

# VALIDATION

Validation by family, friends, and others helps soothe frayed emotions and helps a people express what is they are genuinely experiencing more accurately.

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## WHEN WE ARE INVALIDATED

- Arousal escalates
- Cognitive capacity decrease
- Expressions become less accurate
- Becomes more difficult for people to understand
- Validation becomes less likely.

When we are invalidated, further invalidation becomes more likely, which only further increases emotional arousal and further decreases accurate expression. **The cycle continues, typically until the point at which one person becomes highly aversive and the other withdraws, or until both become highly aversive and destructive conflict ensues.**

## INVALIDATING RESPONSES COMMUNICATE

- High negative emotion (e.g., disgust, contempt, condescension, or other emotions associated with disrespect)
- High levels of negative judgment (e.g., the person's feelings, desires, actions, or thoughts are just "wrong")
- That the person's valid experiences are otherwise not legitimate.



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## Validating Responses

### PAY ATTENTION/"ACTIVE LISTENING"

Reduce your reactivity and minimize interpretations and judgments. Convey a willingness to listen openly and accept the other person's descriptions as valid.



### ACKNOWLEDGE OR REFLECT

Use statements such as "I can see that you are \_\_\_ (e.g., tired, sad, excited)," or "I know you are \_\_\_ (e.g., frustrated, unhappy, angry, relieved, thinking X, wanting Y)."



### CLARIFY, BE CURIOUS

Ask gentle questions to try to understand the person's experience. Rather than asking questions Socratically or as a means of showing the other person how she should not feel or think in a certain way.

### PUT "MISTAKES" AND PROBLEMATIC REACTIONS IN PERSPECTIVE

Instead of being critical, judgmental, and invalidating what might be non-normative or seem dysfunctional or problematic, the listener can try to understand the larger context of the person's reactions. This includes understanding the impact of previous experiences and how they contribute to current reactions and behaviors.



### NORMALIZE

Often reactions are completely normal and these emotions can be normalized by saying "Of course you feel that way," or "Anyone would react that way," or "I would (think, feel, want) that too in your situation."



### BE VULNERABLE TOO

When a person makes a vulnerable disclosure (e.g. "I know I have not been a great friend lately," the listener must also be willing to be vulnerable (e.g., "I have been feeling bad about our conflict too").

### BE RESPONSIVE WITH DEEDS, NOT JUST WORDS. PROVIDE SOOTHING

Sometimes it's important to react with action, not just talk. For example, if the person is hungry, getting them some food; if tired, help reduce demands; if unhappy, provide soothing. This demonstrates understanding by helping to alleviate suffering.



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**Validating others' emotions does not mean that you agree with the other person, or that you think their emotional response is warranted. Rather you communicate to them that you understand their feelings, without trying to talk them out of the feeling or shame them for the feeling.**

1. Fruzzetti, A. E., & Shenk, C. (2008). Fostering Validating Responses in Families. *Social Work in Mental Health*, 6(1-2), 215-227. doi:10.1300/J200v06n01\_17.
2. Salters-Pedneault, K. (2016, March 27). What is Emotional Validation? Found at <http://bpd.about.com/od/forfamilyandfriends/a/Validating-Emotions.htm>.