

VALIDATION

What is validation, why is it so important,
and how to do it


DR. ERIN UNDERBRINK
PEDIATRIC TREATMENT GROUP
THERAPY LAB



WHAT IS VALIDATION

Validation is all about understanding and accepting another person's emotional experience. Emotional validation is not the same as agreeing with the other person, or even thinking their response or emotion is warranted. Instead, with validation we are showing the other person that we hear them and understand what they are feeling without shaming, dismissing, rejecting or arguing against their feelings. Simply put: validation is the process of letting someone know their experience is real.

When people are in a validating environment they feel understood, accepted and cared for. Validation also allows others the chance to practice their own self-regulation and acceptance. Feeling understood and accepted is a key component to mental wellness, social relationships, and even understanding and developing our own self-compassion, growth mindset and capacity for empathy. On the other hand, invalidation can lead to difficulties with self-esteem, emotion regulation, and other mental health concerns. Invalidation can lead others to feel isolated and unsupported. It can also encourage arguing, defiance and resistance.





VALIDATING SOMEONE IS HONORING THEIR EXPERIENCE

IT'S HARDER THAN IT SOUNDS

Don't be mistaken: validation sounds easy but is actually really hard. Especially as parents, we are often in roles of teaching, instructing, guiding and protecting. Unfortunately, these things can be naturally invalidating. For example, a child says they hate homework, that it's hard. We might say "you're smart, you can do it, and you have to do it anyways." While those may be true statements, we've not only missed the emotion they are feeling, but we've also set ourselves up for an argument (i.e., now the child can dive into the reasons they can't do it or are not smart and further delay the task).

SELF VALIDATION

Self-validation is the same process; accepting and allowing the thoughts and feelings showing up in your own brain without invalidating, dismissing or rejecting.

HOW DO WE VALIDATE SOMEONE?

HOW TO GUIDE

Identify and acknowledge the emotion Use reflection to repeat or restate what they said. Try mindreading their emotion to figure out if there's more under it.

Acknowledge the source of the emotion. Use past experience, history of the person, and mind reading as well as active, effective listening skills.

Validate the emotion as true Remember, we aren't arguing with them about what they should do, we are just identifying how they are feeling.

Use your nonverbal body language Often effective validating takes good, active listening. Pause and use eye contact to really hear what they might be saying and show them you're with them. Use your own regulation skills here to manage emotions like frustration that might show up for you. We are looking for genuineness here!

Show Empathy Emotions are hard. When someone is feeling an emotion, their logic brain may not be working, which is something we can all relate to. Try to see that rather than engage in reasoning.

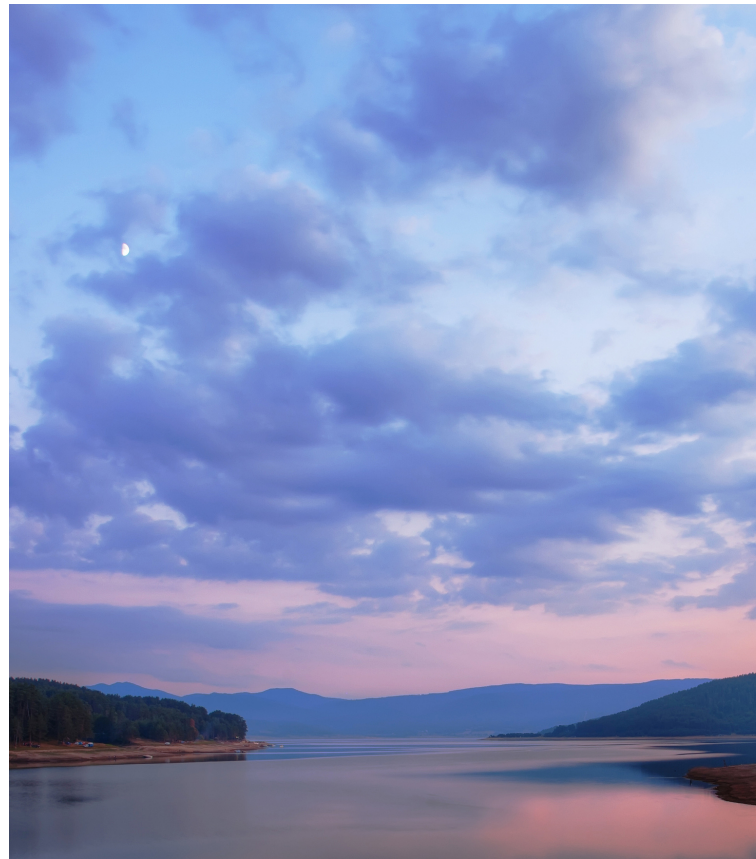
Ask Questions Attempting to better understand where someone is coming from can be validating.

Resist giving a direction or command after This is especially key with someone in a position of authority (parent/boss). Resist the urge to end with a command, and rather allow them the moment to be emotional and then come to the conclusion themselves.

EXAMPLES

VALIDATING STATEMENTS

"I can see how you would feel that way"
"That must be really hard"
"I would feel the same way"
"That sounds terrible"
"How annoying!"
"I get how you would be frustrated"
"I'm here for you"
"I'm with you on that"
"You worked really hard at that"
"It's ok to be upset"
"Your feelings are valid"
"I've had the same feeling"



INVALIDATING STATEMENTS

"It's not that hard"
"See, that wasn't so bad"
"You've done it before"
"I'm sorry you feel that way"
"At least it's not..."
"It could be worse"
"Just do it"
"You'll be fine"
"It won't be that hard"
"You shouldn't feel that way"
"I'm not having this conversation"
"It's not that big of a deal"
"Calm down"
"That's an overreaction"





Statement: "I hate homework it's pointless"

Validation: "I also hated homework"

Statement: "It's too hard"

Validation: "This is taking a ton of brain power from you!"

Statement: "It's so unfair that..."

Validation: "I hate it when things feel unfair!"

Statement: "I can't do it"

Validation: "That feels impossible"

Statement: *swear word or slamming door*

Validation: "You're really mad about this"



PRACTICE



Practice Exercise 1

1. Take a few minutes to think about a recent argument you had with a significant other (child, partner, friend, boss, employee, etc)
2. Identify an emotion they were feeling
3. Think about different statement you could make to validate this emotion

Practice Exercise 2

1. Think about a statement a significant other (child, partner, friend, boss, employee, etc) frequently makes that is a complaint (i.e., hating work/homework, disliking a chore, feeling physical pain, etc)
2. Come up with 3 different validating statements you can make in response