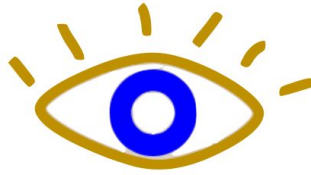


# Communicating Across Difference

## Microaggressions & Nonviolent Communication

### Handout



Note: in the Netherlands citizens have civil rights article 1. that protect them from discrimination based on religion, world-views, political views, race, sex and other grounds. It is our government's duty to provide policies that ensure '*equal treatment to all, in equal situations.*'

This law concerns the relationship between the citizen and the state. In line with that, our interpersonal relationships with our teams, communities and society as a whole, can strive towards the establishment of equal treatment, amidst all our differences. This workshop introduces you to one of the techniques for communicating across difference with a focus on empathy and connection, that strives to make our relationships, and thus life in general, more enjoyable.

## Microaggressions

### Challenges to communicating across difference

- Racial Microaggressions are the brief and everyday slights, insults, indignities and denigrating messages sent to people based on their sex, gender, race, ability, class eo., by well-intentioned people who are often unaware of the hidden messages being communicated. Microaggressions are a form of discrimination and can be hurtful even though they are sometimes unintentional or meant in a joking way.
- However, these everyday slights add up, and can contribute to people belonging to a minority social group to experience anxiety, depression, lower self-esteem, dropping out of school, and cause lower feelings of belonging.
- Microaggressions are the result of structures of implicit bias through power dynamics in our circles of socialization, that are very personal and hard to see. Most people don't confront microaggressions, but confronting can help the other person to realize their bias, change their behavior and spread awareness about the hurtful impact of microaggressions within their own social circles.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Restorative Justice Centre, UC Berkeley. Microaggression Workshops.

## Active Bystander Interventions

### Confronting Microaggressions

Microaggressions are situations that just do not feel right. It might be comments made by a friend that you feel are inappropriate, or when you spot someone being harassed at a party. Being an active bystander means being aware when someone's behaviour is inappropriate and choosing to challenge it through the 4 D's to signal that their behavior is hurtful.

Our goal when reinforcing such messages within our communities, is to spread awareness in order to reduce the potential of future biases. When it comes to intervening safely, remember the four Ds – direct, distract, delegate, delay.

#### Direct action

Call out negative behaviour, tell the person to stop or ask the victim if they are OK. Do this as a group if you can. Be polite. Don't aggravate the situation - remain calm and state why something has offended you. Stick to exactly what has happened, don't exaggerate. \*This could also be an opportunity to practice nonviolent conversation techniques.

#### Distract

Interrupt, start a conversation with the perpetrator to allow their potential target to move away or have friends intervene. Or come up with an idea to get the victim out of the situation – tell them they need to take a call, or you need to speak to them; any excuse to get them away to safety. Alternatively, try distracting, or redirecting the situation.

#### Delegate

If you are too embarrassed or shy to speak out, or you don't feel safe to do so, get someone else (with more privileges than you) to step in. Or report it to a person with authority such as with HR or a Diversity Officer.

#### Delay

If the situation is too dangerous to challenge then and there, just walk away. Wait for the situation to pass then ask the victim later if they are OK – it's never too late to act.

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## Nonviolent communication

### How can I respond?

'When your goal is to affect someone's bias, the most effective responses are polite rather than hostile and focus on positive qualities rather than accusations of prejudice.'<sup>2</sup>

Non-Violent Communication (NVC) is a practice founded by Marshall Rosenberg that helps us communicate our feelings and needs in such a way that the recipient can hear us. Because it's best to hear it from the source, please watch these video's where Marshall Rosenberg explains NVC: [The 3-hour workshop](#) & [Short clip](#)

The basic formula of nonviolent communication contains 4 elements.

Observation, feeling, need, request. Put together it looks like this:

When I (see/**observe**) \_\_\_\_\_, I **feel** \_\_\_\_\_ because I **need** \_\_\_\_\_. Would you be willing to (concrete **request** of how to meet this need without accusation or demand) ?

- **Observe the situation without evaluating or judging**

A pure observation is without comparison to the past.

- **Identify a feeling**

Feelings are always related to your body, and never involve others. Examples feelings when your needs are not satisfied 'I feel': Afraid, Annoyed, Angry, Aversion, Confused, Disconnected, Disquiet, Embarrassed, Fatigue, Pain, Sad, Tense, Vulnerable or Yearning.

Examples feelings when needs are satisfied: Affectionate, Confident, Engaged, Inspired, Excited, Exhilarated, Grateful, Peaceful, Refreshed, Joyful or Hopeful.

- **Identify your need or desire**

A psychic or basic need is always about oneself, not about another, and is always a basic human quality. Examples 'I need': Connection, Honesty, Peace, Play, Physical Well-Being, Meaning, Autonomy.

- **Formulating a request**

Phrase a specific request positively, speaking kindly, but firmly and clearly, without unnecessary emotion such as sarcasm.

- **Obtain feedback on everything you have done so far**

"Am I on the right track with this conversation?" or "Time out. How are we doing resolving this issue?"

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<sup>2</sup> 'Microaggressions Self-Defense', *Social Sciences*, C. M. Byrd. (2018)

*'Everybody's needs can be met - there's no need for compromise.'* Learning the language of the heart can be hard because we have been socialized to think in judgements of right/wrong, good/bad, too little/too much. In nonviolent communication *'All judgements are tragic expressions of unmet needs.'* Therefore, we need to learn how to directly communicate those needs. Here's an exercise to start practicing just that.

### Step 1

1. Make a list of how you talk to yourself when you are less than perfect, what judgements do you tell yourself?
2. For each one of these judgements, think what might have been the stimulus for it? What could you have done that that spurred these judgements?
3. Now, in that situation: what need of yours is not being met?

### Step 2

1. What are the judgements that go on in you when you are angry or judging others? What are you most likely to say in your mind or out loud in these situations?
2. Identify what the other person might have done to stimulate this response?
3. When I judge people in that situation, what need of mine is not being met?

### Step 3

1. Write down a list of things other people do or say that make you react in a defensive way or make you hear criticism.
2. Also write down on that list the things you are most afraid of that people might think of you.
3. What could you have done to spurr these judgements?
4. Guess the other person's needs that weren't being met in that situation.

This workshop serves as a rough introductory to the themes of implicit bias, microaggressions, bystander intervention, and non-violent communication. What all of these have in common is that they are about gaining awareness about how we communicate with each other across difference. It takes time to find your own relationship to communicating across difference - so be patient with yourself and others. We hope that if you find yourself in challenging situations, you can fall back on some of these tools and approaches that we shared today.



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