

Frank and Gundi Gaschler

I want to understand what you really need

Nonviolent Communication with children



Prefaces by
Marshall B. Rosenberg
and Isolde Teschner

Translated from German by
Marietta Winkler von Mohrenfels

The Giraffe's Dream
a project for
pre-school institutions



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For Elia and Marie,

***thanking you for all the experiences with you
that continually allow me to grow.***

***I wish for the strength and courage
to support you***

***in remaining the “wonderful” human beings
that you’ve always been.***



Table of contents

Preface by

Marshall B. Rosenberg

Preface by Isolde Teschner

Introduction

What kind of relationship do I want to have with my child?

Understanding and being understood

Taking the step into kindergarten

Roots and wings

Nonviolent Communication: Four steps towards understanding

The symbols of Nonviolent Communication

Basic concepts of Nonviolent Communication

About conflicts and the question

“Who is actually responsible for my feelings?”

The four steps of Nonviolent Communication

Celebrating and mourning

Nonviolent Communication with children

From what age on does NVC work?

When can I start being honest with my children?

Does the child even understand my words?

Here are a few ideas for everyday interactions:

Do you always have to be nonviolent – or is it allowed to set limits now and again?

Shouldn't children simply do things without a discussion?

Is there such a thing as discipline when you use NVC?

Self-discipline: Taking good care of myself

Are the children's needs more important than those of the adults?

Negotiating the fulfilment of needs

“The Giraffe's Dream”

The units of the Giraffe's Dream

First unit: The baby giraffe has got lost

Second unit: How is the baby giraffe feeling?

Third unit: What does the baby giraffe need?

Fourth unit: What does the little giraffe ask of us?

Fifth unit: We have a party – Mummy Giraffe is coming

Detailed activities for practising observation

Detailed activities for practising feelings

More activities to practise requests

More activities to practise NVC processes

Elements of the project, schedule and procedure

Nonviolent Communication and federal state education policy in Germany

Appendix

Thank you ...

The initiators of “The Giraffe's Dream” are looking for partners

Who we are – about the authors


About Marietta Winkler von Mohrenfels, the translator of this book

Preface by Marshall B. Rosenberg

I went to school and university for 21 years and I can't remember anyone ever asking me how I felt or what I needed. Instead, they taught me things like "right" and "wrong", "good" and "bad" for me to fit into a system judging people according to these standards.

I recommend 'The Giraffe's Dream' to kindergarten and school teachers, parents and children as a way to help each other to do what we all love best:

To enrich people's lives!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marshall Rosenberg". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the letter "g".

Preface by Isolde Teschner

***If we act as living role models for our children,
showing them how to care for themselves
without hurting others,
they learn everything
they are ever going to need for life.***

This idea is the central theme of 'The Giraffe's Dream' developed by Frank and Gundi Gaschler. It means that it would be a big step towards more empathy, community and peace in the world if children grew up from the very beginning in surroundings based on the principles of Nonviolent Communication (NVC).

Living with children repeatedly poses new questions and challenges. Although we know that there is no such thing as a panacea we nevertheless need something to give us orientation.

This book shows that this orientation lies in the inner connection to the children entrusted to us. If we are in empathic contact with them, in the present moment, they gain from this relationship the strength to settle down in this world and find their own way in it.

The Giraffe's Dream can help child care workers and parents to build a harmonious relationship with children and to accompany them empathically on their way into life.

Isolde Teschner
† 2017

Introduction

***“I don’t have to do anything -
I can make up my own mind!
Besides, I’m a human being!”***

These two sentences were the answer of our daughter Elia, then 3 ½ years old, to her kindergarten teacher who had just said “You have to tidy up now.” What followed were long discussions between us as the parents and the child care workers. Furthermore, we thought very hard about the question of just how “nonviolent“ we wanted our children’s education to be.

My wife Gundi and I had already been deeply engaged with the subject of education for some time - not only because we are parents but also because we offer training courses for parents (the German name of these courses is “Starke Eltern - starke Kinder®” which translates as “Strong parents - strong children”). In our training courses and at home we were repeatedly confronted with the question of how to set boundaries, how to define the consequences of certain acts and stick with them and - above all - with the question: “How much orientation does my child need?” The main thrust of most of the seminars for parents we visited and of the guidebooks for parents we - especially Gundi - read at the time was: “Give your children *orientation* so that they can decide *later* what is *right* for themselves.” That sounded easy and was also easy to teach. But in reality it was not that simple. Giving orientation to our daughters was not quite so easy because Marie (our older daughter) and Elia did not always accept it. It was somewhat unsatisfying

that the children would decide “*later*” on the right thing when “*now*” the children’s room was untidy. What is more, I myself have not yet found a definite answer to the question of what is “*right*” for my own life.

One day, in the course of her work as a trainer of parents, Gundi came across Marshall Rosenberg’s book “*Nonviolent Communication*”¹ and subsequently started to make major changes in our family. In the twinkling of an eye she spread the idea that such things as “right” and “wrong” didn’t exist, nobody was responsible for the feelings of others and you didn’t have to apologise – the more so because nobody was really to blame for anything. Moreover: “You don’t have to do anything!”

My whole world view was in danger of breaking down! I had already been through a lot: I’d sent I-messages, I’d held family conferences, I’d found positive ways of phrasing my messages and I’d avoided double bind messages. But what now? If there is neither right nor wrong, how can you orientate yourself? If everybody is responsible for their own feelings, what about the community? If nobody is to blame for anything, everybody can do what they want, right? What I could accept, though, was that I didn’t *have* to do anything – least of all to read the book about Nonviolent Communication myself! I had a great need for autonomy at that time. Nevertheless, despite all my defences, I couldn’t help noticing some change. Unlike me the children totally absorbed the paradigm shift in our family. It wasn’t that Gundi’s method was suddenly more successful – the children’s rooms were not tidied up more naturally by using Nonviolent Communication than by my using my approach of reward, punishment and orientation. The change happened in our relationships with each other. It seemed to me that they became more and more relaxed and intimate. Our quarrels became a lot less noisy. Tantrums, tears and violence between the children happened more rarely when

Gundi took care of them than when it was my turn. At the same time, Gundi appeared to me to be distinctly more balanced and content. With the children I observed that they developed a sort of curiosity in situations that normally ended with the usual “No, I won’t! – Oh yes, you will!” ritual. This came to a head during a car trip when I barked at Elia because the crumbs of her pretzel had fallen on the floor and Marie asked me: “Daddy, what is this really all about?”

Since I realised that I am not only the personification of “Daddy” but also a person who is allowed to have needs – and satisfies those needs – a major change has come about in our family. It’s now more like we’re living with each other instead of self-sacrificingly living for each other. I give because I want to give and not because I have to. If I am not ready to give a certain thing, perhaps there’s somebody else ready to give it. If I give, then it’s a real gift – without reward, obligation or debt. It’s a joy for me to give and I enjoy experiencing every day how marvellously my two girls give to me in the same way.

Today I consider *the intention* with which we communicate with each other to be the absolute key to the Nonviolent Communication attitude. Do we talk to each other in order to achieve our own goals, to be proved correct, to convince, to win? Or do we want to be understood and understand the other person? “What is my real concern, when I’m talking to you?”

Slowly, I became curious and recognised that Nonviolent Communication was a useful means of educating children. However, Gundi went a step further and also asked me about my feelings and needs. This was fanning the flames! Did she want to educate me, too? Was she even trying to

give me therapy? Had she found a new method - a secret weapon - for our old game of "Who communicates better", with which she wanted to manipulate me and convince me that she was in the right? I was furious. On the one hand, because I became insecure when I realised that she understood what I was really saying no matter what words I used to express myself; on the other hand, because I felt powerless at the thought that the balance between us might shift. On the whole, I was terrified that she might destroy our relationship with Nonviolent Communication. What followed was a phase of extremely emotional disagreements and highly charged discussions.

"When I read what "The Giraffe's Dream" was all about I was deeply touched because it reminded me of the reason why I had become a professional kindergarten teacher: I wanted to see children as what they are and not as what they are supposed to be."

SABINE, , child care worker

The turning point came when Gundi explained her intention to me. For her, she said, Nonviolent Communication was the best means currently available to her to bring us into contact with and understand each other, to strengthen our relationship and partnership.

She said that her intention was to do something *for* our relationship, not against it. By sharing her learning and growing process with me, she was inviting me to go down this road with her.

I then decided to read the NVC book - secretly at first. What appealed to me were Marshall's stories - the humour and lightness paired with the depth and warmth with which he tells them. I wanted to know more and participated in introductory seminars and practice groups. We integrated

NVC into our parent training courses and decided to participate together in a training course for NVC trainers.

During that time a member of the parents' association at Elia's kindergarten asked us if we knew of a violence prevention program or could organise one ourselves. She wanted to make the children strong for the next phase of their life. She felt powerless in the face of school as an institution and worried about her son. In order to protect him from painful experiences, she wanted to give him something that would support him and serve him as a source of strength. As we were just looking for ways to pass on our new and rich treasure trove of experience, not only to parents in our training courses but to children as well, the idea was born to develop "The Giraffe's Dream" project - with the aim of strengthening the children.

In the course of creating our "The Giraffe's Dream" concept the new plans for education programs showed that many kindergartens have a need for empathic social interaction, constructive and appreciative communication, easiness and truthfulness.

In April 2005, Gundi and I, assisted by Sara Hartmann and Barbara Friedlein, completed "The Giraffe's Dream" plan and put it into practice in kindergartens in the German towns of Karlsfeld and Dürmentingen. We were inspired by the openness, the commitment and the enthusiasm with which the kindergarten staff told us about their experiences with the children, the parents and within their teams. This together with all the insights and changes brought about by our work there motivated us to continue with projects in many other kindergartens.

The effects and results of our work are documented in Anne Jaschke's thesis the title of which translates as "Nonviolent Communication in kindergarten - an empirical study on how "The Giraffe's Dream" concept was put into practice in five kindergartens" (original title: *"Gewaltfreie Kommunikation im Kindergarten - Eine empirische*

Untersuchung zur Umsetzung des Konzeptes „Giraffentraum“ an fünf Kindergärten“) published by Dresden Technical University in 2007.

The kindergarten teachers who were interviewed during this study reported various, exclusively positive, effects on the children and the whole kindergarten. (Some of their statements are cited in this book.) Anne Jaschke concludes: “The educational targets of these programs in Saxony and Bavaria overlap in many places with the intentions of “‘The Giraffe's Dream'” project. Many learning targets of the education programs such as the competence to solve conflicts as well as social and communicative competencies can be reached with “‘The Giraffe's Dream'”. Therefore this project is a suitable tool to put the education programs’ recommendations into practice.” In cooperation with other trainers we are working for Nonviolent Communication to reach more and more kindergartens, children’s day care centres, schools and families, for it to be integrated into the training of kindergarten and school teachers and for parents to get support and inspiration in seminars.

What you will find in this book

In this book we want to show how relationships within families and kindergartens can be founded upon mutual esteem and vitality. We describe Nonviolent Communication as a way to achieve this (second chapter) and show how to communicate with preschool children (third chapter). In the fourth chapter we present “‘The Giraffe's Dream'” as an example of how Nonviolent Communication can be introduced into kindergartens and we show connections to the requirements of up-to-date learning and education plans.

This book is written in many places from the first person perspective because I (Frank) have been the main person responsible for putting the experiences, reflections and

acquired knowledge into writing. Nevertheless, it's very important to me that Gundi and I appear together as authors of this book. I see our shared development, the road that we have travelled and are still travelling together, as the far more important and time-consuming work. The written words are just the results of our exchange, our many conversations, our mutual processes and of our family life. Through this book I want to thank Gundi for introducing NVC into our family, to express my respect for the fact that she remained persistent despite my opposition and to show that her contribution is at least as important as mine as far as I am concerned.

In addition, the book describes our experiences in our own family and expresses our gratitude to NVC and therefore Marshall Rosenberg. It describes our present view of NVC. For us, NVC is not an inflexible model but a very solid basis on which life and heart-to-heart relationships can succeed. At the same time it is flexible and allows us to grow. With this book we want to contribute to a strong basis and to further growth.

Marshall Rosenberg died on 7th February 2015.

We are sad, touched, deeply grateful and very humble in the face of your life's work. We are also very happy to have known you.

See you in the field beyond right and wrong doing!

¹ Marshall B. Rosenberg: Nonviolent Communication. Junfermann Verlag, Paderborn 2001.