

Being an Empathy Buddy

An Empathy buddy is a unique and revolutionary relationship created to develop the practice of Compassionate or Nonviolent Communication (NVC) with a buddy. In this handout you'll discover how an "Empathy Buddy Chat" works, why buddy chats can make both your lives more wonderful, and how you can start or perhaps improve your Empathy Buddy relationship.

1. In an Empathy Buddy Chat, the Listener focuses on the FEELINGS and NEEDS of the Speaker. EMPATHY for another person is being fully present to that other person: checking in with what they're feeling, what's alive for them in that moment.

Empathy Buddies practice empathy skills. They form a unique and revolutionary relationship in which they agree to:

- Give and receive empathy equally.
- Do it in a safe, non-judgmental and respectful environment.

Unlike typical, back and forth, chit-chat conversation, the listener does not give advice or sympathy, but focuses solely on:

- Hearing and guessing the FEELINGS and NEEDS of the speaker, sometimes called an EMPATHY GUESS : "Are you feeling X, because you are needing Y"?

2. Empathy Buddy Chats enhance NVC skills.

Empathy buddies report that their chats really help them with their NVC awareness and skills by:

- Integrating what they've already learned.
- Giving them confidence to take these skills out into the 'real world' with greater ease.
- Developing fluency in the meanings of the various words that define our feelings and needs.
- Connection to oneself and understanding of needs or life energy.

3. How do Empathy Buddy Chats make life more wonderful?

In addition to the NVC skills themselves, empathy buddies have discovered that regular chats and the relationship itself may help them to:

- Reduce stress.
- Change the direction of their life by rediscovering their emotions and needs.
- Develop inner stillness, presence and awareness.
- Shift away from the habitual to greater awareness in thinking, listening and speaking.
- Improve their relationships.
- Receive support while going through life's changing experiences.
- Develop solutions based on needs more life serving.

4. Empathy Buddy – The Steps

SETTING IT UP

Timing, schedule, preferences, flexibility, agreements, confidentiality.

PRE-CHAT

- Before chatting, take a few minutes to reflect on what's "alive" in you, or a "triggering event", that you'd like to share and receive support for.
- Perhaps take a few breaths or other centering technique.
- Have the INTENTION to give and receive empathy, to support each other's growth and learning.

CHECK-INS (SET TIME EACH)

- Each Empathy Buddy says:

- o Briefly shares a little bit about What's going on for them and how they're feeling in the moment;
- o Their time availability;
- o Work out a schedule for the call.
- Decide who speaks first based on their empathy capacity in that moment.

SHARES (SET TIME EACH)

SPEAKER

- Shares what's going on.
- During the share, Speaker may ask Listener to guess the Speaker's current Feelings and Needs and/or a reflection of what's going on.
- Speaker receives "EMPATHY GUESSES", slows down and checks in before responding with perhaps: "Yes, that really resonates" or "No, but it's more like..." in order to gain clarity.
- To better uncover Feelings and Needs, Speaker may go to "jackal" or judging mode. For example: "They were horrible and wrong and I hate them and they should have..."
- Speaker may ask for a short pause at the end to assimilate the experience before changing places with Listener and may state: "I'm complete for now".

LISTENER

- Listener stays in the flow of being present to the changing Feelings and Needs as the Speaker talks.
- In a phone chat, Listener may indicate their presence by "mmm", "ahhh", etc, if Speaker finds this supportive.
- Listener lets go of having to achieve the "perfect empathy guess" and focuses on helping the Speaker gain clarity and understanding about their Feelings and Needs. It's reassuring that Marshall Rosenberg said that his guesses were off at least 50% of the time.
- Some Listeners want to take notes to stay focused on the Feelings and Needs. Please ask for permission to do this in advance and destroy any notes at the end. {add needs met- respect, confidentiality, privacy}
- Listener may ask Speaker at the end: "Are you complete?"

CHECK OUT (SET TIME)

- At the end of the chat is the vital part, where Buddies REVIEW THEIR CHAT {NEEDS MET - ? WHAT WORKED WHAT DIDNT WORK, ANY LEARNINGS, CELEBRATIONS, MOURNINGS}.
- What worked might become an NVC APPRECIATION: ("I really appreciated when you...that met my need for ...").
- What didn't work might become an opportunity for an NVC MOURNING: ("I regret I was not as focused as I'd like to be because I value or want to...").
- If there's a misunderstanding, NVC CONNECTION REQUESTS may help.
- When requesting a change, practice using an NVC REQUEST WITH CONNECTION.
- Buddies set the time for the next call.

Tips for Empathy Buddy Chats

- START ON TIME - If you find that you're starting late, it might or might not be a signal that something is not working.
- USE A TIMER - When one person takes up more time, the relationship won't work well (add needs- sustainability, balance). Timers help keep balance.
- BE HONEST - Tell your buddy what is working and what is not. This is the basis of all close relationships. If something comes up for that has you wanting to end the call, honor that, share it and take action to meet your needs.

- **DISTANT BUDDIES** - If possible, Choose a buddy outside your circle of friends and community. This encourages the ease of intimacy and promotes a safe environment for your chat.
- **STICK TO EMPATHY** - if you want offer something other empathy or want to have a regular conversation ask if they're open to it before breaking out of empathy mode or request this at the end of the Buddy Chat.
- **RELATIONSHIPS ARE UNIQUE** - Some buddies meet weekly, others monthly. Find a schedule that works best for you and your buddy. Some people have one buddy. Others have several buddies. Some chat by phone, others use Skype or FaceTime. Some days you give equal time, other days you vary depending on needs.
- **CHANGE HAPPENS** - Some people keep the same buddy for years. Others change buddies as their skill level, time availability and interests change. Check in with yourself and your buddy to see how the relationship is working.

Getting Started

- **FIND YOUR BUDDY** - Successful buddies want to develop their skills, have similar times available for chats, “chemistry” and possibly similar interests. There are plenty of opportunities for you to connect or find a buddy at any of the New York Center for Nonviolent Communication 3 programs such as:
 - o Discovery Weekends and Intensives;
 - o Practice Groups;
 - o Facebook for on-line Compassion Course participants.
- **START SMALL** - Consider starting with a shorter chat of about 20-30 minutes in total. Reflect for a day or so after the call how it went for you before deciding to continue.