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Summary of the Quarter 1 Forum: Defuse Conflict With Nonviolent Communication

Lisa Jacobs, a collaborative attorney and mediator, discussed Nonviolent Communication (NVC) during the CADR's quarter 1 forum on February 10, 2015. Also referred to as Compassionate Communication or Collaborative Communication, NVC was proposed by clinical psychologist Marshall B. Rosenberg, PhD, in his 2003 book, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*.

Rosenberg believed that conflict resulted from miscommunication about human needs. He proposed that if people could express their own unmet needs and recognize the unmet needs in others, they could deflect criticisms as expressions of those unmet needs rather than as personal attacks and reduce the likelihood that an exchange would escalate into an argument.

Jacobs described Rosenberg's key elements of NVC beginning with *Empathic Listening*, or "the gift of presence." When one person is speaking, the other focuses on the content and delivery, and responds with a description of the speaker's feelings ("you sound angry") and unmet needs ("about how your children don't pick up after themselves"). This process continues until the empathic listener notices physical changes that indicate the speaker is calming down. Jacobs cautioned listeners to not respond with solutions or their own experiences, two common mistakes that take the focus off the speaker. Next, Jacobs discussed *Self-Empathy*, awareness of one's own unmet needs and taking care of one's self before helping others. Jacobs reminded the audience to, "put your own mask on first," adding not all needs can be met at all times. Finally, Jacobs explained *Honest Expression*, which comprises four interrelated components. The process begins with a nonjudgmental *Observation* that is expressed in descriptive language and often tied to an objective measure ("You've been working late and you don't get home until after I've gone to bed"). Next comes a statement of *Feelings* ("I feel sad that I don't see you") followed by an expression of *Needs* or description of how to establish a connection ("It's important to me for us to spend time together"). The final step is a specific *Request*. Jacobs emphasized stating the request in positive rather than negative terms ("I'd like you to be home by 6:00 pm on Fridays so we can go out to dinner together" *not* "I don't want you to work late on Fridays"). Jacobs concluded with a role play to demonstrate the practical application of Rosenberg's model.

