

CLARA: A Five-Step Process for Nonviolent Engagement

Center, Learn, Articulate, Receive, Accomplish

This way of approaching conflict stems from a foundation of compassion, truth, and love, including agape, or loving your “enemy.” It is grounded in Mahatma Gandhi’s concept of Satyagraha, or Soulforce, which means integrating three aspects: speaking the truth, loving the enemy, and noncooperating with injustice and violence.

CLARA -- Center, Learn, Articulate, Receive, and Accomplish – is a five-step process for nonviolent engagement and transformation. CLARA means “clear” in Spanish. This process is a way to become clear in a conflict and relate face-to-face with others in a nonviolent way, and is also a method for understanding how nonviolent action in social movements happens. We seek to use nonviolent approaches rather than avoid, accommodate, or use violence to meet violence. Our intention is to expand our understanding of the truth and allow win/win scenarios to emerge.

Step One: Center Myself

Centering helps me make contact with what is really happening within myself. By anchoring myself in my heart, I am prepared to respond, not simply to react, to the conflict I am facing. I may decide to protect myself. I may decide to engage. In either case, I can act from a place where I am most truly who I am, and not simply from a worn-out and potentially destructive script.

Centering and Grounding is done at two levels, one before you get together to address the conflict, and the other in the moment of the conflict itself. Before you meet with the other person to work through the conflict, some practices include: Prayer/meditation, walking, being in nature, talking/role-playing with friends.

In the moment, some centering techniques include:

- Breathing -- and focusing on one’s breath
- Asking the other person to sit down
- Silently repeating a meaningful or sacred prayer, word, mantra, or name
- Recognizing and naming one’s emotional state in that moment (fear, anger, sadness, etc.)

Step Two: Learning About the Conflict, Including My Piece of the Truth in It

When we get into conflicts we are quite often misperceiving each other. We are often projecting or creating narratives that are not real. Learning my truth helps me to get clear what my truth is independent of my projections and the other’s true story.

This involves a 3-step process: *Observation, Understanding, and Insight (OUI)*. We clear the ground and get to a broader view with many more options and possibilities.

OBSERVATION: Observe and notice the visible and physical elements of a conflict, including:

- Inner and outer sensory observation
- Discovering the facts without evaluation.
- Emotions in ourselves and in the other.
- What does emotion trigger in the body?
- Seeing what is happening in the environment.

UNDERSTANDING: Obtain further knowledge of the conflict by investigating relationships, attitudes, behaviors, and contradictions.

INSIGHT: Penetrate into a situation to apprehend the inner nature of the conflict, including the different kinds of power, cultures, and identities involved. See the conflict intuitively. Go beyond narrow understanding.

Step Three: Articulating My Truth

What am I truly feeling and needing in this moment (besides needing to be right)? Speak out of this feeling or need rather than out of an urge to win. I believe in cooperation, AND I will not cooperate with injustice. I need to learn how to speak my truth without violating the truth of my 'opponent', or anyone else for that matter. I don't want to engage in a power struggle, but believe I can reach a win-win solution. By being open, direct, vulnerable, and inviting, I am disarming myself so that the other person can feel less defensive. Go first...model the behavior you desire.

Helpful suggestions:

- Relax body posture and facial expression
- Speak slowly and softly
- Use "I" statements, such as "I feel" or "I believe"
- Keep in mind the deeper needs underneath what I am feeling.

Step Four: Receiving the Truth of the Other Person

Listen deeply with our hearts to the other person's truth: what do they feel or need? We must be truly interested in this person and her or his position. What is the other's piece of the truth? There is a reason that the other is holding a position different from the one you are; try to get to it. Our commitment should be to the Truth, more than our version of the truth. Our opponent often has piece of the truth that we are missing. Use questions not to cross-examine or trap the other, but to really learn something.

- Listen actively without thinking what I will say next
- Ask questions with curiosity. Lower your voice at the end of a sentence.
- Do not cooperate with any injustice in the situation
- Check out any of my own assumptions concerning the situation

Step Five: Accomplishing an Outcome

Find ways to put the "two truths together" and discover the points of agreement where the needs of both parties are met. Point out the elements you both agree on. Agree to disagree on the elements that are clearly in opposition to each other. Agree on how you will go forward with each other on this issue.

Some possible ways to do this:

- Propose the elements where you see that you both agree on
- Ask the other person's feedback and any places of agreement they see
- Ask the other person if each of you can consider the truth of the other and can agree on any of those additional pieces of the truth
- Agree to disagree on the elements that are clearly in opposition to each other
- Come to a final agreement and restate so you are both clear about it
- Take some silent time for each person to see how the agreement feels to see if each person feels satisfied about getting at least some of his/her needs met
- Write down the final agreement if it makes sense
- Discuss with the other person how the agreement changes your relationship
- Consider accountability: Talk about how you will check in with each other from this point onwards (when and where) to see how the new agreement is working for you both and if any adjustments may have to be made