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What is it about:

- understanding the emotion of anger and its purpose
- developing emotional literacy through getting connected to needs and feelings
- practicing Non Violent Communication (NVC) through the dance floor

source: Nonviolent communication - framework by Marshall Rosenberg and education workshop by Gerardo Sánchez Lozano (NVC practitioner)

domains: emotional literacy, empathy, nonviolent communication, communication about feelings and needs

approach description:

This communication canvas is based on the work of M. Rosenberg and his approaches to handling anger using Nonviolent Communication (NVC). NVC is a way of being in the world and its purpose is to serve life and to create connection in such a way that everyone's needs can be met (read more about NVC itself at the CNVC website and NVC circle canvas).

In the book "The surprising purpose of anger", M. Rosenberg encourages us to shift from the idea that anger is an emotion to be suppressed, into seeing anger as a gift which can lead us to connect to our unmet needs which triggered our angry reaction.

Anger is often accompanied by thinking of the wrongness or badness of the others (what did they do wrong or bad). And complaints or judgments - they alienate us from the feelings and needs of others and ourselves. They may cause defensiveness, no willingness of cooperation and no learning space. We may even start to look for allies in our anger and judgements. NVC invites us to shift from this perspective of defensive reactions, into practice separating our feelings from judgements and exploring the unmet needs beneath the anger.

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approach description:

Anger can be then seen as an alarm which gives useful information about our unmet needs. If anger is repressed or denied, it can often lead to expression of it in ways that are dangerous to ourselves and others. So in NVC, Rosenberg invites us to use anger in ways that help us to get at the needs that are not being fulfilled within ourselves, that are the root of our anger.

The NVC practitioner Gerardo Sánchez Lozano mentions in his practice that *“when we can identify the unmet needs driving our anger, it becomes possible to transform the emotion into other, more accessible feelings.”*

Disclaimer 1: what Gerardo emphasises in his practice, and what we would also like to bring to the attention of learners, is that anger may feel overwhelming, and its roots may go deeper than a single event. It can trigger emotional wounds or past trauma and can blur our ability to get clarity on our needs. In such cases, it is crucial to acknowledge that the NVC approach to anger may need to be complemented with other healing approaches. Deep emotional healing can be a prerequisite before we are able to fully embrace the transformative potential of NVC.

Disclaimer 2: We recommend that learners going through this method already have the basic understanding of the NVC and the distinctions (ex. needs v. strategies).

aim of use:

Anger beneath is an approach which introduces the basis of the NVC process for transforming anger. It can develop the skills of learners to reflect over their attitude towards anger, to notice the moment of anger and to identify thoughts which may trigger anger. The method also invites us to use NVC elements (observation, feelings, needs, request) to get clearer about our needs, it opens space for self-awareness and empathy (self and for others). It is not meant to be a quick fix for anger, rather an invitation to practice to transform anger into opportunity for life-enriching connections.

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educational method:

- **Step 1: Introduction**

Introduce briefly the aim of the session and description of the approach of this communication canvas.

- **Step 2: Quotes**

Place around the room the quotes about anger (handout 1) and ask the learners to position themselves close to the quote that resonates with them the most. Invite them to share anything that is alive in them with the people who are close to them.

- **Step 3: Reflection over attitude towards anger**

- Invite participants for a short individual reflection over:
 - what is my relationship with anger? (you may support with the spectrum of: being very comfortable with anger and knowing how to express/feeling very uncomfortable with anger)
 - what did I learn about anger when growing up? Has that evolved?
- Ask participants to form groups of 3 and share briefly what they feel comfortable to share as the outcome of their reflection.
- Plenary: invite 2-3 voices to share in the plenary any mourning, celebration or realisation they may have after individual reflection or sharing in trios.

- **Step 4: NVC dance floor introduction**

- **Introduction:** introduce participants to the dance floor practice which will serve to transform anger into deeper understanding of their needs and feelings.
- **Intention:** you can mention that the intention of the practice is connected to the fact that emotions mobilise us to meet our needs. Having it as a starting point, in the NVC approach to anger, we are not invited to get rid of anger. We are invited to transform the way we use its energy. As anger carries energy and passion.

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educational method:

There are various ways to possibly direct this energy, for example:

- **othering:** “you are the problem. You are the enemy. You deserve to be punished.” In this approach anger becomes a weapon that separates us from others.
- **togethernizing:** “something important is not being met (some need, value, boundary, or sense of justice matters deeply). What matters to me? What need is alive here? What do I want to protect, create or contribute to?”. In this approach: anger becomes energy for connection, understanding and action.

So the question is not how to suppress the energy of anger, but rather:

*How can I use the passion and energy of my anger to care,
to contribute and to create change?*

● Step 5: NVC dance floor practice

1. Groups of 3: Invite participants to divide themselves in groups of 3 (potentially 2 if the number does not match). In the dance floor practice, one person of the group is a dancer, and the dancer also defines how they would like to be accompanied in the dance: to be only listened to, or to be supported with naming needs, feelings and requests. Let participants decide if in the given time they all have a chance to be a dancer, or if only one or two are dancers.

2. 4 elements + thoughts: prepare and give to each of the groups five A4 papers written on it: observation, feelings, needs, request and thoughts. Ask groups to find the place for their practice and place on the floor the five papers.

3. Notice anger: invite the dancer in the group to think of a recent situation when they felt angry. They can remind themselves how they expressed it. Recommend to pick a situation on a scale 1-10 of intensity on a level 1-2 for the sake of learning. And also to choose a situation about which they are ready to share.

Reminder: during points 4-8, the dancer may move freely around the A4 sheets representing the NVC elements.

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educational method:

4. Listening to thoughts: once the anger is recognized in the situation, it is time to turn focus into thoughts, as a lot of anger comes from blame, comparisons and judgements. The supporting sentence for the dancer can be : “I am feeling angry, because I am telling myself...”

5. (Judgement free) observation: at this step dancer can work with their thoughts by forming them into the shape of NVC observations, not interpretations, analysis nor judgements.

6. Connecting with needs: dance can use anger to find the roots of their needs and find ways to meet them. Identifying needs allows one to move from a reactive state into a place of deeper awareness. The supporting question for a dancer at this step can be: *“What did I need that I expressed through my judgement?”*

7. Connecting with feelings: after identifying needs, a dancer can check on their emotions. There is a chance that when a dancer identifies their needs, their feelings may have transformed into some other emotions. If anger is still present, it may indicate there are some needs a dancer hasn't yet connected to. It may take a few rounds of reflection to uncover needs (if that is the case, dancer may move back to the step of needs and return to feelings check).

8. Make requests: once emotionally regulated and connected to their feelings, a dancer can check with themselves if any request arises. The request can be direct to themselves, to other people involved in the situation, or other people who may be of support.

● Step 6: Debriefing

Invite the learners for the reflection in the whole group on:

- how was the process of practicing on the NVC dance floors?
- how connecting to your needs makes you feel?
- how connecting to your needs transforms your feelings?
- was there anything surprising/challenging/easy in the process?
- how can this experience serve or be used in everyday life?



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Handout 1:

Quotes from the M.Rosenberg's book "The Surprising Purpose of Anger"

- "Anger is an alarm that tells us we are thinking in ways that are not likely to get our needs met."
- "Anger is a product of thinking".
- "When we teach that anger should be avoided, it can be used to oppress people by getting them to tolerate whatever is happening to them."
- "It is not simply what people do that makes us angry, but it is something within us that responds to what they do that is really the cause of the anger."
- "I feel angry, because I am telling myself thoughts about the other person's actions that imply wrongness on their part."
- "We are superficially expressing our anger by blaming or punishing the other person."
- "Judging others as "wrong" prevents you from connecting with your own needs."

read more:

- **Book:** M. Rosenberg, The Surprising Purpose of Anger: Beyond Anger Management: Finding the Gift, PuddleDancer Press, 2005
- **Book:** M. Rosenberg, Nonviolent communication. A Language of life, PuddleDancer Press 2015
- **Video:** G. Sánchez Lozano: Los dos sorprendentes propósitos de la rabia, 2023
- **Website:** B. Belgrave & G. Lawrie, website with NVC Dance Floors



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