

Expressing Anger Fully

The subject of anger gives us a unique opportunity to dive more deeply into NVC. Because it brings many aspects of this process into sharp focus, the expression of anger clearly demonstrates the difference between NVC and other forms of communication.

I would like to suggest that hitting, blaming, hurting others—whether physically or emotionally—are all superficial expressions of what is going on within us when we are angry. If we are truly angry, we would want a much more powerful way to fully express ourselves.

Hurting people is too superficial.

This understanding comes as a relief to many groups I work with that experience oppression and discrimination and want to increase their power to effect change. Such groups are uneasy when they hear the terms *nonviolent* or *compassionate* communication because they have so often been urged to stifle their anger, calm down, and accept the status quo. They worry about approaches that view their anger as an undesirable quality needing to be purged. The process we are describing, however, does not encourage us to ignore, squash, or swallow anger, but rather to express the core of our anger fully and wholeheartedly.

Distinguishing Stimulus From Cause

The first step to fully expressing anger in NVC is to divorce the other person from any responsibility for our anger. We rid ourselves of thoughts such as, “He (or she or they) made me angry

We are never angry because of what others say or do.

when they did that.” Such thinking leads us to express our anger superficially by blaming or punishing the other person. Earlier we saw that the behavior of others may be a stimulus for our feelings, but not the cause. We are never angry because of what someone else did. We can identify the other person’s behavior as the stimulus, but it is important to establish a clear separation between stimulus and cause.

I’d like to illustrate this distinction with an example from my work at a Swedish prison. My job was to show prisoners who had behaved in violent ways how to fully express their anger rather than to kill, beat, or rape other people. During an exercise calling on participants to identify the stimulus of their anger, one prisoner wrote: “Three weeks ago I made a request to the prison officials and they still haven’t responded to it.” His statement was a clear observation of a stimulus, describing what other people had done.

I then asked him to state the cause of his anger: “When this happened, you felt angry because *what?*”

“I just told you,” he exclaimed. “I felt angry because they didn’t respond to my request!” By equating stimulus and cause, he had tricked himself into thinking that it was the behavior of the prison officials that was making him angry. This is an easy habit to acquire in a culture that uses guilt as a means of controlling people. In such cultures, it becomes important to trick people into thinking that we can *make* others feel a certain way.

Where guilt is a tactic of manipulation and coercion, it is useful to confuse stimulus and cause. As mentioned earlier, children who hear, “It hurts Mommy and Daddy when you get poor grades,”

To motivate by guilt, mix up stimulus and cause.

are led to believe that their behavior is the cause of their parents’ pain. The same dynamic is observed among intimate partners: “It really disappoints me when you’re not here for my birthday.” The English language facilitates the use of this guilt-inducing tactic.

We say: “You make me angry.” “You hurt me by doing that.”

“I feel sad because you did that.” We use our language in many different ways to trick ourselves into believing that our feelings result from what others do. The first step in the process of fully expressing our anger is to realize that what other people do is never the cause of how we feel.

The cause of anger lies in our thinking—in thoughts of blame and judgment.

So what is the cause of anger? In Chapter 5, we discussed the four options we have when confronted with a message or behavior that we don’t like. Anger is generated when we choose the second option: whenever we are angry, we are finding fault—we are choosing to play God by judging or blaming the other person for being wrong or deserving punishment. I would like to suggest that this is the cause of anger. Even if we are not initially conscious of it, the cause of anger is located in our own thinking.

The third option described in Chapter 5 is to shine the light of consciousness on our own feelings and needs. Rather than going up to our head to make a mental analysis of wrongness regarding somebody, we choose to connect to the life that is within us. This life energy is most palpable and accessible when we focus on what we need in each moment.

For example, if someone arrives late for an appointment and we need reassurance that she cares about us, we may feel hurt. If, instead, our need is to spend time purposefully and constructively, we may feel frustrated. But if our need is for thirty minutes of quiet solitude, we may be grateful for her tardiness and feel pleased. Thus, it is not the behavior of the other person but our own need that causes our feeling. When we are connected to our need, whether it is for reassurance, purposefulness, or solitude, we are in touch with our life energy. We may have strong feelings, but we are never angry. Anger is a result of life-alienating thinking that is disconnected from needs. It indicates that we have moved up to our head to analyze and judge somebody rather than focus on which of our needs are not getting met.

In addition to the third option of focusing on our own needs and feelings, the choice is ours at any moment to shine the light

of consciousness on the other person's feelings and needs. When we choose this fourth option, we also never feel anger. We are not repressing the anger; we see how anger is simply absent in each moment that we are fully present with the other person's feelings and needs.

All Anger Has a Life-Serving Core

"But," I am asked, "aren't there circumstances in which anger is justified? Isn't 'righteous indignation' called for in the face of careless, thoughtless pollution of the environment, for example?" My answer is that I strongly believe that to whatever degree I support the

When we judge others,
we contribute to violence.

consciousness that there *is* such a thing as a "careless action" or a "conscientious action," a "greedy person" or a "moral person," I am contributing to violence on this planet. Rather than agreeing or disagreeing about what people *are* for murdering, raping, or polluting the environment, I believe we serve life better by focusing attention on what we are needing.

I see all anger as a result of life-alienating, violence-provoking thinking. At the core of all anger is a need that is not being fulfilled. Thus anger can be valuable if we use it as an alarm clock to wake us up—to realize we have a need that isn't being met and that we are thinking in a way that makes it unlikely to be met.

Use anger as a
wake-up call.

To fully express anger requires full consciousness of our need. In addition, energy is required to get the need met. Anger, however, co-opts our energy by directing it toward punishing people rather than meeting our needs. Instead of engaging in "righteous indignation," I recommend connecting empathically with our own needs or those of others. This may take extensive practice, whereby over and over again, we consciously replace the phrase "I am angry because they . . ." with "I am angry *because I am needing . . .*"

I once was taught a remarkable lesson while working with students in a correctional school for children in Wisconsin. On two

successive days I was hit on the nose in remarkably similar ways. The first time, I received a sharp blow across the nose from an elbow while interceding in a fight between two students. I was so enraged it was all I could do to keep myself from hitting back. (On the streets of Detroit where I grew up, it took far less than an elbow in the nose to provoke me to rage.) The second day: similar situation, same nose—and thus more physical pain—but not a bit of anger!

Anger co-opts our energy by diverting it toward punitive actions.

Reflecting deeply that evening on this experience, I recognized how I had labeled the first child in my mind as a “spoiled brat.” That image was in my head before his elbow ever caught my nose, and when it did, it was no longer simply an elbow hitting my nose. It was: “That obnoxious brat has no right to do this!” I had another judgment about the second child; I saw him as a “pathetic creature.” Since I had a tendency to worry about this child, even though my nose was hurting and bleeding much more severely, the second day I felt no rage at all. I could not have received a more powerful lesson to help me see that it’s not what the other person does, but the images and interpretations in my own head that produce my anger.

Stimulus versus Cause: Practical Implications

I emphasize the distinction between cause and stimulus on practical and tactical as well as on philosophical grounds. I’d like to illustrate this point by returning to my dialogue with John, the Swedish prisoner:

John: Three weeks ago I made a request to the prison officials and they still haven’t responded to my request.

MBR: So when this happened, you felt angry because *what?*

John: I just told you. They didn’t respond to my request!

MBR: Hold it. Instead of saying, “I felt angry because *they* . . . ,” stop and become conscious of what you’re telling yourself that’s making you so angry.

John: I'm not telling myself anything.

MBR: Stop, slow down, just listen to what's going on inside.

John: *(after silently reflecting)* I'm telling myself that they have no respect for human beings; they are a bunch of cold, faceless bureaucrats who don't give a damn about anybody but themselves! They're a real bunch of . . .

MBR: Thanks, that's enough. Now you know why you're angry—it's that kind of thinking.

John: But what's wrong with thinking that way?

MBR: I'm not saying there is anything wrong with thinking that way. Notice if I say there is something wrong with you for thinking that way, I'd be thinking the same way about *you*. I don't say it's *wrong* to judge people, to call them faceless bureaucrats or to label their actions inconsiderate or selfish. However, it's that kind of thinking on your part that makes you feel very angry. Focus your attention on your needs: what are your needs in this situation?

John: *(after a long silence)* Marshall, I need the training I was requesting. If I don't get that training, as sure as I'm sitting here, I'm gonna end up back in this prison when I get out.

MBR: Now that your attention is on your needs, how do you feel?

John: Scared.

MBR: Now put yourself in the shoes of a prison official. If I'm an inmate, am I more likely to get my needs met if I come to you saying, "Hey, I really need that training and I'm scared of what's going to happen if I don't get it," or if I approach while seeing you as a faceless bureaucrat?

Even if I don't say those words out loud, my eyes will reveal that kind of thinking. Which way am I more likely to get my needs met?

(John stares at the floor and remains silent.)

MBR: Hey, buddy, what's going on?

John: Can't talk about it.

When we become aware of our needs, anger gives way to life-serving feelings.

Three hours later, John approached me and said, “Marshall, I wish you had taught me two years ago what you taught me this morning. I wouldn’t have had to kill my best friend.”

All violence is the result of people tricking themselves, as did this young man, into believing that their pain derives from other people and that consequently those people deserve to be punished.

One time I saw my younger son take a fifty-cent piece from his sister’s room. I said, “Brett, did you ask your sister whether you could have that?” “I didn’t take it from her,” he answered. Now I faced my four options. I could have called him a liar, which would, however, have worked against my getting my needs met since any judgment of another person diminishes the likelihood of our needs being met. Where I focused my attention at that moment was critical. If I were to judge him a liar, it would point me in one direction. If I were to think that he didn’t respect me enough to tell me the truth, I would be pointed in another direction. If, however, I were either to empathize with him at that moment, or express nakedly what I was feeling and needing, I would greatly increase the possibility of getting my needs met.

The way I expressed my choice—which in this situation turned out to be helpful—was not so much through what I said, but through what I did. Instead of judging him as lying, I tried to hear his feeling: he was scared, and his need was to protect himself from being punished. By empathizing with him, I had a chance of making an emotional connection out of which we could both get our needs met. However, if I had approached him with the view that he was lying—even if I hadn’t expressed it out loud—he would have been less likely to feel safe expressing truthfully what had

Violence comes from the belief that other people cause our pain and therefore deserve punishment.

We recall four options when hearing a difficult message:

- 1. Blame ourselves**
- 2. Blame others**
- 3. Sense our own feelings and needs**
- 4. Sense others’ feelings and needs**

Judgments of others contribute to self-fulfilling prophecies.

happened. I would have then become part of the process: by the very act of judging another person as a liar, I would contribute to a self-fulfilling prophecy. Why would people want to tell the truth, knowing they will be judged and punished for doing so?

I would like to suggest that when our heads are filled with judgments and analyses that others are bad, greedy, irresponsible, lying, cheating, polluting the environment, valuing profit more than life, or behaving in other ways they shouldn't, very few of them will be interested in our needs. If we want to protect the environment, and we go to a corporate executive with the attitude, "You know, you are really a killer of the planet, you have no right to abuse the land in this way," we have severely impaired our chances of getting our needs met. It is a rare human being who can maintain focus on our needs when we are expressing them through images of their wrongness. Of course, we may be successful in using such judgments to intimidate people into meeting our needs. If they feel so frightened, guilty, or ashamed that they change their behavior, we may come to believe that it is possible to "win" by telling people what's wrong with them.

With a broader perspective, however, we realize that each time our needs are met in this way, we not only lose, but we have contributed very tangibly to violence on the planet. We may have solved an immediate problem, but we will have created another one. The more people hear blame and judgment, the more defensive and aggressive they become and the less they will care about our needs in the future. So even if our present need is met in the sense that people do what we want, we will pay for it later.

Four Steps to Expressing Anger

Let's look at what the process of fully expressing our anger actually requires in concrete form. The first step is to stop and do nothing except to breathe. We refrain from making any move to blame or punish the other person. We simply stay quiet. Then we

identify the thoughts that are making us angry. For example, we overhear a statement that leads us to believe that we've been excluded from a conversation because of race. We sense anger, stop, and recognize the thoughts stirring in our head: "It's unfair to act like that. She's being racist." We know that all judgments like these are tragic expressions of unmet needs, so we take the next step and connect to the needs behind those thoughts. If we judge someone to be racist, the need may be for inclusion, equality, respect, or connection.

To fully express ourselves, we now open our mouth and speak the anger—but the anger has been transformed into needs and need-connected feelings. To articulate these feelings may require a lot of courage. For me it's easy to get angry and tell people, "That was a racist thing to do!" In fact, I may even enjoy saying such things, but to get down to the deeper feelings and needs behind such a statement may be very frightening. To fully express our anger, we may say to the other person, "When you entered the room and started talking to the others and didn't say anything to me, and then made the comment about white people, I felt really sick to my stomach, and got so scared; it triggered off all kinds of needs on my part to be treated equally. I'd like you to tell me how you feel when I tell you this."

Steps to expressing anger:

1. Stop. Breathe.
2. Identify our judgmental thoughts.
3. Connect with our needs.
4. Express our feelings and unmet needs.

Offering Empathy First

In most cases, however, another step needs to take place before we can expect the other party to connect with what is going on in us. Because it will often be difficult for others to receive our feelings and needs in such situations, if we want them to hear us we would need first to empathize with them. The more we empathize with what leads them to behave in the ways that are not meeting our needs, the more likely it is that they will be able to reciprocate afterwards.

The more we hear them, the more they'll hear us.

Over the last thirty years I've had a wealth of experience speaking NVC with people who harbor strong beliefs about specific races and ethnic groups. Early one morning I was picked up by a cab at an airport to take me into town.

A message from the dispatcher came over the loudspeaker for the cabbie: "Pick up Mr. Fishman at the synagogue on Main Street." The man next to me in the cab muttered, "These kikes get up early in the morning so they can screw everybody out of their money."

For twenty seconds, there was smoke coming out of my ears. In earlier years, my first reaction would have been to want to physically hurt such a person. Instead I took a few deep breaths and then gave myself some empathy for the hurt, fear, and rage that were stirring inside me. I attended to my feelings. I stayed conscious that my anger wasn't coming from my fellow passenger nor the statement he had just made. His comment had triggered off a volcano inside of me, but I knew that my anger and profound fear came from a far deeper source than those words he had just uttered. I sat back and simply allowed the violent thoughts to play themselves out. I even enjoyed the image of actually grabbing his head and smashing it.

Giving myself this empathy enabled me to then focus my attention on the humanness behind his message, after which the first words out of my mouth were, "Are you feeling . . . ?" I tried to empathize with him, to hear his pain. Why? Because I wanted to see the beauty in him, and I wanted for him to fully apprehend what I had experienced when he made his remark. I knew I wouldn't receive that kind of understanding if there were a storm brewing inside of him. My intention was to connect with

Stay conscious of the violent thoughts that arise in our minds, without judging them.

him and show a respectful empathy for the life energy in him that was behind the comment. My experience told me that if I were able to empathize, then he would be able to hear me in return. It would not be easy, but he would be able to.

“Are you feeling frustrated?” I asked. “It appears that you might have had some bad experiences with Jewish people.”

He eyed me for a moment. “Yeah! These people are disgusting. They’ll do anything for money.”

“You feel distrust and the need to protect yourself when you’re involved in financial affairs with them?”

“That’s right!” he exclaimed, continuing to release more judgments, as I listened for the feeling and need behind each one. When we settle our attention on other people’s feelings and needs, we experience our common humanity. When I hear that he’s scared and wants to protect himself, I recognize how I also have a need to protect myself and I too know what it’s like to be scared. When my consciousness is focused on another human being’s feelings and needs, I see the universality of our experience. I had a major conflict with what went on in his head, but I’ve learned that I enjoy human beings more if I don’t hear what they think. Especially with folks who have his kind of thoughts. I’ve learned to savor life much more by only hearing what’s going on in their hearts and not getting caught up with the stuff in their heads.

When we hear another person's feelings and needs, we recognize our common humanity.

This man kept on pouring out his sadness and frustration. Before I knew it, he’d finished with Jews and moved on to blacks. He was charged with pain around a number of subjects. After nearly ten minutes of my just listening, he stopped: he had felt understood.

Then I let him know what was going on in me:

MBR: You know, when you first started to talk, I felt a lot of anger, a lot of frustration, sadness, and discouragement, because I’ve had very different experiences with Jews than you’ve had, and I was wanting you to have much more the kind of experiences I’ve had. Can you tell me what you heard me say?

Man: Oh, I’m not saying they’re all . . .

MBR: Excuse me, hold on, hold it. Can you tell me what you heard me say?

Our need is for the other person to truly hear our pain.

Man: What are you talking about?

MBR: Let me repeat what I'm trying to say. I really want you to just hear the pain I felt when I heard your words. It's really important to me that you hear that. I was saying I felt a real sense of sadness because my experiences with Jewish people have been very different. I was just wishing that you had had some experiences that were different from the ones you were describing. Can you tell me what you heard me say?

Man: You're saying I have no right to talk the way I did.

MBR: No, I would like you to hear me differently. I really don't want to blame you. I have no desire to blame you.

I intended to slow down the conversation, because in my experience, to whatever degree people hear blame, they have failed to hear our pain. If this man said, "Those were terrible

People do not hear our pain when they believe they are at fault.

things for me to say; those were racist remarks I made," he would not have heard my pain. As soon as people think that they have done something wrong, they will not be fully apprehending our pain.

I didn't want him to hear blame, because I wanted him to know what had gone on in my heart when he uttered his remark. Blaming is easy. People are used to hearing blame; sometimes they agree with it and hate themselves—which doesn't stop them from behaving the same way—and sometimes they hate us for calling them racists or whatever—which also doesn't stop their behavior. If we sense blame entering their mind, as I did in the cab, we may need to slow down, go back, and hear their pain for a while more.

Taking Our Time

Probably the most important part of learning how to live the process we have been discussing is to take our time. We may feel awkward deviating from the habitual behaviors that our conditioning has

rendered automatic, but if our intention is to consciously live life in harmony with our values, then we'll want to take our time.

A friend of mine, Sam Williams, jotted down the basic components of the NVC process on a three-by-five card, which he would use as a cheat sheet at work. When his boss would confront him, Sam would stop, refer to the card in his hand, and take time to remember how to respond. When I asked whether his colleagues were finding him a little strange, constantly staring into his hand and taking so much time to form his sentences, Sam replied, "It doesn't actually take that much more time, but even if it did, it's still worth it to me. It's important for me to know that I am responding to people the way I really want to." At home he was more overt, explaining to his wife and children why he was taking the time and trouble to consult the card. Whenever there was an argument in the family, he would pull out the card and take his time. After about a month, he felt comfortable enough to put it away. Then one evening, he and Scottie, age four, were having a conflict over television and it wasn't going well. "Daddy," Scottie said urgently, "get the card!"

For those of you wishing to apply NVC, especially in challenging situations of anger, I would suggest the following exercise. As we have seen, our anger comes from judgments, labels, and thoughts of blame, of what people "should" do and what they "deserve." List the judgments that float most frequently in your head by using the cue, "I don't like people who are . . ." Collect all such negative judgments in your head and then ask yourself, "When I make that judgment of a person, what am I needing and not getting?" In this way, you train yourself to frame your thinking in terms of unmet needs rather than in terms of judgments of other people.

Practice translating each judgment into an unmet need.

Take your time.

Practice is essential, because most of us were raised, if not on the streets of Detroit, then somewhere only slightly less violent. Judging and blaming have become second nature to us. To practice NVC, we need to proceed slowly, think carefully before

we speak, and often just take a deep breath and not speak at all. Learning the process and applying it both take time.

Summary

Blaming and punishing others are superficial expressions of anger. If we wish to fully express anger, the first step is to divorce the other person from any responsibility for our anger. Instead we shine the light of consciousness on our own feelings and needs. By expressing our needs, we are far more likely to get them met than by judging, blaming, or punishing others.

The four steps to expressing anger are (1) stop and breathe, (2) identify our judgmental thoughts, (3) connect with our needs, and (4) express our feelings and unmet needs. Sometimes, in between steps 3 and 4, we may choose to empathize with the other person so that he or she will be better able to hear us when we express ourselves in step 4.

We need to take our time both in learning and in applying the process of NVC.

NVC in Action

Parent and Teen Dialogue: A Life-Threatening Issue

In this situation, fifteen-year-old Bill took a car, without permission, from Jorge, a family friend. He went on a joy ride with two friends and returned the car undamaged to the garage, where its absence had not been detected. Since then, however, Jorge's fourteen-year-old daughter, Eva, who had gone along for the ride, told her father what had happened. Jorge informed Bill's father, who is now approaching his son. The father has just recently been practicing NVC.

Father: So I hear you, Eva, and Dave took Jorge's car without asking.

Bill: No, we didn't!

Father: *(in a loud voice)* Don't lie to me; it'll only make it worse!

Then he remembered to first connect to his own feelings and needs in order to stay in connection with his son.

Father: You just sit there for a moment; I need to think.

Going inside himself, he saw how angry and scared he was. Angry when telling himself, "Bill should have known better!" and "What a liar he's become!" Scared when he thinks of all the potential consequences of not only Bill's action, but his own misjudgment of what his son might do.

Father: *(silently to himself)* That was stupid of me to assume he knows better. Someone could have gotten killed in this! *(then catching himself)* Oops, I need to translate the labels "stupid" and "liar" into feelings and needs. For "stupid," I guess the feeling is disappointment in myself: I would have liked to think that I knew him better. And as for "liar," I'm feeling pretty scared because I want to be able to count on getting accurate information to deal with this situation.

Father: *(out loud, after silence while he mulls over how to begin talking)* Bill, are you worried that you'd be punished if you gave me accurate information?

Bill: Yeah, you're always so mean whenever I do anything you don't like.

Father: Are you saying you'd like more understanding and fairer treatment for what you do?

Bill: Oh, sure, like I'm really gonna get fair treatment and understanding from you!

Father: *(silently to himself)* Boy, do I get angry when he says that! Can't he see how hard I'm trying? I really need a little respect for how hard this is, and I guess also a little caring for how scared I'm feeling.

Father: *(out loud to Bill)* Sounds to me like you're worried that no matter what you say, you won't be treated fairly?

Bill: What do you care about treating me fairly? When something happens, you just want someone to punish. Besides, what's the big deal? Even if we did take the car, no one got hurt and it's back where it was. I mean, this is no major crime wave.

Father: Are you scared there'll be harsh consequences if you admit to taking the car, and you want to trust that you'll be treated justly?

Bill: Yeah.

Father: *(allowing time for silence and the connection to go deeper)* What could I do to give you that reassurance?

Bill: Promise to never punish me again.

Father: *(Aware that punishment will not help Bill develop consciousness around potential consequences of his behavior, but will only contribute to greater disconnection and resistance, Bill's father expresses willingness to agree to Bill's request.)* I'd be open to that agreement if you agree to stay in dialogue with me. That is, we talk until I'm satisfied you're aware of all the possible consequences of your having taken that car. However, in the future, if it happens that I'm not confident that you see the potential danger of what you're in for, I might still use force—but only in order to protect you.

Bill: Wow, great! It really feels good knowing I'm so stupid you have to use force to protect me from myself!

Father: *(losing touch with his own needs, but silently)* Man, there are times when I could just kill the little . . . I'm so furious when he says things like that! It really doesn't seem like he cares. . . . Damn, what am I needing here? I'm needing to know, when I'm working this hard, that at least he cares.)

Father: *(out loud, angrily)* You know, Bill, when you say things like that, I get really pissed off. I'm trying so hard to stay with you on this, and when I hear things like that . . . Look, I need to know if you even want to keep talking with me.

Bill: I don't care.

Father: Bill, I really want to listen to you rather than fall into my old habits of blaming and threatening you whenever something comes up that I'm upset about. But when I hear you say things like, "It feels good to know I'm so stupid," in the tone of voice you just used, I find it hard to control myself. I could use your help on this. That is, if you would rather me listen to you than blame or threaten. Or if not, then, I suppose my other option is to just handle this the way I'm used to handling things.

Bill: And what would that be?

Father: Well, by now, I'd probably be saying, "Hey, you're grounded for two years: no TV, no car, no money, no dates, no nothing!"

Bill: Well, I guess I'd want you to do it the new way then.

Father: *(with humor)* I'm glad to see that your sense of self-preservation is still intact. Now I need you to tell me whether you're willing to share some honesty and vulnerability.

Bill: What do you mean by "vulnerability"?

Father: It means that you tell me what you are really feeling about the things we're talking about, and I tell you the same from my end. *(in a firm voice)* Are you willing?

Bill: Okay, I'll try.

Father: *(with sigh of relief)* Thank you. I'm grateful for your willingness to try. Did I tell you—Jorge grounded Eva for three months—she won't be allowed to do anything. How do you feel about that?

Bill: Oh man, what a bummer; that's so unfair!

Father: I'd like to hear how you really feel about it.

Bill: I told you—it's totally unfair!

Father: *(realizing Bill isn't in touch with what he's feeling, decides to guess)* Are you sad that she's having to pay so much for her mistake?

Bill: No, it's not that. I mean, it wasn't her mistake really.

Father: Oh, so are you upset she's paying for something that was your idea to start with?

Bill: Well, yeah, she just went along with what I told her to do.

Father: Sounds to me like you're kind of hurting inside seeing the kind of effect your decision had on Eva.

Bill: Sorta.

Father: Billy, I really need to know that you are able to see how your actions have consequences.

Bill: Well, I wasn't thinking about what could've gone wrong. Yeah, I guess I did really screw up bad.

Father: I'd rather you see it as something you did that didn't turn out the way you wanted. And I still need reassurance about your being aware of the consequences. Would you tell me what you're feeling right now about what you did?

Bill: I feel really stupid, Dad. . . . I didn't mean to hurt anyone.

Father: *(translating Bill's self-judgments into feelings and needs)* So you're sad, and regret what you did because you'd like to be trusted not to do harm?

Bill: Yeah, I didn't mean to cause so much trouble. I just didn't think about it.

Father: Are you saying you wish you had thought about it more and gotten clearer before you acted?

Bill: *(reflecting)* Yeah . . .

Father: Well, it's reassuring for me to hear that, and for there to be some real healing with Jorge, I would like you to go to him and tell him what you just told me. Would you be willing to do that?

Bill: Oh man, that's so scary; he'll be really mad!

Father: Yeah, it's likely he will be. That's one of the consequences. Are you willing to be responsible for your actions? I like Jorge and I want to keep him for a friend, and I'm guessing that you would like to keep your connection with Eva. Is that the case?

Bill: She's one of my best friends.

Father: So shall we go see them?

Bill: *(fearfully and reluctantly)* Well . . . okay. Yeah, I guess so.

Father: Are you scared and needing to know that you will be safe if you go there?

Bill: Yeah.

Father: We'll go together: I'll be there for you and with you. I'm really proud that you are willing.