

# 5 Key Distinctions for Creating Connection

## 1. Neutral Observations vs. Interpretations (or other types of thought)

Identify a neutral observation as distinct from your interpretations. This helps lessen reactivity and increase mindfulness as well as helping with connection. A neutral observation includes only what a camera could record. It answers most of these questions: *What? When? Who? Where? How long? How often?*

## 2. Feelings arise from Universal Needs

Feelings are important messengers letting you know about needs, met or unmet. Naming and expressing feelings in a responsible way also contributes to shared vulnerability and connection. You are taking responsibility for your feelings when you connect them to the underlying needs and place both feelings and needs within the context of a neutral observation and a specific do-able request.

## 3. Feelings vs. Interpretations

Many words are used as feelings but are actually interpretations of what you think someone is doing to you. For example, when you say I feel "rejected" you are interpreting that someone is pushing you away out of dislike. While this may or may not be true, it's not the end of the story. When you interpret someone's behavior in this way, feelings and needs immediately come up for you; perhaps feelings of hurt and disappointment and needs for acceptance and companionship. Expressing or even identifying for yourself the feelings and needs present when you interpret another's behavior helps with connection to yourself and others.

## 4. Universal Needs vs. the Strategies to Meet Them

All human beings have the same universal needs. Learning the list of universal needs and how they are different from preferences, strategies and desires creates space for creativity, flexibility, and compassion. When you confuse universal needs with the strategies to meet them, you can easily become stuck in reactivity. Problems and arguments become unsolvable. Phrases like, "He needs to control everything," reveal this common confusion. Control is not a universal need. Control is a strategy, a pretty popular one, to meet needs. All humans have the same needs and it is these universal needs that motivate behavior. Identifying the universal needs present in any given moment allows you to take effective action and access compassion.

## 5. Requests vs. Demands or Vague Wishes

Lastly, learn to express requests that are specific, doable, and connected to needs rather than vague invitations or demands. For example, "I need predictability in our work together. Would you be willing to let me know a day in advance if you won't attend the Friday meeting?" states a need and a specific request. "Be more considerate" implies a need and doesn't make a specific request. "Be there, or else!" is a demand.

A request is the beginning of a negotiation about how all needs can be met. If you are not curious about the other person's needs, reactivity is present. Take time to get grounded before continuing the dialogue.

Requests that are specific and doable answer most of these questions: *What? When? Who? Where? How long? How often?*