonging, love, and positive relationships with others

#### 2. AUTONOMY

The need for independence, freedom, and a sense of personal control

#### 3. PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

The need for physical health, safety, and nourishment

#### 4. PLAY

The subtle but powerful act of building mutual trust and safety in your relationships

## **5. MEANING/PURPOSE**

The need for a sense of meaning and purpose in life

## **6. PEACE**

The need for harmony, tranquility, and absence of violence or conflict

## **7. HONESTY**

The need for sincerity, truthfulness, and integrity

## **8. EMPATHY**

The need for understanding, compassion, and connection with others' feelings

## **9. RESPECT**

The need for recognition, dignity, and acceptance

## **10. CELEBRATION**

The need for acknowledgment and appreciation of accomplishments and positive experiences



These needs, according to Rosenberg, are at the core of human motivations and actions. Nonviolent Communication emphasizes the importance of recognizing and addressing these needs in ourselves and others to promote understanding, empathy, and constructive communication.

By identifying and meeting these needs, individuals can work towards resolving conflicts and building more compassionate and cooperative relationships. Expressing them honestly, with this in mind, helps shed light on what is happening within oneself and the other person ([see ANNEX 2](#)).

The path to connection and safety is not always linear, it emerges complex and determined by different variables. Often behind disconnected language and behavior there is what we commonly know as trauma or multiple traumatic experiences.

Also in this case, to help us understand better it is key to know the structure of our nervous system. The nervous system has three autonomic responses to stress and trauma that follow an evolutionary hierarchy.



According to **Polyvagal Theory** (see figure n.2), we rely on the newest responses to help us return to a state of safety. But when the newer responses fail, we regress to using older evolutionary responses. It's this hierarchy that can give us and clients a profound window into understanding a trauma response.

## 1. SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT SYSTEM

The first circuit of their nervous system – the pathway that is unique to mammals – will try to negotiate by using the face, vocalization, or language. This is what Dr. Stephen Porges, the father of the Polyvagal theory, has coined the social engagement system.

## 2. SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

If the social engagement system doesn't negate the threat, that latest circuit will retract in order to promote mobilization. This is when the sympathetic nervous system will gear up for fight or flight.

## 3. PARASYMPATHETIC IMMOBILIZATION

If fight/flight doesn't work and the threat persists, the nervous system will resort to its oldest and most primitive response: parasympathetic immobilization. According to Stephen, this action is controlled by the old vagus that we share with reptiles.

When humans experience TRAUMA, their nervous systems often remain on high alert for any sign of danger. This puts them at a higher risk of slipping back into sympathetic mobilization or parasympathetic immobilization. And when humans go into a state of immobilization with fear, the nervous system doesn't provide them with an easy way to get back to a regulated state where social engagement processes are easily recruited.

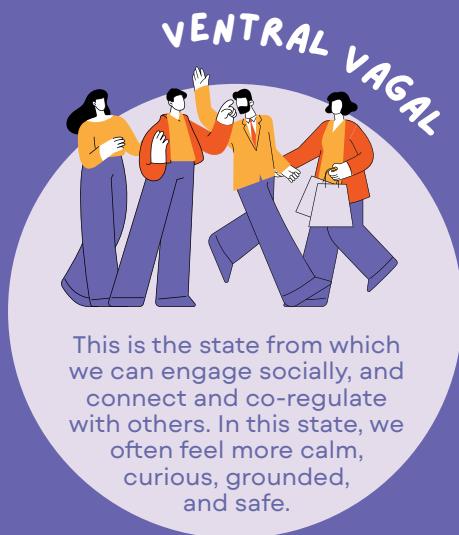


# MAPPING YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM'S RESPONSE TO TRAUMA

Based on ideas from **Stephen Porges, PhD** and **Deb Dana, LCSW**  
According to polyvagal theory, the nervous system has three pathways, each designed to protect you.

1.

Think of ventral vagal as the nervous system's optimal state.



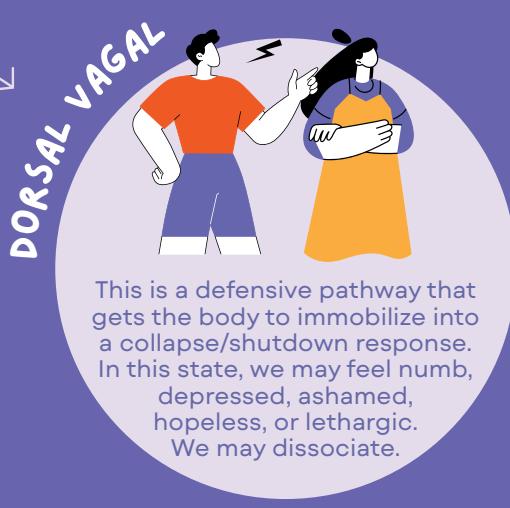
2.

But when you carry a history of trauma, relationships can be particularly triggering, making it difficult to feel safe connections with others.



So, the nervous system starts seeking out alternative pathways of protection.

Understanding these responses can help you recognize when your nervous system is going into "defense mode". Your therapist may be able to help you identify what triggers these responses so that you can develop strategies to manage them and get grounded.



## 2.2 FORMULATING REQUESTS

Based on the needs previously identified, specific requests can be formulated. The more accurate and specific a request is, the more appropriate the solutions will be. To express our requests we should use clear, positive, and concrete action language.

Being aware of our needs gives us the strength to take responsibility for acting in accordance with our values. Therefore, it is crucial to be able to formulate clear requests.

The main goal is to facilitate cooperation by clearly expressing what we want, who we want to do it with, and when. Without this precision, we would leave the other person guessing and interpreting what action we would like them to take, which could easily lead to misunderstandings.

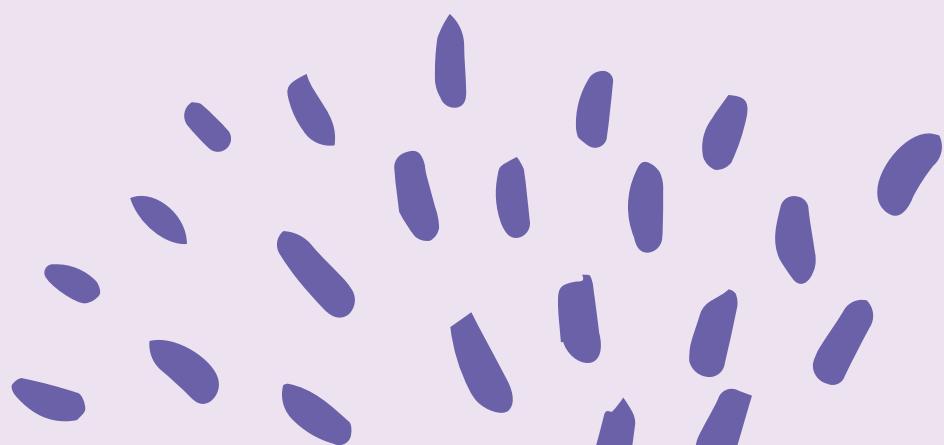
Example: “*Could you give me the report tomorrow at 3 PM?*”

In a conversation, there are two requests that can contribute to connection:

- A.** Asking for feedback on what we said, to see if we clearly expressed what we wanted to communicate
- B.** Asking to know the impact of our words

Making a request means being open to the other person's diverse opinions and desires. It is therefore important to distinguish between requests and expressions that arise from a “demanding energy” and could give the impression that the other person has no choice.

Therefore we should learn to formulate a request for a specific action while remaining open to a negative response, without triggering an attempt to force the issue. It is recommended not to give up, but to empathize with what is preventing the other person from saying “yes” before deciding how to continue the conversation.



## PHASE 3

# ADOPTING STRATEGIES TO RESPOND TO NEEDS

### 3.1 TOOLS TO EXPRESS EMOTIONAL LITERACY

This section introduces **practical tools to help youth workers put emotional literacy into action**. There are not scripts or formulas, the following are ways of being that humans can adapt, practice, and grow into over time.

The TOOLS explored here include:

#### 1. LISTENING

more than hearing words; it's about presence, attention, and creating space for others to feel seen and heard

#### 2. QUESTIONS

how we ask matters

#### 3. EMPATHY

not fixing, advising, or analyzing, but offering understanding and emotional presence

#### 4. RAPPORT

the subtle but powerful act of building mutual trust and safety in your relationships

Each of these tools strengthens the ability to connect rather than correct, to respond rather than react, and to lead with compassion rather than control.

## 3.2 LISTENING

One of the key tools to express ones emotionally literacy is by active **listening**, which means takes the necessary time to deeply understand the concerns, ideas, and challenges of their team members.

Active listening involves asking questions, paraphrasing, and confirming information, without interruptions or biases, to fully grasp the situation.

In NVC is promoted also, empathic listening which is more than active or reflective listening. It means seeing a situation from the other person's perspective, both mentally and emotionally, whether you agree with them or not. It involves offering your presence to what is alive in the other person at that moment, following it without any desire to change the person or the situation.

Rather than trying to understand the other person, this requires us to maintain a sincere curiosity and a sense of "not knowing." Empathic listening is often silent, although you can choose to verbally hypothesize the speaker's feelings and needs to check and/or demonstrate understanding. Hearing your hypotheses may also help the other person gain clarity.

Being listened to by someone who utilizes the qualities of empathic listening is sometimes described as a "liberating" or "empowering" experience. It often releases the energy needed to find their own solutions.

### DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN EMPATHIC LISTENING AND OTHER RESPONSES

A person complains: "My coworker is constantly telling me what to do. It's really annoying".

Example of an EMPATHIC response:

"Are you annoyed (feeling) because you want others to trust (need) that you can make your own decisions?"

Examples of NON-EMPATHIC responses:

**1. GIVING ADVICE:**

telling the other person what we think they should do.  
*“Just go ahead and do your best...”*

**2. ANALYZING:**

interpreting and evaluating the other person's behavior.  
*“She's probably under a lot of stress...”*

**3. SYMPATHIZING:**

feeling sorry for the other person or sharing the feelings we feel when listening to their words.  
*“Oh, poor thing... I feel so sad for you.”*

**4. REASSURING:**

trying to make the other person “feel better.”  
*“Cheer up! You can do it!”*

This process is designed to make us more aware of how our reactions are influenced by our thinking and where we place our attention.

If we think of a situation in which someone said something that triggered an emotional reaction in us, four are the options we can use to explore our reactions and experience how connecting to our needs can contribute to clarity and calm.

## **1. BLAMING THE OTHER**

We judge, criticize, blame the other.  
This generates feelings of anger, irritation...

## **2. BLAMING OURSELVES**

We judge, criticize, blame ourselves.  
This generates feelings of guilt, shame, depression...

### **3. LISTENING TO OURSELVES**

We translate our judgments. We perceive our feelings and needs.  
This generates feelings of inner peace, relief, sadness...

### **4. LISTENING TO THE OTHER**

We perceive the other's feelings and needs.  
This generates feelings of compassion, calm, curiosity...



### 3.3 QUESTIONS: HOW WE ASK

HOW WE ASK matters, thoughtful questions can invite honesty, reflection, and connection.

In this regard a commonly known model of human communication “**The five axioms**” theorized by Paul Watzlawick (see figure 3) better explain why and support communicators on focusing on the key aspects of communication.

Paul Watzlawick’s axioms of communication offer foundational insights and help deepen our awareness on how communication functions on both explicit and implicit levels.

These axioms can significantly enhance the way questions are formulated to foster empathy, clarity, and connection and ultimately supporting more meaningful and peaceful exchanges.

The first axiom is ‘**One cannot not communicate**’.

For the model, this axiom means that communication is continuous. People express themselves verbally and/or nonverbally and, through this, they influence each other at every moment. Communication is always cause and effect and it is therefore circular.

This axiom reminds us that how a question is asked: its tone, timing, and accompanying non-verbal cues, can affect whether it fosters connection or defensiveness. When formulating questions, being mindful of this axiom encourages a more empathetic and presence-based approach.

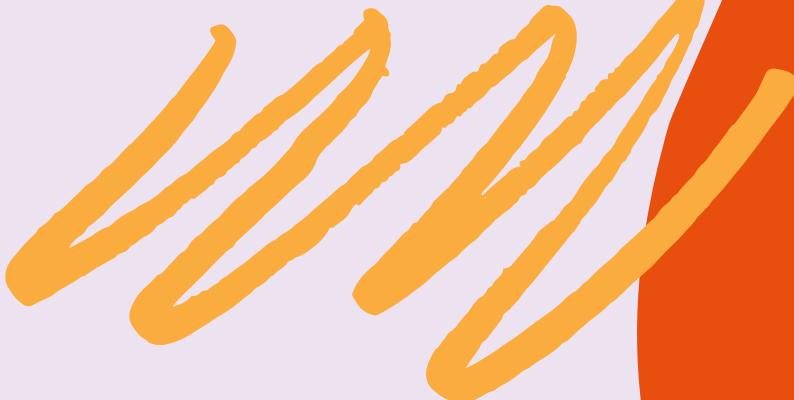




Figure 3: 5 Axioms according to Paul Watzlawick © Smarter Together (2021)

The second axiom formulated by Watzlawick is '**Any communication has a content as well as a relationship aspect**', the latter determines the former. This axiom posits the relationship between two people as determining communication. The range of meaning of sentences such as "You look good today" can range from the highest praise to the deepest insult through the relationship between two people (Lubienetzki & Schüler-Lubienetzki, 2020).

NonViolent Communication seeks to reduce judgment and increase mutual understanding, being aware of the relational aspect helps ensure that questions come across as curious rather than accusatory.

For example, asking "Why did you do that?" can be rephrased as "Can you help me understand what was important to you in that moment?"—a shift that reflects empathy and preserves connection.

Figuratively speaking, communication is circular, that is, without beginning and end. People who are in a relationship with each other communicate, and everything that has happened in the relationship so far is part of it. Nevertheless, people set their personal starting points in communication, from which their communicative behavior then depends. The corresponding axiom for this is: '**We usually experience our behavior as a reaction**'.

Watzlawick refers to the way in which actors interact as modalities. The axiom for this is formulated as '**Communication is also non-verbal (analogue & digital)**'.

The digital strand (language, signs, symbols, etc.) is primarily used to convey factual content. This modality is not very accessible for relationships and feelings. The level of the relationship is communicated via the analog strand (facial expressions, gestures, behavior, etc.).

As precise as digital expressions are (e.g., in the form of linguistic expressions), analog ones are imprecise. Most of the time, these are ambiguous. A smile can express kindness or contempt. There are tears of joy and of sadness. There is no complete certainty in communication that messages will reach the other person.

However, by combining digital and analog modalities, the intended message can be made clear. The overall picture emerges on all channels (Lubienetzki & Schüler-Lubienetzki, 2020).

This duality supports NVC's emphasis on presence and authenticity. When formulating questions, attending to both what we say and how we say it ensures alignment between intention and impact.

The fifth and last axiom is '**Communication is symmetric or complementary**'. If the communication is symmetrical, this means that both communication partners strive for equality and interact accordingly.

They mirror each other, so to speak. Strength is met with strength, weakness is met with weakness or hardness with hardness etc. Complementary communication shows a different matching behavior, which is about a coordinated and expected difference. Such complementary relationships arise for example between teachers and students, mother and child, or managers and employees. What the expectations are in such relationships depends, among other things, on the cultural background. If the expectations of complementarity are not fulfilled, this leads to disruptions in communication.

For example, if an older person in Japan is not treated with emphatic respect by a younger person, this circumstance can significantly impair communication or even make it impossible. The communication partners simply do not understand each other. Regardless of whether the communication situation is symmetrical or complementary, it is crucial for the course of communication whether the partners have the same or a different definition of their relationship. Deviations in the definition can lead to disruptions. (Lubienetzki & Schüler-Lubienetzki, 2020).

Furthermore interactions are influenced by dynamics of power or equality. NVC aims for equal footing, inviting openness rather than hierarchy. When questions are asked from a place of mutual respect, free of blame or demand; they are more likely to result in honest, compassionate dialogue.



## 3.4 EMPATHY

**Empathy** is the heart of Nonviolent Communication (NVC), serving as both its foundation and its goal.

Within the NVC process, empathy is not simply a soft emotional response—it is a **powerful tool for bridging differences and meeting needs without blame, criticism, or coercion**.

In NVC, empathy is the act of deeply listening to another person's feelings and needs without judgment, advice, or interruption.

It involves fully being present with the other, offering attention not to the content of their words alone, but to the emotional reality behind them. This kind of presence creates a safe space for others to express themselves openly and honestly, which can de-escalate conflict and foster trust.

Equally important is **self-empathy**, the ability to compassionately connect with our own inner experience. This involves becoming aware of the thoughts and judgments we are having and the feelings we are experiencing, and, in particular, connecting with the needs that are affecting us.

By identifying and acknowledging our own feelings and unmet needs, we can respond to others with clarity and compassion, rather than from a place of reactivity. This internal clarity helps us make requests instead of demands and express ourselves without blame or criticism.

Along with self-empathy it becomes key the empathic reception, which involves focusing on listening to the other person's observations, feelings, needs, and requests, however they express themselves.

This is crucial when we hear difficult messages. Instead of receiving criticism or anger as personal attacks, NVC teaches us to “hear the need behind the message”. In this regard, it may be useful to attempt a paraphrase of what the other person says, perhaps highlighting the NVC components implicit in their message. This shift in perspective enables us to stay connected, even in moments of tension.

Empathy in NVC is not about agreeing with others or fixing their problems; it's about **being with them, offering understanding, and recognizing our shared humanity**. It transforms communication from a struggle for control into a pathway toward connection and mutual respect.

In a world often marked by polarization and conflict, empathy offers a radical alternative: the possibility of meeting one another not as enemies or obstacles, but as fellow human beings with valid needs and feelings.

Through this lens, empathy becomes not only a skill but a form of compassion in action.



## 3.5 RAPPORT

Building a safe relationship starts with honest expression, knowing that someone can be honest with you and still appreciate you. That your challenges don't define you, and your contributions are noticed.

In youth work, safety is both physical and emotional. Young people need to feel they are seen, respected, and valued in order to open up, take risks, and engage meaningfully.

Starting from the assumption that the analyses we make of others are the expression of our needs and values, it is important to keep in mind that to honestly express requests and observations, we must eliminate all judgment.

Since the language we use can obscure our awareness of personal responsibility, it is necessary to choose language that, on the contrary, acknowledges the choices we make and does not appear judgmental through comparisons and classifications that encourage violence. The greatest danger to avoid is the unawareness of being responsible for our behaviors, thoughts, and feelings.

In particular, we noted that learning how to give feedback and express gratitude helps create relationships where the sense of belonging, one of the primary needs of the youth, can thrive.

**1. FEEDBACK** often feels like judgment. It feels like being told what we did wrong, without being heard or supported. This can lead to defensiveness, shame, or withdrawal. But when given thoughtfully, feedback becomes a tool for growth and connection, not correction.

In order for a feedback to be SUPPORTIVE OF GROWTH, it has to be:

- **CLEAR:** Focused on actions, not character (“I noticed you interrupted a few times” vs. “You’re rude”)
- **CONSTRUCTIVE:** Points toward possibilities, not just problems
- **COLLABORATIVE:** Invites dialogue, not just obedience (“What was going on for you in that moment?”)
- **RESPECTFUL:** Delivered with empathy and without humiliation

**2. GRATITUDE** is more than just saying “thank you”, it’s about noticing and naming the value someone brings to the space. It is about recognizing and appreciating others authentically can be a quiet but transformative act of emotional leadership.

Expressing gratitude helps:

- **REINFORCE POSITIVE IDENTITY:** “I really appreciated how you supported your teammate”
- **CREATE A CULTURE OF MUTUAL RESPECT:** Not just top-down praise, but peer-to-peer appreciation



# ANNEX 1

## A QUICK AND SIMPLE WAY TO THINK ABOUT THE BRAIN



# ANNEX 2

## FEELINGS AND NEEDS REFERENCE GUIDE

This is not intended to be a comprehensive list. It is a starting point to help you gain awareness of your inner experience.



### Feelings (Emotions) when Needs are Met

Expanding your emotional vocabulary and deepening self-awareness can significantly enhance how you connect with yourself and others.

**AFFECTIONATE**  
compassionate  
friendly  
loving  
open-hearted  
sympathetic  
tender  
warm

**CONFIDENT**  
empowered  
open  
proud  
safe  
secure

**ENGAGED**  
absorbed  
alert  
curious  
enchanted  
engrossed  
entranced  
fascinated  
interested  
intrigued  
involved  
spellbound  
stimulated

**EXCITED**  
amazed  
animated  
ardent  
aroused  
astonished  
dazzled  
eager  
energetic  
enthusiastic  
giddy  
invigorated  
lively  
passionate  
surprised  
vibrant

**EXHILARATED**  
blissful  
ecstatic  
elated  
enthralled  
exuberant  
radiant  
rapturous  
thrilled

**GRATEFUL**  
appreciative  
moved  
thankful  
touched

**HOPEFUL**  
expectant  
encouraged  
optimistic

**INSPIRED**  
amazed  
awed  
wonder

**JOYFUL**  
amused  
delighted  
glad  
happy  
jubilant  
pleased  
tickled

**PEACEFUL**  
calm  
centered  
clear-headed  
comfortable  
content  
equanimous  
fulfilled  
mellow  
quiet  
relaxed  
relieved  
satisfied  
serene  
still  
tranquil  
trusting

**REFRESHED**  
enlivened  
rejuvenated  
renewed  
rested  
restored  
revived

## Feelings (Emotions) when Needs are NOT Met

Expanding your emotional vocabulary and deepening self-awareness can significantly enhance how you connect with yourself and others.



**AFRAID**  
apprehensive  
dread  
foreboding  
frightened  
mistrustful  
panicked  
petrified  
scared  
suspicious  
terrified  
wary  
worried

**AVERSION**  
animosity  
appalled  
contempt  
disgusted  
dislike  
hate  
horrified  
hostile  
repulsed

**DISQUIET**  
agitated  
alarmed  
discombobulated  
disconcerted  
disturbed  
perturbed  
rattled  
restless  
shocked  
startled  
surprised  
troubled  
turbulent  
turmoil  
uncomfortable  
uneasy  
unnerved  
unsettled  
upset

**FATIGUE**  
beat  
burnt out  
depleted  
exhausted  
lethargic  
listless  
sleepy  
tired  
wear  
worn out

**ANGRY**  
enraged  
furious  
incensed  
indignant  
irate  
livid  
outraged  
resentful

**CONFUSED**  
ambivalent  
baffled  
bewildered  
dazed  
hesitant  
lost  
mystified  
perplexed  
puzzled  
torn

**EMBARRASSED**  
ashamed  
chagrined  
flustered  
guilty  
mortified  
self-conscious

**PAIN**  
agony  
anguished  
bereaved  
devastated  
grief  
heartbroken  
hurt  
lonely  
miserable  
regretful  
remorseful

**ANNOYED**  
aggravated  
disgruntle  
dismayed  
displeased  
exasperated  
frustrated  
impatient  
irked  
irritated

**DISCONNECTED**  
alienated  
aloof  
apathetic  
bored  
cold  
detached  
distant  
distracted  
indifferent  
numb  
removed  
uninterested  
withdrawn

## Feelings (Emotions) when Needs are NOT Met



Expanding your emotional vocabulary and deepening self-awareness can significantly enhance how you connect with yourself and others.

### SAD

dejected  
depressed  
despair  
despondent  
disappointed  
discouraged  
disheartened  
forlorn  
gloomy  
heavy-hearted  
hopeless  
melancholy  
unhappy  
wretched

### TENSE

anxious  
cranky  
distressed  
distraught  
edgy  
fidgety  
frazzled  
irritable  
jittery  
nervous  
overwhelmed  
restless  
stressed out

### VULNERABLE

fragile  
guarded  
helpless  
insecure  
leery  
reserved  
sensitive  
shaky

### YEARNING

envious  
jealous  
longing  
nostalgic  
pining  
wistful

**FAUX FEELINGS:** the following words are often confused as feelings when they are actually interpretations or assessments of others' actions.

Abandoned, abused, accused, attacked, belittled, betrayed, blamed, bullied, cheapened, cheated, coerced, condemned, controlled, cornered, criticized, devalued, diminished, discredited, dismissed, disparaged, disrespected, distrusted, excluded, harassed, ignored, insulted, interrupted, intimidated, invalidated, judged, let down, manipulated, micromanaged, misunderstood, mistrusted, neglected, offended, oppressed, patronized, pressured, provoked, put down, rejected, ridiculed, ripped off, scapegoated, shamed, taken for granted, threatened, tricked, trivialized, unappreciated, unheard, unloved, unseen, unsupported, unwanted, used, victimized, vilified, violated, wronged

# Universal Human Needs

Expressing our own needs and acknowledging the needs of others enables us to create common ground.



## INTERDEPENDENCE

acceptance  
affection  
appreciation  
being heard  
being seen  
belonging  
closeness  
communication  
community  
companionship  
connection  
consideration  
consistency  
contribution  
cooperation  
emotional - freedom  
emotional - safety  
empathy  
equality  
friendship  
honesty  
intimacy  
love  
predictability  
reassurance  
reliability  
respect  
sharing  
stability  
support  
trust  
understanding

## MEANING

awareness  
celebration  
of life  
challenge  
clarity  
competence  
consciousness  
contribution  
creativity  
discovery  
efficacy  
effectiveness  
growth,  
hope

## PEACE

beauty  
communion  
ease  
equality  
harmony  
inspiration  
order

## SPIRITUAL COMMUNION

awareness  
beauty  
giving  
grace  
gratitude,  
harmony  
inspiration  
mastery  
order  
peace  
serving

## PHYSICAL NURTURANCE

air  
bonding  
comfort  
exercise  
movement  
nourishment  
physical - affection  
rest  
safety  
sexual - expression  
shelter  
sunlight  
tenderness  
touch  
water

## MENTAL

clarity  
comprehension  
consciousness  
discernment  
information  
reflection  
stimulation  
thinking  
understanding

## PLAY

adventure  
fun  
humor  
joy  
laughter  
relaxation

# Universal Human Needs

Expressing our own needs and acknowledging the needs of others enables us to create common ground.



## AUTONOMY

authenticity  
choice  
freedom  
honesty  
independence  
individuality  
integrity  
liberty  
presence  
self-empowerment  
solitude  
space  
spontaneity

## CELEBRATION OF LIFE

aliveness  
authenticity  
communion  
creativity  
delight  
dreams  
excitement  
growth  
humor  
integrity  
intensity  
meaning  
mourning  
passion  
pleasure  
purpose  
self-respect  
self-worth  
stimulation  
values  
vision

## CONNECTION

acceptance  
affection  
appreciation  
belonging  
closeness  
communication  
community  
companionship  
compassion  
consideration  
consistency  
cooperation  
empathy  
inclusion  
intimacy  
love  
mutuality  
nurturing  
respect  
safety  
security  
self-respect  
stability  
support  
to be known  
to be seen  
to be understood  
trust  
warmth

# A-Z

## ALPHABETIZED LIST OF FEELINGS

absorbed	blissful	disinterested	exhilarated
adventurous	blue	dislike	expansive
affectionate	bored	dismayed	expectant
afraid	breathless	displeased	exposed
aggravated	brokenhearted	disquieted	exuberant
agitation	buoyant	distant	fascinated
alarmed	calm	distraught	fatigued
alert	carefree	distressed	fearful
alive	chagrined	disturbed	fidgety
aloof	cold	doubtful	fondness
amazed	comfortable	downcast	forlorn
amorous	concerned	downhearted	friendly
amused	confident	dread	frightened
angry	confused	dull	frustrated
anguish	contented	eager	fulfilled
animated	contrite	ecstatic	furious
animosity	cool	ebullient	gay
annoyance	cozy	edgy	giddy
anxious	cross	effervescent	glad
apathetic	curious	elated	gleeful
appalled	cushy	electrified	gloomy
appreciative	dazzled	embarrassed	glorious
apprehensive	dejected	embittered	glowing
aroused	delighted	enchanted	grateful
ashamed	depressed	encouraged	gratified
astonished	despair	energetic	grief
astounded	despondent	engrossed	guilty
aversion	detached	enlivened	happy
awake	diffident	enraged	hate
awed	disappointed	enthralled	heavy
awful	disconnected	enthusiastic	helpful
bad	discouraged	envious	helpless
beat	disenchanted	exalted	hesitant
bewildered	disgruntled	exasperated	hopeful
bitter	disgusted	excited	horrible
blah	disheartened	exhausted	horrified

# A-Z

## ALPHABETIZED LIST OF FEELINGS

hostile	merry	restless	troubled
hot	mirthful	restored	uncertain
humbled	miserable	revived	uncomfortable
humdrum	mopey	revolted	uneasy
hurt	morose	sad	unglued
impatient	moved	safe	unhappy
incensed	nervous	satisfied	unnerved
indifferent	optimistic	scared	unsteady
indignant	overwhelmed	secure	upbeat
infuriated	pain	sensitive	uplifted
inquisitive	panicky	serene	upset
insecure	passionate	shaky	uptight
inspired	passive	shocked	vengeful
intense	peaceful	skeptical	vexed
interested	perky	sleepy	vulnerable
intrigued	perplexed	sorrowful	warm
invigorated	pessimistic	sour	weary
involved	pleased	spacious	withdrawn
irate	proud	spellbound	woeful
irked	puzzled	spent	worn out
irritated	quiet	spiritless	worried
jealous	radiant	startled	zestful
jittery	rancorous	still	
joyful	rapturous	stimulated	
joyous	refreshed	stunned	
jubilant	regretful	surprised	
lazy	reinvigorated	suspicious	
lethargic	rejuvenated	tender	
liberated	relaxed	tense	
listless	relieved	terrified	
lonely	reluctant	thankful	
loving	remorseful	thrilled	
mad	renewed	tickled	
mean	repelled	tired	
melancholy	resentful	touched	
mellow	rested	tranquil	

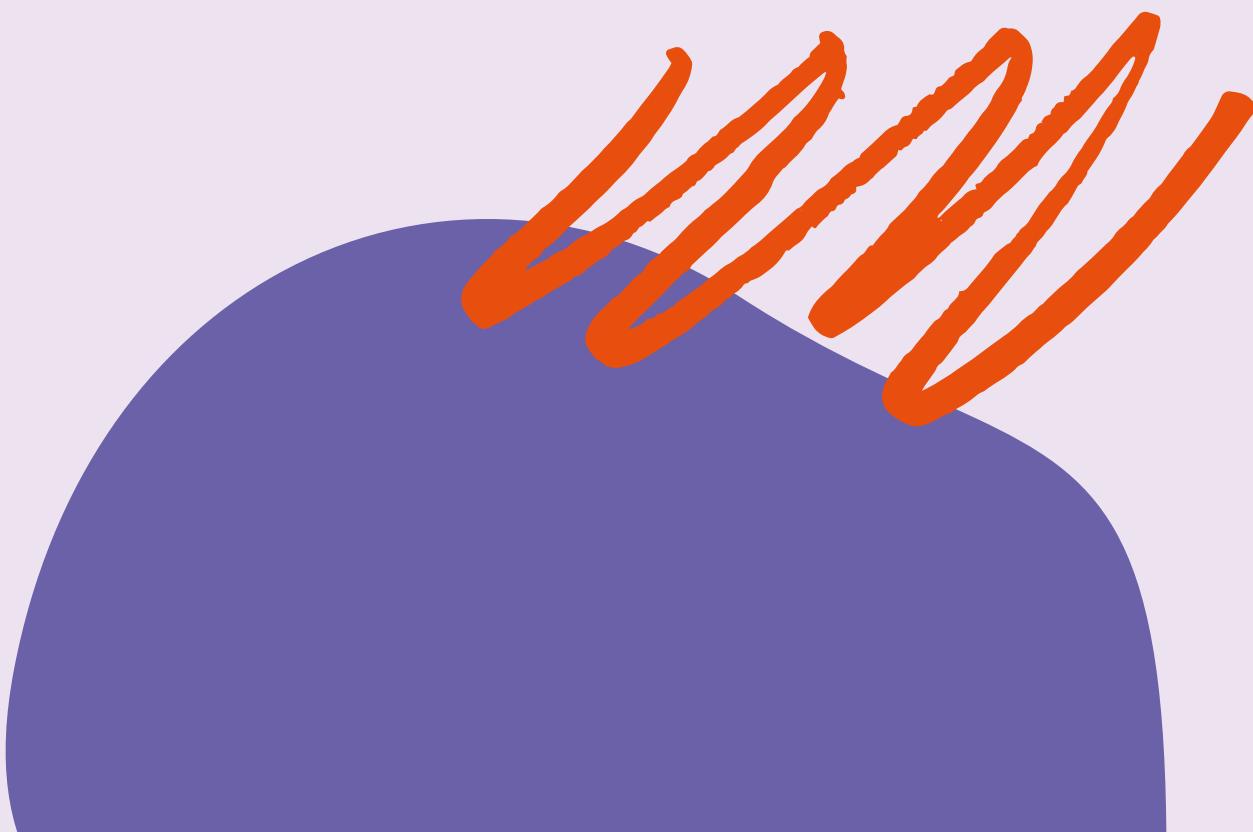
# A-Z

## ALPHABETIZED LIST OF NEEDS

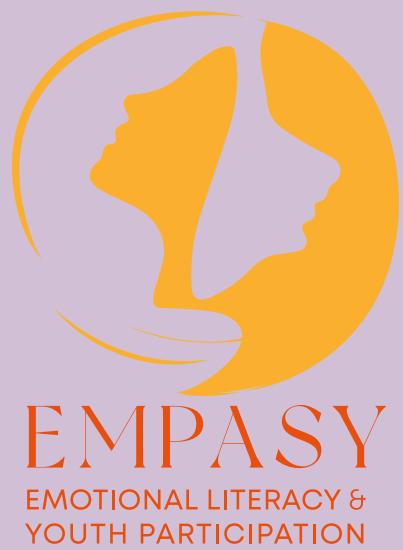
acceptance	discernment	mastery	stimulation
adventure	discovery	meaning	sunlight
affection	dreams	mourning	support
air	ease	movement	tenderness
aliveness	effectiveness	mutuality	thinking
appreciation	efficacy	nourishment	to be known
authenticity	emotional freedom	nurturing	to be seen
autonomy	emotional safety	order	to be understood
awareness	empathy	passion	to understand
beauty	equality	peace	touch
being	excitement	physical affection	trust
being heard	exercise	play	understanding
being seen	freedom	pleasure	values
belonging	friendship	predictability	vision
bonding	fun	presence	warmth
celebration of life	giving	purpose	water
challenge	grace	reassurance	
choice	gratitude	reflection	
clarity	growth	relaxation	
closeness	harmony	reliability	
comfort	honesty	respect	
communication	hope	rest	
communion	humor	safety	
community	inclusion	security	
companionship	independence	self empowerment	
compassion	individuality	self respect	
competence	information	self worth	
comprehension	inspiration	serving	
connection	integrity	sexual expression	
consciousness	intensity	sharing	
consideration	interdependence	shelter	
consistency	intimacy	solitude	
contribution	joy	space	
cooperation	laughter	spiritual communion	
creativity	liberty	spontaneity	
delight	love	stability	

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Lubienetzki & Schüler-Lubienetzki, 2020, How We Talk to Each Other - The Messages We Send With Our Words and Body Language, Springer
2. Marshall B. Rosenberg, 2003, Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life: Life-Changing Tools for Healthy Relationships, Puddledancer Press
3. Link Nicabm:
  - <https://www.nicabm.com/brain-a-quick-and-simple-way-to-think-about-the-brain/?itl=homepageinfographics>
  - <https://www.nicabm.com/mapping-nervous-system-response/>
  - <https://d-care.mgfu.hu/en/page/appreciative-communication-styles-for-social-workers>







EMPASY.PROJECT