

KEY CONCEPT 3

COMMUNICATION THAT BLOCKS CONNECTION

**3.1 Awareness Exercise:
The Impact of Judgmental
Thinking**

3.2 Activity: Cover-Up

**3.3 Activity: Tuning in to the
Four Ds**

KEY CONCEPT 3:

Communication That Blocks Connection

Description: NVC highlights ways in which we think and speak that prevent heart connection. These include:

1. Diagnoses, judgments, labels, criticism, blame
2. Denial of responsibility for our own feelings and behaviors (or depriving another person of their responsibility for their own feelings and behaviors)
3. Demands or demand-energy—asking for compliance without willingness to consider the needs of the party being addressed
4. “Deserve”-oriented thinking—thinking that certain behaviors or individuals deserve certain consequences in the form of reward or punishment

Toolkit exercises in this section cultivate awareness of ways in which we fall into the “Four Ds of Disconnection.” These activities provide participants an opportunity to experience how these forms of thinking block compassionate connection.

Tips for Facilitators: Spend time with participants so they see the value of becoming familiar with the four Ds of Disconnection. As we become increasingly aware of how we disconnect ourselves from others by judging, denying responsibility, demanding, and the use of deserve-language, we might begin to criticize ourselves for such behaviors. This generates a “double-disconnect”—we are not only disconnected from the other party, we are also disconnected within ourselves. An image that might be helpful when approaching our own judgmental behaviors is gold-panning. When we pan for gold we focus on the gold in the midst of the refuse and carefully save the precious nuggets of ore so that we can extract what is beautiful and of great worth. In the same way, within a piece of communication that blocks connection we can find valuable clues revealing what our heart needs and how to re-establish connection.

AWARENESS EXERCISE 3.1

The Impact of Judgmental Thinking

AIM OF EXERCISE: To practice becoming aware of judgmental thoughts and how they affect us

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

1. *Sit comfortably. Straighten your spine. Make any necessary adjustments.*
2. *Focus your attention inward by closing your eyes or gazing softly on the floor in front of you.*
3. *Place your attention on your breathing.*
4. *Bring to mind a person who stimulates unpleasant feelings for you.*
5. *Notice the thoughts that come up as you think of this person. Repeat these thoughts to yourself silently by saying the words in your head.*
6. *Return to the memory of the person and let more thoughts arise. With each thought, repeat the words in your head.*
7. *Now focus your attention on sensations in your body. What physical sensations are you aware of? Become aware of your energy while thinking about the person.*
8. *If you notice any judgments, listen to each judgment and repeat it to yourself.*
9. *If you notice blaming thoughts, listen and repeat them to yourself in your head.*
10. *Again, take a moment to notice your energy and body sensations.*
11. *If you notice any demands you want to make of the person, silently state these demands in your head.*
12. *Likewise, if you have thoughts about what they should or should not be doing or saying, repeat these statements in your head.*
13. *If you think they deserve anything, let that come to you and repeat it silently.*
14. *Once more be aware of the physical sensations in your body and muscles, your energy level, and the type of energy available to you as you run through these thoughts.*

15. *Now take a moment and connect with the need or needs that are not being met for you when this person comes to mind. Are you able to identify the universal needs that you would like met in this situation?*

[Pause]

16. *Go back to your body and be aware of physical sensations and the quality of your energy. As you switch your focus from judgmental thoughts to the universal needs underneath those thoughts, do you notice any changes in your body or energy?*

17. *Spend a few moments recognizing the preciousness of the need or needs you have named. Experience how much you treasure the need(s).*

18. *Once more, check in with your body: notice how your muscles and energy feel in this moment.*

SHARING CIRCLE:

- My name is _____ .
- From the exercise, I learned or realized _____ .

SUGGESTION FOR PRACTICE IN DAILY LIFE: When you find your thoughts turning to judgment, blame, demand or “deserve-type thinking,” try deliberately repeating the thought to yourself as a way to become fully conscious of it. Then you can give yourself the choice to either continue in judgment-mode or to change your focus.

REFERENCE: Chapter 2

ACTIVITY 3.2

Cover-Up



PURPOSE OF ACTIVITY:

1. To realize how we hide our hearts under stories we make up about ourselves
2. To realize how we prevent ourselves from seeing and hearing another person by hiding them under the stories we make up about them
3. To recognize that we have choice to:
 - continue feeding our stories, or
 - find strategies to meet the needs behind the stories

BRIEF DESCRIPTION: Participants identify thoughts they have about themselves and others. Using a simple visual metaphor, participants are led through a four-part series to recognize how such thoughts cover up what is real and present in a human being—whether it be ourselves or another person. This activity includes a large group demonstration, individual work, reflection, group debriefing, and a short guided meditation.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- One large mirror or window
- One large sheet of newsprint
- Individual Handout: Cover-Up (two copies for each participant)
- Fifteen sheets of paper cut in half lengthwise (to produce thirty pieces, about 11" x 4")

TIME REQUIRED: 1 hour

GROUP SIZE: Any

SPACE REQUIRED: Enough to seat all participants

LITERACY LEVEL REQUIRED: Able to read and write words

PROCEDURE:

Part 1

1. Give this information:

George has been in and out of prison for twelve years. George asks, "Why does my parole officer look at the piece of paper where lots of people have written thoughts about me instead of looking at me and listening to me?"

2. Stand in front of a mirror or window and have on hand a stack of paper (about 11" x 4").

3. Ask participants:

- *If you were George, what labels might you be putting on yourself?*
- *When George judges himself, sees himself as undeserving, or blames himself for what he should or shouldn't do, what kinds of things might he be saying about himself in his head?*

4. Encourage participants to respond and have a volunteer record their answers—one thought (label or judgment) per sheet. Stick the sheets on the mirror or window.

5. When the group has finished responding, ask them:

Can you imagine George trying to see himself—his real self—in this mirror? What does he see? [If you are using a window, ask participants to imagine that it is a large mirror.]

6. Tack a large piece of newsprint on the wall or board. Ask a volunteer to use the newsprint to write down the group's responses to the next question:

What might be other people's thoughts about George? What words would they use to label, judge, criticize, or blame him? What thoughts might they have about what George deserves and what's wrong with him?

7. When the group has finished responding, ask a volunteer to represent

George. Have this volunteer hold the newsprint (covered with people's thoughts about George) in front of himself so that nobody can see him.

8. Debrief question:

Does anyone wish to share what they have learned from this part of the exercise?

Part 2

1. Introduce the next part:

Now we'll look at how stories we make up about ourselves prevent us from seeing and hearing what is alive in our hearts and similarly, how stories we make up about other people prevent us from seeing them.

2. Guide participants through the following meditation:

- *Close your eyes, take a couple of breaths, and relax your body.*
- *Imagine yourself standing in front of a full-length mirror.*
- *Take all the labels that you give yourself (for example: “stupid,” “smart,” “compassionate,” “mean,” “loser,” “winner,” “drug addict,” “facilitator”) and paste them on the mirror.*
- *Now add on to that mirror all the self-blaming statements you say to yourself.*
- *Now add all the “should” and “should not” you give yourself.*
- *Add all the things you think you deserve—both positive and negative.*
- *Now look at the mirror. Can you see yourself? Or do you just see a pile of thoughts about yourself?*
- *Now visualize taking all the thought statements off the mirror. See your own reflection in the mirror clearly and take a moment to be fully present to yourself. [Pause]*

Part 3

1. Give each participant two copies of the handout with the following instructions:

Take one of these handouts and write down thoughts that you have about yourself—all the labels and judgments you believe about yourself—whether positive or negative, all the thoughts about what you deserve or don’t deserve, about what you should or should not be thinking, saying, or doing

[Give participants time to write.]

2. After the group has completed the handout, ask them:

Do these thoughts about yourself cover up your real self? Is it possible that they are only a story about you—just like the paper that George’s parole officer looked at instead of looking at George?

3. Suggest to the participants:

When you think one of these thoughts, you can remind yourself, “This is only a story I make up about me. I can leave the story and return to who I am in this moment and connect with what is alive in me now.”

4. Use the following question for participants to debrief:

What is one thought about yourself that most keeps you from seeing and hearing the real you?

Part 4

Offer the following instructions and questions:

1. *Bring to mind someone about whom you entertain a lot of thoughts.*
2. *Write those thoughts on the second handout such that you no longer can see the figure behind the writing.*
3. *Now ask yourself, "Is there any thought I am willing to let go of?" If so, cross it off the paper.*
4. *Circle the thoughts that are most in the way of your seeing and hearing the other person in the present moment.*
5. *Ask yourself, "What need am I trying to meet by holding on to that thought?"*
6. *Now ask yourself, "What is one other strategy that I could use to meet that need?"*

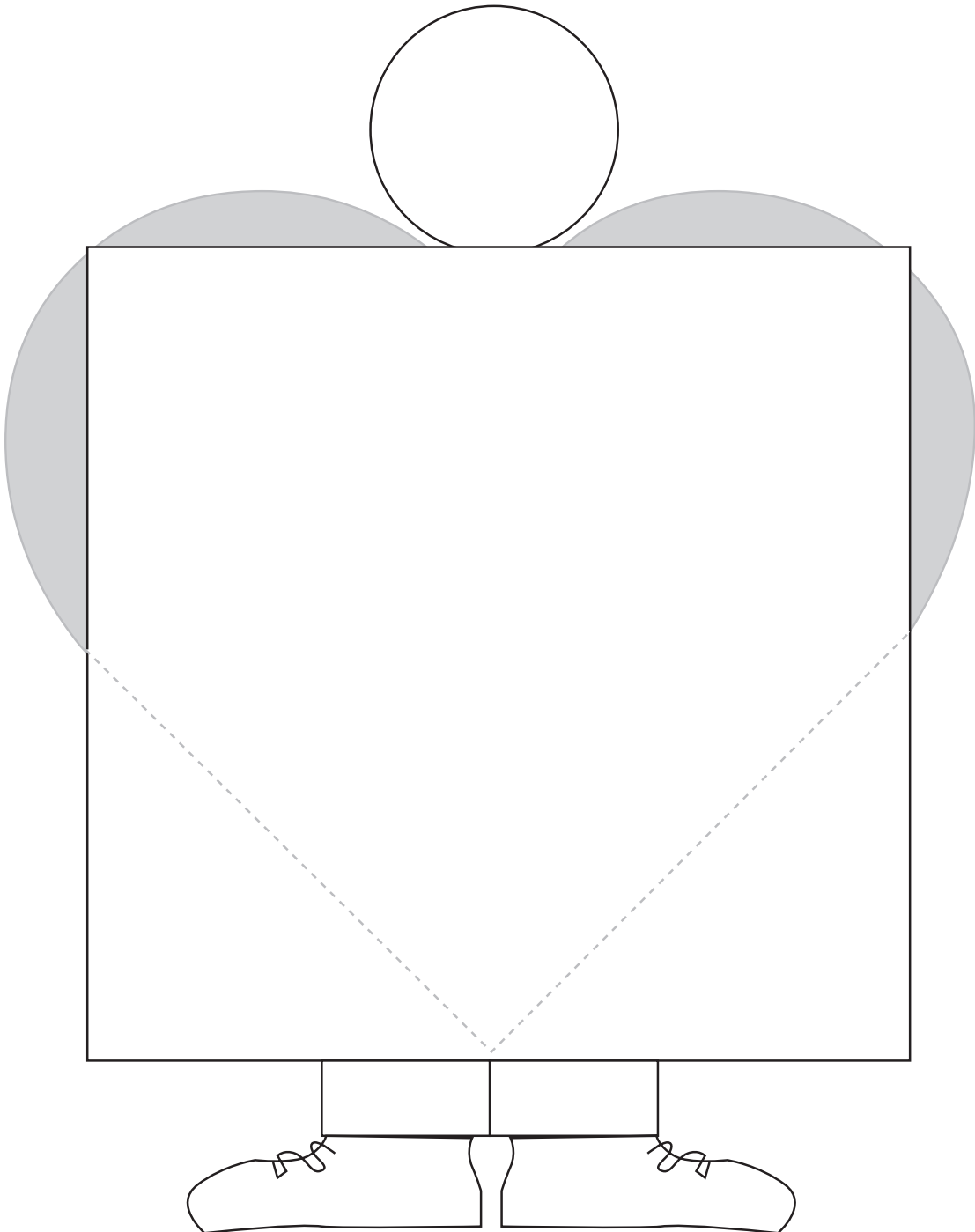
After participants have completed this part of the exercise, debrief by asking them to share what they have learned that might help them see and hear people in the here and now.

DEBRIEF QUESTION: Is there anything you would like to celebrate—either mourn or appreciate—from having completed the four parts of this activity?

REFERENCE: Chapter 2

INDIVIDUAL HANDOUT 3.2:

Cover-Up



ACTIVITY 3.3

Tuning In to the Four Ds



PURPOSE OF ACTIVITY:

1. To identify four patterns of communication that diminish heart connection
2. To practice recognizing specific instances in everyday speech which fall into these patterns
3. To practice hearing the universal need that may underlie a statement expressing these patterns
4. To experiment with translating statements communicated through these patterns into NVC expression

BRIEF DESCRIPTION: Small teams of participants each create a 3-minute skit containing several statements illustrating the “Four Ds of Disconnection” (see definition of the Four Ds under Procedure Part I, Item #1, below). Teams take turns performing their skit. Audience-teams vie among themselves to identify a “D” as quickly as possible. Any audience member who recognizes a “D” statement in the skit announces it by jubilantly intoning “D-D-D-D” (to the opening notes of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony).

The teams progressively challenge each other to:

- (a) recite the D-statement that generated the chanting of “D-D-D-D,”
- (b) identify which of the four Ds the statement represents,
- (c) guess the need behind the statement, and
- (d) (for groups familiar with the NVC model) translate the D-statement into an NVC expression

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Paper and writing instruments; white board or flipchart
- Individual Handout: Tuning in to the Four Ds

TIME REQUIRED: 2 hours for three groups of four to five participants. Add 20 minutes for each additional group.

GROUP SIZE: Minimum: Nine (three teams with at least three members each). **Maximum** number depends on availability of time and space: allow 2 hours for three teams. Add another 20 minutes for each additional team. If additional rooms are available so that two or more skits may be performed simultaneously, this activity can accommodate any number of participants.

SPACE REQUIRED: Adequate for teams to plan their skits without mutual interference

LITERACY LEVEL REQUIRED: Not required, but ability to write down one's lines may be helpful when performing the skit

PROCEDURE:

Part I—Introduction and Creation of Skits

1. List the “Four Ds of Disconnection” on the board. Review and give an example of each “D.” (For additional information on the Four Ds, see Description of Concept #3 at the beginning of this section, p. 47.)
 - a. **DIAGNOSE**, judge, label, criticize
e.g., “The problem with you is that . . .”
 - b. **DENY** responsibility for one's actions and feelings
e.g., “I have to pay taxes.” “He made me feel bad.”
 - c. **DEMAND**
e.g., “You have to (must, should, got to, ought to, are supposed to) take out the garbage.” “You can't wear that.”
 - d. **DESERVE** as in “You deserve (don't deserve) . . .”

NOTE: Explain that these four patterns of communication can occur in dialogues we have with others as well as with ourselves. There may be some overlap between (b) and (c). For example, if I say, “I have to pay taxes” to a friend, this would be an example of (b) denial of responsibility. If I say “I have to pay taxes” to myself, this could be either (b) or (c), the common denominator being the absence of choice.

2. Give participants an overview of the activity as offered in the first paragraph of the “Brief Description,” above. (Save the details in the second paragraph to present later.)
3. Divide participants into groups of four to five and inform them that they have 30 minutes to create a 3-minute skit, which will be performed twice to an audience. The skit is to contain lines which illustrate the four Ds. However, ask groups to aim for dialogues that sound real or natural rather than exaggerated, and to make their skit challenging for their audience by including both lines which have Ds and those which have no Ds.
4. Distribute and go over the handout “Tuning in to the Four Ds,” offer paper and pen, and give participants 30 minutes to create their skits. Double-check that all groups are clear about the task at hand.

Part II—Performance and Challenge

1. Arrange a stage in front of the room where the skits are to be performed.
2. Invite one team to step up to the stage to perform their skit.
3. Ask the referee on the team to stand to one side of the stage. (See #8 below for referee responsibilities)
4. Have the audience face the stage, but clustered in their own teams.
5. Give the following instructions to the audience-teams:
 - a. *Audience, you will see the skit performed twice. During the first time, simply listen for “D” statements, but do not interrupt the performance.*
 - b. *During the second performance your teams will be challenging each other. Just as soon as any of you hear a “D” statement, stand up, throw both hands over your head, and loudly intone “D-D-D-D” as quickly as possible. [Demonstrate the movements and chant D-D-D-D to the tune and rhythm of the first four notes of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony.]*
 - c. *This person will then recite the “D” statement they claim to have identified.*
 - *If they are unable to recite the “D” statement, they forfeit their right to challenge the other team and the skit continues.*
 - *If they are successful in identifying and reciting the “D” statement, they may challenge a specific person from another team to state which of the four Ds the statement represents.*
 - d. *The person who is challenged may consult with their teammates before deciding which of the four Ds the statement represents. Please be aware that some “D” statements may qualify under more than one “D” category. What we’ll be looking for during the challenge is a clear explanation of why a statement falls into the category that was identified.*
 - *If they are unable to identify the category, their team loses the challenge and the skit continues.*
 - *If they are able to identify the type of D, the challenge continues and moves back to the other team.*
 - e. *The original challenger then guesses the need behind the “D” statement. (What universal need might the speaker have had?) The player is allowed to consult with teammates to come up with two guesses.*
 - *If they are unable to make two guesses, the challenge ends and the skit continues.*
 - *If they are able to guess two possible needs, the challenge continues.*

- f. *The person on the other team is now called to translate the “D” statement into an NVC expression of either honesty or empathy.*
- *If they are able to do this, they will have fully succeeded in meeting the challenge from the other team. The skit continues.*
 - *If they are not able to do this, the original challenger has an opportunity to give it a try. If the original challenger succeeds in translating the statement into an NVC expression of honesty or empathy, they will have completed their challenge of the other team. The skit continues.*

6. Clarify the following points:

- a. *Remember that you may always request assistance from team-mates.*
- b. *During the skit, I will take the role of arbiter as to whether a team has satisfactorily responded to a challenge. However, please take notes if you disagree or have a question. We will have a debrief period after each skit to address these concerns.*

7. Ask the audience if they are clear on how they will be challenging one another.

8. Address the following instructions to the team that is performing the skit:

- a. *Referee, If more than one person stands up to chant D-D-D-D, please point to the person you believe first completed all three actions: (1) stand up, (2) stretch hands overhead, and (3) chant D-D-D-D.*
- b. *Referee, you will also determine how many seconds a team may take to come up with an answer. Use your judgment to give a warning or to “call time.”*
- c. *Actors, before beginning your performance, please tell us:*
 - *The title of your skit*
 - *The parties involved, their relationship to each other, and the role each of you are playing*
 - *Where (and when) this scenario takes place*

9. Following the performance of each skit, allow time for participants to raise questions or disagreements regarding the challenges that were made.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS: After all the skits have been completed, ask participants to share what they most enjoyed about the activity, what they learned from either performing or listening to the skits, and how the exercise might be improved.

SUGGESTIONS FOR PRACTICE IN DAILY LIFE:

Listen for Ds

- in the media, when reading signs or hearing public announcements,
- in how you talk to yourself.

Rather than judging the way a message is being expressed, train yourself to guess the need behind the statement.

REFERENCE: Chapter 2

INDIVIDUAL HANDOUT 3.3

Tuning In to the Four Ds

Your group has 30 minutes to create a scenario which contains a number of “D” statements—statements which *diagnose*, *deny* responsibility, *demand*, or imply that someone *deserves* a particular situation.

Here is a list of the “Four Ds of Disconnection.”

1. **DIAGNOSE**, judge, label, criticize
e.g. “The problem with you is that . . .”
2. **DENY** responsibility for one’s actions and feelings
e.g. “I have to pay taxes.” “He made me feel bad.”
3. **DEMAND**
e.g. “You have to (must, should, got to, ought to, are supposed to) take out the garbage.” “You can’t wear that.”
4. **DESERVE** as in “They deserve (don’t deserve) . . .”

GUIDELINES FOR CREATING SKIT: In creating the skit, work together in whatever way is most effective for your particular group. Use the following steps as a reference. Time in parentheses are suggestions only.

1. **(2 minutes)** Brainstorm and then pick a scenario involving two or more parties who are not in full harmony with each other. Examples: a parent-child scene over homework, a disagreement between cellmates (neighbors or coworkers), a disciplinary action at school (prison or workplace), a dispute between citizens and government officials, etc.
2. **(5 minutes)** Begin by “playing out” the scenario you picked. Have everyone chime in spontaneously to create the draft of a script-dialogue. At this stage, any person can speak out in any role. Include statements demonstrating the four Ds as well as statements that do not. (Take notes so you can later recall the lines that had been spontaneously generated.)
3. **(3 minutes)** Decide on the outline of your 3-minute skit. Define and write down the following:
 - a. Who are the parties involved? How many roles will there be in the skit? Make up a name for each character in the skit. What is their relationship to each other?
 - b. Where (and when) does this scenario take place?

- c. What appears to be the main issue in the dialogue? Give the skit a title.
 - d. In what direction do you intend the dialogue to go?
4. **(2 minutes)** Decide who will play which role. Reserve one member of your group to serve as a “referee” during the performance when the audience teams will be challenging each other.
 5. **(5–10 minutes)** Create the dialogue. Either:
 - a. work together as a team to generate a script; or
 - b. have the actors improvise their own lines
 6. **(5 minutes)** Have each actor write down the lines they will be delivering which contain a “D.” Explore the need(s) that the speaker may be trying to meet by saying that line.
 7. **(5 minutes)** Rehearse the skit. You will be performing it twice—once straight through, and the second time with interruptions from the audience.

