

# Nonviolence Practice

## THE CLARA METHOD OF DE-ESCALATION

(Note: Most of us tend to start with step four, especially if the opponent is hostile.)

### STEP ONE: CALM AND CENTER

Many of us--when we feel threatened, attacked, or "put on the spot"--need to internally calm and center ourselves before we can honestly be engaged in listening. Try the following:

- Focus on breathing in calm with in-breaths and releasing stress with out breaths.
- Be aware of what's supporting you (the ground, chair, your bones and muscles, love...)
- Put one hand over your heart and one over your stomach.
- Imagine carrying something you love: a plant, gift, baby, or pet.
- Meditate, pray, or affirm a mantra in silence.
- Call on the courage of your heroes.



### STEP TWO: LISTEN

In a debate, you listen to your opponent until they get the facts wrong and you can use the real facts to make a fool of them. In CLARA, listen until you hear the moral



principle that they're speaking from or a feeling or experience that you share. Listen until you find a way in which you can open your heart and connect with them.

Try to understand what lies at the core of what's being said: the fear, the uncertainty, the anger, the truth offered by the person talking. Seek common ground. Be mindful of body language, yours and the speaker's.

*Research shows that communication is conveyed by 55%, or more, in body language; 38% by the voice: its accents, tone, emphases, pauses and inflections; and only 7% by actual words.*

### STEP THREE: AFFIRM

This is the step we don't usually think of in a conscious way. Express the connection that you found when you listened, whether it's a feeling, an experience, or a principle that you have in common with the other person. Affirm whatever you can find in their questions or statements that represents a reasonable concern. If you can't find anything (and we'll help you get better at finding something), there are other ways to affirm. The exact words don't matter--the important part is to convey that you won't attack or hurt the other person and you know they have as much integrity as you do. For this to be effective one must be genuine. It's best to speak spontaneously from the heart rather than developing "go to" responses in advance. Share of yourself. Affirming can be challenging, but gets easier with practice.

You may need to repeat the Calm-Listen-Affirm steps several times before moving on. Don't respond until the speaker has calmed down and seems willing to listen.

### STEP FOUR: RESPOND

Debaters, politicians, and sometimes the rest of us often avoid answering the question that was asked and answer a different question in order to stay in control of the situation. In CLARA, answer the question.

Respond to the issue the person raised. If you agree with them, say that too, even if it feels like you're losing ground. If you don't know the answer, say so, refer them to other sources. Sometimes it seems the person is only trying to fluster or attack you. Reacting with respect rather than defensiveness and anger is important. It conveys that you are powerful enough to withstand aggression and respond honestly.

### STEP FIVE: ADD INFORMATION

This step allows you to share additional information that you want to give the other person. It may help the other person or audience to consider the issue in a new light or redirect the discussion in a more positive direction. This may involve correcting any mistaken facts they mentioned; you can do this now because you've made a heart connection.

