

## NVC AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

DK: You have criticized clinical psychology for its focus on pathology. Have you trained any psychotherapists or other mental-health practitioners in NVC?

No EnemyImage- of me or your!

MBR: Lots of them, but most of the people I train are not doctors or therapists. I agree with theologian Martin Buber, who said that you cannot do psychotherapy as a psychotherapist. People heal from their pain when they have an authentic connection with another human being, and I don't think you can have an authentic connection when one person thinks of him- or herself as the therapist, diagnosing the other. And if patients come in thinking of themselves as sick people who are there to get treatment, then it starts with the assumption that there's something wrong with them, which gets in the way of the healing. So, yes, I teach this to psychotherapists, but I teach it mostly to regular human beings, because we can all engage in an authentic connection with others, and it's out of this authentic connection that healing takes place.

### Protection

MBR: No. When we do restorative justice, I want the perpetrators to stay in prison until we are finished. And I am for using whatever physical force is necessary to get them off the streets. But I don't see prison as a punitive place. I see it as a place to keep dangerous individuals until we can do the necessary restoration work. I've worked with some pretty scary folks, even serial killers. But when I stayed with it and forgot about the psychiatric point of view that some people are too damaged to ever change, I saw improvement.

### Diagnosis

Once, when I was working with prisoners in Sweden, the administrator told me about a man who'd killed five people, maybe more. "You'll know him right away," he said. "He's a monster." When I walked into the room, there he was — a big man, tattoos all over his arms. The first day he just stared at me, didn't say a word. The second day, he just stared at me. I was growing annoyed at this administrator: Why the hell did he put this psychopath in my group? Already, I'd started falling back on clinical diagnosis.

[to top of page](#)

Then, on the third morning, one of my colleagues said, "Marshall, I notice you haven't talked to him." And I realized that I hadn't approached that frightening inmate, because just the thought of opening up to him scared me to death. So I went in and said to the killer, "I've heard some of the things that you did to get into this prison, and when you just sit there and stare at me each day and don't say anything, I feel scared. I would like to know what's going on for you."

And he said, "What do you want to hear?" And he started to talk.

If I just sit back and diagnose people, thinking that they can't be reached, I won't reach them. But when I put in the time and energy and take a risk, I always get somewhere.

Depending on the damage that's been done to somebody, it may take three, four, five years of daily investment of energy to restore peace. And most systems are not set up to do that. If we're not in a position to give somebody what he or she needs to change, then my second choice would be for that person to be in prison. But I wouldn't kill anyone.