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Kommunikation for Livet

## From anorexia and suicidal thoughts to zest for life

*A true story*

An example of how self-blame can be transformed to new insight and appreciation of the needs the person tried to fulfill with their actions.

### **Background:**

A young woman with depression and suicidal thoughts has been in intensive therapy for approx. half a year. Non-violent communication was part of the treatment. She is now in touch with a renewed appetite for life and has processed a rape that happened when she was 10 years old. She has turned her anorexia into courage for life, but struggles with self-blame because of her destroyed stomach by starving herself for a long time.

### **Transformation using the Non-Violent Communication process**

The process of Non-Violent Communication (NVC) has just as much to offer for internal conflicts, as it has to external conflicts between two or more parties. This text gives an insight into parts of the NVC process, which aims to "harvest the fruit of regrets and grief". To learn from the past experience, and use the new insight to act differently in the future. The process contributes to getting in touch with the inner life, in the form of needs. These needs prompted the actions which I now regret, and at the same time empathize with the pain and unmet needs that are alive in me now. The example also includes elements of a therapeutic method for working with the "inner child".

The young woman writes the following in response to some questions:

#### *1. What happened, what is the course for the painful feelings?*

"Great continuous pain in the stomach, many things I cannot eat, digestion does not work".

#### *2. Give room to self-blame and painful feelings.*

"I am so tired! Tired in my body, tired in my head - the thoughts fill my mind, drag me down into the dark hole, I know so well - self-blame, knocking myself on the head!

How could I be so stupid: here I am now in a body full of pain, a frail body that doesn't work, and this simply because I was so stupid that the only thing I could come up with was to stop eating. Had expected a little more from myself. Had thought my intellect would go a little further than to put an equal sign between hunger and painlessness!

### **NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION (NVC) USED IN PRACTICE.**

*Our experiences from therapeutic work with the use of NVC, shows that depressed or suicidal people benefit greatly from getting in contact with the needs dimension in life. And that a person's access to find ways to meet their needs, is supported and developed by getting directly in contact with the needs.*



I should have known better, should have known my stomach couldn't take it. Not least should I have taken care of my body - quite honestly, I have to live in it for the rest of my life, and then I don't do anything else than to fight it. Scary to be so stupid - but now I can learn the lesson, I get as I have deserved - the pain is now your condition of life, the result of my flawed equal signs. How is it possible to repress so strongly? I must have less ability to think than I thought.

I get so extremely upset and loses touch with myself when I think this way, stays. I become my own worst enemy, my own harshest judge — I yearn unspeakably to become my own friend instead."

### *3. How do you feel right now, what do you need right now?*

"I am deeply frustrated when I think about the choices I have made, need ease in my life, for relief and care for my body. I feel a great sadness and pain, maybe even anger. Longing for acceptance and understanding of my choices. Need hope, a hope that life can be different - that I can experience peace and care for myself. But it quickly fades in judgments and evaluations of my actions at that time".

### *4. Which needs were you trying to fulfill when you did what you now regret?*

"Yes, wondering what I tried to do then? Wondering what I would actually achieve by not eating?"

When I think back, I see the image of a little girl alone on a bench. Not just alone at this moment, but alone in the extreme sense of the word. A girl who, when she was only ten years old, made a pact with herself and life about keeping her mouth shut. No longer trusting anyone - no more drawing attention to yourself. Already then, she had experienced in the most tragic way what the world had to offer - failure, pain, violation and transgression of any boundary she may have. There was great strength in the covenant, but inside was a great black hole, a void. It was when she felt this cavity that she went down to the bench and sat down. Sometimes she cried. Big tears filled with longing and yearning. It was so hard for her to understand that she was not worth loving, that there was no one who would put their arms around her, rock her and stroke her hair. She often thought of herself as a baby bird, that falls out of the nest, one that is far too small to fend for itself, but must find all its courage and strengthen if it doesn't want to die. When the little girl went back to the house after sitting on the bench, she wanted to scream out loud - run to her mother and father and stomp on the floor. But she knew very well that she must be a big girl. For the most part, there was no one to shout at at all.

It was really difficult for the little girl to eat. It was as if there was no room for food in the stomach at all. The lump filled so much that just the sight of the full plate could bring tears to her eyes. For most of the time she sat and rummaged around in the food a little, so that no one would see that she did not eat anything. And yet she longed for someone to see it, or at least see her. Again, she wanted to scream, do something or anything that could tell them how much it hurt to have that big lump in her stomach. But it was just another silent cry that no one heard or fully understood!

She so needed to protect herself, this little girl. Deep inside there was something warm and bright, that she had to keep hidden from everyone else if she was to hold her own standing against the darkness that otherwise surrounded her. In there in the light and warmth were all the images, the images of how it should be. A little red-cheeked girl who comes bounding through the door, happy and free, sure that the whole world is interested to hear what she has to say. A little girl who confidently climbs onto her father's lap, and there she is being rocked to sleep. A little girl who runs into mom and dad's bedroom at night, and crying tells about loneliness, pain, anxiety and who is picked up, who is seen, heard and embraced.



Now the little girl is grown up, and I am filled with a violent pain and desperation. My heart bleeds for this little girl. Makes me want to give her everything she so desperately longed for. The care, the safety, the closeness, the contact. Look at her, it screams inside me, see that she is suffering, that she herself does not know how she can deal with the pain and therefore not being able to eat. See her cries for help when she sits in helplessness and mess with the food, see her cry for help when she sticks her finger in her throat, as the only way to get the pain out.

I feel the little girl's desperation and suddenly I see clearly that what she did was not stupid. That what she did, on the contrary, protect her from further pain and failure. That she didn't know of other strategies than to shut the mouth and that it actually protected the life, the core of her that no one was allowed to reach."

*5. When you are now aware of the needs you tried to fulfill then, and at the same time are in contact with the unmet needs of today, what would you like to do to fulfill **all** the needs?*

"With this understanding, it becomes so clear that I must meet the needs I have today for relief and care, while at the same time wanting to meet the little girl in her desperation. Want to take care of her need for understanding and safety and finding a way to live on where I see the little girl and surrounds her with all the care she has longed for for so many years. Listen to her when she tells me how difficult it was for her then to endure the pain. Offer her all mine presence and tell her that I can see right now that she did the most beautiful thing she possibly could back then to stay alive. Thank her for her great fight to protect what was still alive and warm inside her and at the same time show her that there are now other options for protecting her and me. That anorexia is not the only way to find protection. Find ways there are both taking care of the little girl I was then and at the same time supporting my life today.

Now I am prepared to meet the little girl with care instead of accusations and blame:

I take her hand as we walk down to the bench. It's still there, like it was yesterday, a little scared girl huddled there. But now there are two of us. I sit down with her, take her on my lap when she gets scared, I cradle her gently and tell her that I want to take care of her as well as I can. I feel the little fingers holding me convulsively and hear the cry coming. Another kind of cry than when she sat there alone. It comes from deep down. Sobs course through her trembling body, while the words come quietly. Words about pain and loneliness. About failure and abuse. I crying together with her now. My tears mingle with hers as we sit there on the bench. Little by little the crying stops. Feels how all her muscles relax and a deep sigh coursing through her body. She sits up, looks at me with bright eyes through tears. I wipe the last tears away from her cheeks before she grabs my hand and pulls me up from the bench. Now we run together along the path, the little girl and I. Exploring the world and feeling the life flowing through us both. It doesn't feel foreign, but like we both recognize this feeling of life and warmth as something that has been hidden in both of us for far too long and is now being brought to life. We breathe in at the same time, deep breaths that send life around in the body. Suddenly she stops, turns to me and say: It's not there anymore, the lump in the stomach!"

*6. When the transformation is successful, it is an expression of inner reconciliation. It can take the following form:*

"When I starved myself and exposed my body to pain, I did the most wonderful thing I could possibly be doing at that time in order to protect my core of life and warmth. Now when I see what has happened, I wish I had been able to find other ways to meet all my needs back then. Both the need for safety and the need for health and care for myself. But then I didn't know what I know now. Had I known then, I would have acted differently."



The sentence expresses reconciliation with the action that I now regret and acknowledge that I needed to learn other ways to meet my needs that were more efficient and had fewer costs.

*7. How are you feeling right now?*

"I feel a great release and a care for myself that I have not known before. It was a very strong and touching experience to get in contact with the desperation I experienced as a little girl and the needs I took care of when I starved myself. Redemption was possible because it arose in me, and not was something from outside that was pushed down on my head. I feel a new and alive connection with myself, by focusing on my feelings and the needs behind them. That contact and understanding of my needs give me a desire and a courage to explore the life I have always longed to live."