


## **KEY CONCEPT 2**

# **ATTENTION**

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- 2.1 Awareness Exercise:  
Directing Our Attention**
  - 2.2 Awareness Exercise:  
Awareness Without Agenda**
  - 2.3 Activity: Choosing Where  
to Place Our Attention**



## KEY CONCEPT 2:

# Attention

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**Description:** NVC challenges us to live in the present—to focus on our own or the other person’s feelings and needs from moment to moment. Whether we are observing, thinking, evaluating, or judging, our practice is to be aware that this is what we are doing right now. Even when we are thinking about a past or future event, we recognize that we are engaging in the present-moment mental activity of “recalling” or “planning.” We recognize that thinking about the past or imagining the future generates present-moment feelings and needs.

**Toolkit exercises** in this section support us in cultivating mindfulness so we can choose where to focus our attention and to be fully present to ourselves and others.

**Tips for Facilitators:** Our ability to apply NVC consciousness in daily life is enhanced by practices that help us slow down, stay present, and be self-aware. We urge facilitators to experiment with ways to realize an atmosphere in the group that encourages connection and awareness and serves as a reminder to return over and over again to the present moment. Awareness Exercises included in this Toolkit, as well as brief meditations, activities that ground us in our bodies, poetry, music, and various mindfulness practices, may all be helpful in cultivating this quality of experiencing ourselves in the present moment.

## AWARENESS EXERCISE 2.1

# Directing Our Attention

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### AIM OF EXERCISE:

1. To practice awareness of where we place our attention
2. To practice choosing where we place our attention

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR GUIDING AWARENESS EXERCISE:** Read the following slowly, leaving space between each statement for the participant to engage in the guided process:

1. *Straighten your spine. Make any necessary adjustments.*
2. *Focus your attention inward by closing your eyes or gently dropping your gaze to the floor in front of you.*
3. *Sit comfortably. Focus your attention on your breathing.*
4. *Notice your breath coming in and going out.*
5. *Now focus on your ribs and notice the movement of your ribs.*
6. *Notice your body sensations as your lungs expand and release.*
7. *Now move your focus to your nostrils. Feel the air coming in and going out. Notice any difference in the quality of the air.*
8. *Now I invite you to focus on imagining being with someone you really enjoy.*
  - *Begin by focusing on your thoughts about that person. Just notice your thinking as you imagine being present to that person.*
  - *Now attend to what you are seeing in your imagination as you look at them. What are they wearing? What expression do you notice on their face?*
  - *Next, change your focus and guess what they might be observing in this situation.*
  - *Now put your attention on your feeling as you are present to them.*
  - *This time focus on what you think they might be feeling in this situation.*
  - *Now come back to your own heart. Be aware of what you are needing or what need is being met as you are present with this person.*
  - *Next turn your attention to what you guess they might be needing. Or what need of theirs is being met in this situation?*

- *In this moment, if you had one request of them, what would it be? Imagine yourself making that request to them.*
- *Now guess what request they might have of you.*
- *As we bring this visualization to a close, take a moment to say goodbye to this person.*

9. *The purpose of this awareness exercise is to practice noticing and choosing where we place our attention. Recall the various times in this exercise when you chose where you placed your attention.*

10. *When you are ready, open your eyes and look around the room at other people with a sense of curiosity as to what each one might have just experienced.*

11. *Take a moment and be conscious of what you learned about yourself and what you chose—or chose not—to be aware of.*

### **SHARING CIRCLE:**

- My name is \_\_\_\_\_ .
- One thing I became aware of during this exercise was \_\_\_\_\_ .

**REFERENCE:** Chapter 1



# Awareness Without Agenda

**AIM OF EXERCISE:** To open our attention to being simply present to whatever comes up—whether a sight, smell, sound, taste, sensation, or thought. NVC asks us to cultivate the capacity to be aware of what is alive in us. We train our attention so that it is available in the only place where life occurs: in the now.

**TIME REQUIRED:** For beginners, start with 5 minutes plus a 5-minute debrief. (Consider slowly increasing to 20 minutes as group gains more experience over time.)

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR GUIDING AWARENESS EXERCISE:** Be aware of your own state of mind and notice (without judging) if your attention wanders as you offer the following instructions. Read slowly, pausing between statements:

1. *Take a moment to adjust your body so that you are sitting comfortably with your back straight.*
2. *If you feel safe doing so, close your eyes. Otherwise, allow your gaze to settle softly on the ground in front of your feet.*
3. *Now bring attention to your breath as it enters and leaves the body . . . Notice what it feels like, either at the nostrils or in your chest or belly.*
4. *We'll take some conscious breaths here . . . Aware of breathing in . . . aware of breathing out. Without forcing the breath or changing it, . . . without judging the way we are breathing or thinking about it, we simply notice what it feels like to be breathing. In and out . . . Belly rising, belly falling . . . Be in this experience . . . The very experience of this breath . . . And this one. . . . And this one? . . .*
5. *Now we'll practice opening our attention to whatever comes up in each moment . . . welcoming each new moment with no agenda . . . As you continue breathing, just notice what comes up for you.*
6. *Are there thoughts coming up? Maybe some thought like, "I am bored stiff," "This is super peaceful," "I don't know what the hell I am doing!" Just notice that you are thinking . . . without reacting to the thought, without judging it, without analyzing it, without believing it or not believing it, without getting lost in it . . . Simply notice that thinking is happening.*
7. *When thoughts subside, go back to the sensation of breathing.*
8. *When sounds come up, simply notice hearing . . . without getting caught up in them . . . The sound of my voice . . . sounds inside the room . . . sounds outside . . . Notice hearing without trying to figure out what the sound is.*

9. *When sound subsides, once again return to the sensation of the breath. Just stay with the feeling that comes from breathing in and out until something else appears on the horizon. Perhaps a sensation in your body—an ache, a tingling, warmth, pressure . . .*
10. *Perhaps a feeling comes up in the form of heaviness . . . sadness . . . tension . . . calm . . . sleepiness . . . Perhaps a smell, a taste in the mouth . . . whatever it is, can we notice what this moment brings without either pushing it away or chasing after it?*
11. *Let's experiment. Let's welcome these next [30 seconds, or however long] with awareness and curiosity. Whatever it brings. [Allow at least 30 seconds of silence.]*
12. *This is my life: what is happening right now . . . I am training my attention to be aware of whatever arises and to be able to hold all experiences that arise within this body and mind.*
  - a. *An emotion? . . . Hmm, what does that emotion feel like? . . .*
  - b. *A thought? I'm aware there's thinking going on without getting sucked up in the thoughts.*
  - c. *A sound? I notice hearing happening.*
  - d. *A sensation in the body? Where is it? Let me get close and really feel that feeling in this moment . . . And this moment? And this? [Long pause]*
13. *The purpose of this awareness exercise is to open our attention to being simply present to whatever comes up—whether a sight, smell, sound, taste, sensation, or thought. NVC calls us to cultivate the capacity to be aware of what is alive in us. We train our attention so that it is available in the only place where life occurs: in the now.*
14. *For those of you whose eyes are closed, notice the unique experience of this moment as I ask you to slowly open your eyes and become aware of sight . . . of seeing . . . Now everyone, bring your awareness gently back to the room and to the group.*

### **SHARING CIRCLE:**

- My name is \_\_\_\_\_ .
- Something I am aware of, after having done this exercise, is \_\_\_\_\_ .

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR PRACTICE IN EVERYDAY LIFE:**

- When waiting—in line, in traffic, or for the bell to ring—start by focusing on your breath and then become aware of seeing, hearing, or smelling.
- Take a walk outside. Allow your senses to come alive as you rotate your attention:
  - from seeing

— to hearing

— to smelling

— to feeling (either the sensation of the body moving or the feel of the feet pressing into the ground)

— and back to seeing, etc.

Give each of the senses a few seconds to register awareness before moving on to the next.

**REFERENCE:** Chapter 1



## ACTIVITY 2.3

# Choosing Where to Place Our Attention



### PURPOSE OF ACTIVITY:

1. To practice consciously choosing where to place our attention
2. To practice tracking our attention

**BRIEF DESCRIPTION:** Participants focus their attention on a sequence of different objects for 6 minutes. There are two parts to this activity; they can be done independently of each other.

### Part I—“Inside With People”

Two people carry on a conversation while two others are directed to place their full attention on an object specified in a handout. For example, they are first directed to focus their attention by “looking at the person who is talking.” After 20 seconds, the focus may switch to “feeling the feelings in my body,” or to “hearing the sounds in the room,” or to “intuiting the speaker’s needs,” etc.

### Part II—“Outside Alone”

Participants go outside and take a walk by themselves while rotating attention every 20 seconds from seeing to hearing to smelling to feeling the sensations of the body.

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

- ❑ Specific Learning Aid 2.3: Accordion-Pleated Handout—Choosing Where I Place My Attention; one copy for every two participants in the room.

NOTE: This handout needs to be folded accordion-fashion before use. This process takes approximately 2–3 minutes. Facilitator may provide pre-pleated handouts or give participants an extra few



**Accordion-Pleated Handout (finished product)**

minutes for each to fold their own. Folding instructions are provided on the reverse side of the handout. See Specific Learning Aid 2.3.

**TIME REQUIRED: Part I:** 30 minutes (may be conducted independently of Part II)  
**Part II:** 25 minutes (may be conducted independently of Part I) **Debrief:** 15 minutes

**GROUP SIZE: Part I:** Four or more, **Part II:** Any size

**SPACE REQUIRED: Part I:** Enough for groups of four to work without mutual interference. **Part II:** Enough outdoor space for everyone to be able to take a 10-minute walk.

**LITERACY LEVEL REQUIRED: Part I** requires ability to read short sentences

## **PROCEDURE:**

### **Part I—Inside With People**

1. Explain purpose of activity.

*NVC invites us to be aware moment to moment as to where we place our life energy. We train our minds so that we may consciously choose where to focus our energy rather than be led by our habits of mind and unconscious patterns of behavior. In this activity, we experiment with our power to consciously choose where we place our attention as well as with our mind's tendency to wander.*

2. Form groups of four (if there are extra participants, form groups of five).
3. Offer the following instructions to the groups:
  - a. *Decide which two persons in your group will be Talkers. Talkers get 6 minutes to talk to each other about something personally meaningful.*
  - b. *The others in the group will be Trainers. You will be training your attention on a series of different objects, one after another, over the course of the 6 minutes that the Talkers will be in conversation.*
  - c. *Trainers will receive a Handout specifying how and where to focus your attention. The Handout is pleated, accordion-style, so as to reveal only one item at a time.*

Show participants a pleated handout. Give a pre-folded handout to each Trainer or show them how to fold their own copy.

*d. There is one item on each fold. Read that item and direct your attention to what it indicates. For example, an item may read: "LOOK at your left hand." Place your full attention on simply looking at the hand. Stay focused on LOOKING for about 20 seconds or until you have difficulty maintaining your attention. Be aware of your mind wandering off or*

when, instead of **LOOKING AT** the hand, you start to **THINK ABOUT** what you are seeing. If this happens, just gently invite your attention back to your intended focus without judging yourself.

- e. When you are ready to switch focus, use your thumb and flip the pleated Handout upwards to expose the next item. The items are numbered from 1 to 13. When you have completed all thirteen items, you may start from the beginning or flip to any item at random.
  - f. Once again, the purpose of this activity is to train ourselves to consciously choose an object upon which to place our attention. It is likely that Trainers will find their attention drawn to the Talkers' conversation, especially if the dialogue is heartfelt. However, I encourage you, Trainers, to challenge yourselves in focusing your full attention without being distracted by the Talkers' conversation.
4. Make sure that everyone understands the procedures. Inform groups that you will give a signal in 5 minutes. Talkers may take the last minute to wind down and bring their conversation to a close, after which Talkers and Trainers in each group will switch roles.
  5. Upon completion of the first 6-minute round, ask participants if there are questions regarding procedures before launching the second round. Request that Talkers and Trainers switch roles, passing the pleated Handouts to the new pair of Trainers in each group. (If a group has five members, one person will not have a chance to be a Talker.)

## Part II—Outside Alone

1. Explain purpose of activity (See Part I, Item #1).
2. Offer the following instructions:
  - a. *Let's take a 10-minute walk outside. During the walk, I'd like you to rotate your attention:*
    - *from SEEING* [Place your hands on your eyes.]
    - *to HEARING* [Place your hands on your ears.]
    - *to SMELLING* [Place a hand on your nose.]
    - *to FEELING THE SENSATIONS IN YOUR BODY* [Sweep your hands from your feet up through your ankles, legs, and hips.]
  - b. *I'll illustrate.*
    - *As I walk, I place my full attention on SEEING. I can move my eyes and let my attention fall on different objects while I walk. But I keep my consciousness focused on what my eyes are seeing. If I find myself naming and identifying objects, guessing and wondering*

*what the object is, I gently remind myself to bring my attention back to just seeing. [Place your hands around eyes.]*

- *After about 20 seconds, I switch to HEARING. [Place hands around ears.]*

*Now I put my full attention on the experience of hearing itself. If I find myself thinking about the sounds, or trying to figure out what they are, I gently re-focus my attention to simply hearing.*

- *After another interval of 20 seconds or so, I switch my attention to SMELLING. [Place a hand on your nose.] Even if I don't smell anything, I can still focus my attention on smelling at each inhalation.*
- *Now I switch my attention to the PHYSICAL SENSATIONS, especially those in my lower body as I walk . . . the pressure against the ball of my foot as it lifts off the ground, the heaviness in the leg, the constriction in the front of the thigh, the feel of the heel as it makes contact with the earth, the various sensations in the ankles, hips, buttocks, etc. as my legs carry me through space . . .*
- *You may also notice PHYSICAL SENSATIONS such as coolness on your cheeks from a breeze or warmth on top of your head from the sun. However, focus primarily on the sensations you experience as you lift, move, and place your legs and feet when taking your steps.*

- After focusing your attention on these physical sensations for about 20 seconds, switch back to seeing, followed by hearing, smelling, and so forth.*
- Feel free to walk at a natural pace or experiment with going slowly if it supports your concentration. Please do not communicate with one another while you walk.*

3. Encourage questions to make sure that everyone understands the instructions. Before the group disperses, ask everyone to stand up and review the four areas where they will be placing their attention during the walk. Name each area of focus and invite participants to use the hand gestures you introduced under 2a, above.

NOTE: Make a clear agreement as to how and when participants will reconvene.

**REFERENCE:** Chapter 1

## Accordion-Pleated Handout (Sample)

<p>what the speaker is feeling</p> <p><b>INTUIT (13)</b></p>	<p><b>(1) LOOK</b> at whoever is talking</p>
<p>your body breathing</p> <p><b>FEEL (12)</b></p>	<p><b>(2) FEEL</b> your own feelings: either emotions or physical sensations</p>
<p>the listener's emotions (Listener may switch from person to person.)</p> <p><b>INTUIT (11)</b></p>	<p><b>(3) INTUIT</b> the emotions of the person who is speaking</p>
<p>to someone in your group, e.g. "May you be happy."</p> <p><b>SEND SILENT BLESSING (10)</b></p>	<p><b>(4) LISTEN</b> to the sounds in the room</p>
<p>whether met or unmet, from moment to moment</p> <p><b>CONNECT WITH YOUR NEED (9)</b></p>	<p><b>(5) LOOK</b> at your left hand</p>
<p>what your left hand feels like (Try closing your eyes.)</p> <p><b>FEEL (8)</b></p>	<p><b>(6) LISTEN</b> to what the speaker is saying</p>
	<p><b>(7) INTUIT</b> the speaker's needs</p>

