

# Peace Ethics: Non-violent Communication

(Rolf Roew, Feb. 2019)

## **0. Introductory remarks to the translated version**

This is the translation of a paper that was originally written in German (see on the same website). There, a German translation of a book by M. B. Rosenberg is used as one of the main sources. The title of the English original is: M. B. Rosenberg (2015): Nonviolent Communication. A Language of Life. PuddleDancer Press.

## **1. Time Management**

The number of lessons needed may vary depending on the learning group and the progress of the individual lessons.

## **2. Reference to the curriculum**

The sequence of lessons described here promotes the following **competence expectation** specified in the Ethics curriculum for grade 9<sup>1</sup>:

- For the non-violent resolution of conflicts, the pupils use techniques of "non-violent communication", de-escalation and metacommunication, where necessary recognising triggers for their anger and assuming responsibility for them.

For this purpose, the following **contents** are taught as part of the curriculum:

- non-violent communication according to M. B. Rosenberg;
- causes and perception of aggressive behaviour;
- unfulfilled needs as triggers of anger.

## **3. Prior knowledge of the students**

From the previous grades, the students already have extensive knowledge and experience, especially in the following areas:

- the perception of basic emotions (grade 5)
- the perception of one's own and others' needs (grade 5)
- the control of emotions (grade 5)
- listening well (grades 5, 7)
- I-messages (grades 5, 7)

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.lehrplanplus.bayern.de/fachlehrplan/gymnasium/9/ethik>

- feedback rules (grades 5, 7)
- mirroring (grades 6, 7)
- saying „no“ (grade 6)
- the impact of insulting remarks (grade 6)
- content aspect and relationship aspect in communication (grade 7)
- causes of conflicts (grade 7)
- killer phrases (grade 7)
- a model for the solution of conflicts (grade 7)
- strategies for the self-regulation of anger (grade 7)
- experience with role play, knowledge of the rules for role play

#### **4. Outline of the sequence of lessons**

1. The students sketch everyday conflicts on cards, selection of 2-3 conflicts. (lesson 1)
2. Preparation and performance of role plays on the selected everyday conflicts. (lessons 2 and 3)
3. Introduction of the basic ideas of "non-violent communication" according to M. B. Rosenberg. (lesson 4)
4. In-depth study of the basic ideas of "non-violent communication" and exercises on them. (lessons 5-8)
5. Dealing with annoyance and anger and final reflexion of the sequence of lessons. (lesson 9)

#### **5. Description of the individual lessons**

##### 5.1 Lesson 1

This lesson builds on the experiences of the students in their own lives.

##### **1. Introduction**

The teacher presents the topic of the following lessons. She briefly explains that for a constructive way of communicating the competence for adequate self-control is an important prerequisite and that for self-control good self-perception is a decisive precondition. Therefore, simple, short mindfulness exercises will be performed at the beginning of the following lessons.

##### **2. Mindfulness exercise**

The mindfulness exercise is performed in a sitting position. The students are instructed to close their eyes and focus their attention entirely on the feeling caused by their breath in their nose. After about 3 minutes the teacher finishes the exercise, carries out a withdrawal and allows individual pupils to report briefly on their experiences.

##### **3. Collecting conflicts**

Working individually, the students first sketch a typical everyday conflict of young people on a card. They are not supposed to describe conflicts that they are currently experiencing or that affect the class or course. The participants in the conflict described should remain anonymous, but be named with fictitious names. In addition to the conflict partners, the

conflict location (general or fictitious, e.g. "school") and trigger of the conflict should also be mentioned. The progression of the conflict will not be described.

#### **4. Sorting conflicts**

The cards are now pinned to a pinboard sorted by conflicts.

#### **5. Selecting conflicts**

Together with the teacher, the students select certain situations from these as starting points for role plays (approx. two to three).

#### **6. Group formation**

From the pre-selection of the conflict situations, the students now select one for themselves and form groups with their classmates according to the number of people involved in the conflict.

#### **7. Preparing the role play**

In their groups, the students begin to prepare their role play. Only the opening scene with the first two statements of the role players are to be prepared concretely. Ideas should be collected for the further course of the dialogue, but the dialogue should not yet be finalized. It's supposed to evolve over the course of the play. Important here is the requirement that the pupils represent a realistic, typical course of such a conflict discussion with all its average weaknesses. They should not attempt to conduct an ideal conflict resolution discussion on stage. The conversation presented on stage does not have to lead to a solution of the conflict.

### 5.2 Lesson 2

#### **1. Warm-up games**

The lesson begins with warm-up games to prepare the students for the role play.<sup>2</sup> The type and scope of the warm-up phase depend on the specific requirements of the respective group. Sometimes a group may need a longer preparation through warm-up games in order to be able to work fruitfully with the role play. In this case, the game can only be started in the following lesson.

#### **2. Preparing the role play**

The students continue the preparation of their role play from the previous lesson.

#### **3. Instructions by the teacher and work assignments**

The teacher reminds the pupils of the most important rules for role-playing, in particular the specific feedback rules.<sup>3</sup> The pupils who are not currently on stage themselves are given an observation assignment. For this purpose, the teacher hands out an observation sheet. On this observation sheet, the pupils are asked to take notes about:

- which behaviors of role-players they found particularly striking,
- whether the conflict has been resolved, not resolved, or partially resolved

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<sup>2</sup> Siehe dazu z. B. Roew, R. e. a. (2006): Das pädagogische Rollenspiel im Ethikunterricht. <http://www.isb.bayern.de/download/1268/rollenspiel-hr.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Siehe dazu z. B. Roew, R. e. a. (2006): Das pädagogische Rollenspiel im Ethikunterricht. <http://www.isb.bayern.de/download/1268/rollenspiel-hr.pdf>

- and in the event that it has not been resolved, or has not been resolved in its entirety, what, in their view, may have been the causes.

#### **4. The first role play**

The teacher puts the pupils in their roles who will perform the first role play on stage. Then the pupils play for about four to six minutes. This playing time is usually sufficient to have plenty of material to talk about in the subsequent reflexion phase. After the game, the teacher puts the pupils out of their roles.

#### **5. Reflexion phase**

The observers first complete their entries on the observation sheet. They then present their observations and comments, which are each subsequently discussed in the group.

### **5.3 Lesson 3**

#### **1. Mindfulness exercise**

The mindfulness exercise is performed in a sitting position. The students are instructed to close their eyes and focus their attention entirely on the feeling caused by their breath in their nose. In doing so, they also have to pay attention to whether their attention is really on their breath. If it's not, they return their attention to it. After about 4 minutes the teacher finishes the exercise, carries out a withdrawal and allows individual pupils to report briefly on their experiences.

What is remarkable here is that in comparison to the warm-up exercise in lesson 1, another element is added: the pupils enter a meta-level of self-observation. With this activity, known as "monitoring", they observe and control their mental activities.

#### **2. Warm-up game**

In a short warm-up game, the pupils get in the mood for the role play.

#### **3. The second role play**

The second role play is performed in the same way as the first. The same situation can be played a second time (differently) or a different one can be chosen.

#### **4. Reflexion phase**

The reflexion phase is basically carried out in the same way as in lesson 2. Against the background of two situations played, however, observations and assessments can already be summarized.

Usually, the pupils will already express thoughts here of their own accord, which the teacher intended to present in the following lessons as ideas from experts in the first place. These statements of the pupils should then be particularly noted and extended. Through this type of induction, the insights gained in class will gain a much higher significance for the pupils, as they themselves have reached them from their own experience. For the teacher this means, among other things, time savings in the later presentation of ideas from communication psychology.

## 5.4 Lesson 4

### 1. Mindfulness exercise

See for lesson 3.

### 2. Short summary of the results of lessons 2 and 3

The students briefly summarise which factors, according to their experiences from the role plays and their reflexion, are particularly obstructive to conflict resolution.

### 3. Introduction of the basic ideas of “non-violent communication“ according to M. B. Rosenberg

The teacher announces that she will now present the thoughts of a communication psychologist on the question of how to conduct conversations about conflicts in such a way as to increase the chances of finding a viable solution. She explains basic ideas of the concept of "non-violent communication" according to M. B. Rosenberg and puts the following points on the blackboard.<sup>4</sup>

#### Basic Ideas of „Non-Violent Communication“ (M. B. Rosenberg)

In a conversation about resolving a conflict, we communicate what follows:

1. What concrete actions it is about, which we can observe and which impair our well-being;
2. How we feel in regard to what we observe;
3. Our needs, values, wishes, etc., from which these feelings arise;
4. The concrete action we would like to ask for.

The teacher asks what Rosenberg might expect from these four points and asks the students for comments and their estimation of the benefits of Rosenberg's concept. She then shows a slide with the example of a statement in which the basic ideas of "non-violent communication" are realised.

#### An example of „non-violent communication“

„Yesterday you borrowed my bike and left it out in the rain. That makes me angry because it's an expensive bike and I don't want it to start rusting. If you ever borrow my bike again, please handle it carefully.“

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Rosenberg, M. B. (2016): Gewaltfreie Kommunikation. Paderborn: Jungfermann, S. 21f.

The teacher asks the students what effect this statement would probably have on them if they were the one being addressed here. She announces that the basic ideas of "non-violent communication" will now be examined in detail so that everyone can get a fuller picture.

### **5. Describing observations**

The students are presented with the following three statements:

- "Last week you forgot to water the plants."
- "You can't be relied on at all."
- "Now take a look at our plants."

In partner work, the pupils assess each of these statements in terms of the extent to which they are beneficial with regard to a constructive solution to the conflict indicated here. For their respective assessment, they write down rational arguments. The pupils' assessments are then presented and discussed in class.

## **5.5 Lesson 5**

### **1. Mindfulness exercise**

The mindfulness exercise is performed in a sitting position. The students are instructed to close their eyes and to focus their attention entirely on what thoughts and feelings appear in their minds. If their attention is wandering, they redirect their attention. After about 4 minutes the teacher finishes the exercise, carries out a withdrawal and allows individual pupils to report briefly on their experiences.

### **2. Revision**

The basic ideas of "non-violent communication" are briefly recapitulated.

### **3. Exercise on the point "Describing Observations"**

The students receive a sheet on which three variations are given for each of 10 different situations on how to address a trigger of a conflict. For each of these variations, they judge in individual work to what extent a pure observation is reproduced there or interpretations are already taking place.<sup>5</sup> They then discuss their results with their neighbours. Controversial cases are briefly discussed in class.

### **4. Expressing emotions**

The students are given two lists of adjectives. The adjectives in the first list describe emotions I can feel when my needs are satisfied, the adjectives in the second list describe emotions I can feel when my needs are not satisfied.<sup>6</sup> In partner work they supplement these lists with further adjectives. The new adjectives are then presented to the class.

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<sup>5</sup> The sheet can be found in: Holler, I. (2016): Trainingsbuch Gewaltfreie Kommunikation. Paderborn: Jungfermann, S. 52f.

<sup>6</sup> The lists can be found in: Holler, I. (2016): Trainingsbuch Gewaltfreie Kommunikation. Paderborn: Jungfermann, S. 71.

## **5. Homework**

Until the next lesson, the pupils are asked to briefly record two situations each day in which something did not work out so well for them. For this purpose they should a) note which thoughts and feelings have spontaneously crossed their minds in this situation and b) the observable facts.<sup>7</sup> The teacher points out that the students will not have to hand in or read out their notes so that their privacy and the privacy of others concerned will be protected. In the following lesson only their experiences with this exercise will be exchanged.

### 5.6 Lesson 6

#### **1. Mindfulness exercise**

See for lesson 5.

#### **2. Evaluation of the homework**

The students exchange their experiences with the exercise. They do not reveal any concrete information about the respective situations in order to protect their and others' privacy.

#### **3. Avoiding reproaches**

The teacher asks the pupils how they judge the effect of reproaches in conflict conversations. In doing so, experiences from the role plays in lessons 2 and 3 can be also used if possible. It is very likely that some students will recognise that reproaches will often lead to defensive attitudes and make conflict resolution more difficult.

The teacher informs the pupils that in "non-violent communication" reproaches are (also) regarded as counterproductive and points out that one of the basic ideas of "non-violent communication" is that it is much better to rather express our needs, desires and values that are not taken into account in a particular situation, which in turn trigger certain feelings in us (cf. lesson 5).

#### **4. Exercise: Transforming reproaches into value judgements and needs**

In order to expand their vocabulary of needs, the pupils receive a list of needs.<sup>8</sup> Then they receive a worksheet<sup>9</sup> that they fill in with a partner. On this worksheet there are eight sentences which express a reproach (e.g. "You always leave a total mess behind!"). For each of these reproaches, they formulate a sentence expressing a value judgement that lies behind this reproach and a noun describing the underlying need (e.g., "I value cleanliness and order." and "consideration"). The results are then discussed in class.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Holler, I. (2016): Trainingsbuch Gewaltfreie Kommunikation. Paderborn: Jungfermann, S. 57.

<sup>8</sup> The list can be found in: Holler, I. (2016): Trainingsbuch Gewaltfreie Kommunikation. Paderborn: Jungfermann, S. 85.

<sup>9</sup> Idea from: Holler, I. (2016): Trainingsbuch Gewaltfreie Kommunikation. Paderborn: Jungfermann, S. 36.

## **5. Homework**

Until the next lesson, the pupils are asked to briefly write down two situations on each day in which criticism of another person has crossed their minds. For this purpose they will a) note which critical thoughts these were and b) which value judgements and possibly also needs are behind these critical thoughts.<sup>10</sup> The teacher points out that the students will not have to hand in or read out their notes so that their privacy and the privacy of others concerned will be protected. In the following lesson only their experiences with this exercise will be exchanged.

### 5.7 Lesson 7

#### **1. Mindfulness exercise**

See for lessons 5 and 6. In addition, the students are instructed to try to calm their minds after some time, i.e. to slow down the pace at which new thoughts and feelings emerge in their minds.

#### **2. Evaluation of the homework**

The students exchange their experiences with the exercise. They do not reveal any concrete information about the respective situations in order to protect their and others' privacy.

#### **3. Requests instead of demands**

The teacher writes the following two remarks on the blackboard:

- a) "Put your dishes in the dishwasher!"
- b) "Can you please put your dishes in the dishwasher?"

She asks the pupils how these two statements would feel for them if they were the addressees. She then points out that many communication psychologists assume that a demand will probably cause greater resistance than a request and will usually lead to friction in conversations. She puts this thesis up for discussion.

#### **4. Advice for the wording of requests**

The teacher puts the following points on the blackboard<sup>11</sup>. She gives an example for each point, explains the thoughts behind it and discusses their plausibility with the students.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Holler, I. (2016): Trainingsbuch Gewaltfreie Kommunikation. Paderborn: Jungfermann, S. 43.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Holler, I. (2016): Trainingsbuch Gewaltfreie Kommunikation. Paderborn: Jungfermann, S. 103.



### Advice for the wording of requests

1. Say what you want, not what you don't want.
2. In your request, describe concrete, observable behavior instead of being vague and abstract.
3. Name concrete behaviour instead of describing what the other person should be or feel.
4. Make sure that the success of your request is verifiable.

### **5. Exercise: wording requests**

In order to practice the wording of requests according to the ideas of "non-violent communication", the pupils work on a worksheet individually.<sup>12</sup> On the worksheet, they are presented with statements that someone uses to address something that bothers them (for example, "You told Moni that I like Peter. I'm irritated now because I told you that in confidence."). These statements are already worded according to the concept of "non-violent communication", but the concluding requests are still missing. These requests are worded by the students now. They then exchange their solutions with their neighbours, evaluate them and discuss them.

### **6. Homework**

The students are given the homework of briefly describing on six cards one situation each in which someone's well-being is affected by someone else.

## 5.8 Lesson 8

### **1. Mindfulness exercise**

The mindfulness exercise is performed in a sitting position. The students are instructed to close their eyes and observe their breath in their noses for six to eight breaths. Then they direct their attention to their lower back. They detect how tense the muscles are there. If they get the feeling that the tension there is too high, they gradually relax the muscles. In the next two steps they do the same with the muscles in the upper back and the neck muscles. When they have finished the exercise, they keep their eyes closed, give the teacher a short hand signal and return their attention to the breath in their nose. After about 8 minutes the teacher finishes the exercise, carries out a withdrawal and allows individual pupils to report briefly on their experiences.

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<sup>12</sup> Idea from: Holler, I. (2016): Trainingsbuch Gewaltfreie Kommunikation. Paderborn: Jungfermann, S. 107f.

## **2. Writing complete statements according to the principles of "non-violent communication"**

The students look again at the blackboard notes from lesson 1. Then they work on a worksheet individually.<sup>13</sup> There, four situations are described in which someone's well-being is affected by someone else (e.g. "You hear from a friend that someone in your class has spread lies about you several times"). They now formulate a complete statement each according to the four basic ideas of "non-violent communication" which addresses this impairment. Afterwards the results are discussed in the class.

## **3. Spontaneously formulating complete statements orally according to "non-violent communication"**

As a homework assignment, students have prepared cards each describing another situation in which someone's well-being is affected by someone else. With their neighbours they now play the following game. Alternately, the pupils give one of their cards to their partner. She reads the situation described there once and then formulates a complete statement orally as a reaction to it as spontaneously as possible and in accordance with the four basic ideas of "non-violent communication". Each statement will be discussed by the partners in the game directly afterwards.

## **4. Reflexion**

The students reflect on their first experiences with "non-violent communication" in class.

## 5.9 Lesson 9

### **1. Mindfulness exercise**

See for lesson 8.

### **2. Annoyance and anger as obstacles to non-violent communication**

The teacher asks the pupils what they consider to be the major obstacles to the realisation of "non-violent communication". Then she points out that in the relevant literature the handling of anger and annoyance is especially addressed. She presents the proposals from "non-violent communication" on the board.<sup>14</sup> She briefly explains each step and puts it up for discussion.

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<sup>13</sup> Idea from: Holler, I. (2016): Trainingsbuch Gewaltfreie Kommunikation. Paderborn: Jungfermann, S. 112f.

<sup>14</sup> Rosenberg, M. B. (2016): Gewaltfreie Kommunikation. Paderborn: Jungfermann, S. 144.

### The steps to express annoyance

1. Pausing and breathing.
2. Identifying our judgmental thoughts.
3. Establishing contact with our needs.
4. Uttering our emotions and unfulfilled needs.

The teacher emphasizes the special significance of pausing. She introduces the term "impulse control". Steps one to three from the board are a prerequisite for a statement according to the four basic ideas of "non-violent communication" to be deliberated and presented in a calm manner.

### **3. The development of annoyance**

For facilitating a better understanding of how annoyance develops, the teacher presents a slide with an image<sup>15</sup>, which shows the development of annoyance from the point of view of "non-violent communication". There it is assumed that at the beginning there is an unsatisfied need. This develops into a "primary emotion", e.g. frustration. As a result, negative judgements about others are made and as a "secondary feeling" anger eventually arises.

### **4. Reflexion of the mindfulness exercises**

In a silent phase, students reflect on the contribution mindfulness exercises can make to the successful application of the ideas of non-violent communication. Their thoughts are then discussed in class. In addition, the teacher may also explain her reasons for having used mindfulness exercises in this context.

In particular, the following aspects can be explained:

- In mindfulness exercises, pausing and concentration on the breath is practiced.
- Mindfulness exercises promote the contact with one's own emotions, thoughts and needs.
- The first signs of anger are often physical sensations (e.g. growing tension). In addition to calm breathing, conscious muscle relaxation can also be used to control anger.

### **5. Flash round: Feedback for the entire sequence of lessons**

In a flash round, each pupil makes a short comment (max. 30 seconds) on the whole preceding sequence of lessons.

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<sup>15</sup> See for Rosenberg, M. B. (2016): Gewaltfreie Kommunikation. Paderborn: Jungfermann, S. 172.