

Communication Coaching

Levels of Validation



Brain-Savvy students know the power of validation. When people are upset, angry, or argue irrational points, students can feel triggered and respond by fixing, correcting, placating, arguing back, or invalidating. Responses will not be effective and may lead to argument escalation. Conversely, validating communication is associated with autonomy development, a secure sense of self, reduced emotional issues, less high-risk behavior, and strengthened attachment bonds. Practice the six levels of validation to learn how and when to nonjudgmentally respond to others.¹ In share pairs, take turns sharing an emotionally charged story while practicing all six levels of validation.

Level 1: Be Fully Present; Actively Listen

This is when you give your full attention. No words are spoken; however, you are actively listening (nodding your head, making eye contact, waiting your turn to talk, etc.). Show that you are “open” to what the other is saying.

Level 2: Reflective Listening

Reflect that you believe what they are disclosing to you (“What I hear you saying is...”). Repeat what they disclosed to you. Do not think about if what they are saying is right or wrong.

Level 3: Express the Unspoken Words and Behaviors

How do you think the person feels? Be empathetic here! Put yourself in their shoes and see the world through their eyes. Would you think/feel/need the same if you were them? If you must, ask them questions to help clear up any misunderstandings you may have. Read their facial expressions and body language. How do they look? Express it to them. (“Seems like you are...” or “You look like you’re...” or “Something wrong?” or “Is everything ok?”)

Level 4: Validation in Terms of Previous Behavior or Learning

Communicate to the person how far they have come. Share with them how they are responding in a more “effective” way compared to similar situations in the past. (“You really used to get upset and punch the walls when you would have a fight with your boyfriend. NOW you are turning to your skills and managing this situation more effectively.”)

Level 5: Validation in Terms of the Present Situation and Normal Behavior

Show that their reaction/behavior makes sense given the present situation he/she is in. (“Even I would feel that way if that happened to me!”) Given the person going through A and B, how can C be any different? Show acceptance and be “non-judgmental” aloud.

Level 6: Radical Genuineness

Being genuine on a “radical” level. Voice your concern/happiness you have for the person. Show him/her you are trying to EXPERIENCE THE EMOTION WITH THEM. Be real! Show patience! You can even share similar experiences you have gone through and show him/her how it made you feel the same way. However, keep the focus on them.

¹Linehan, M.M. (2015) DBT skills training manual, second edition. The Guilford Press, New York, NY

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Examples of Validating Statement



Validation over Invalidation

Validation. It is important that you try to validate the other person's feelings, that is, let them feel that you can understand how and why they feel the way they are feeling. Communicate and show them their feelings made sense. You do not have to agree with them, but of course you can understand their point of view. Validating the other person's feelings is the most important way you can let them know you care about them and the way they feel. It shows them you know that they are important. There are very few other "effective" ways to convey that message.

Examples of Validating Statements:

- "That took a lot of effort on your part."
- "You seem... You appear to be... I can tell you are..."
- "What do you think?"
- "Would you like to share more about that?"
- "That's a good question."
- "I don't know, but I'll find out."
- "I'm interested in what you are saying."
- "That sounds important to you."
- "Do you want to talk about it?"
- "No one has the right to hurt you like this."
- "No wonder why you feel this way."
- "I would feel the same way if I were in your shoes."

Invalidation. This is the opposite of validation. When you invalidate the other person, you show them you are dismissing or ignoring their thoughts, feelings and needs. Over time, this may cause them to doubt themselves. In turn, this will cause them to rely on others to tell them how they should think, feel, and act.

Examples of Invalidating Statements:

- "Stop exaggerating."
- "You shouldn't cry over that."
- "You need to think about that differently."
- "I don't care what your friends are doing."
- "We'll talk about that when you need to know."
- "Why are you asking me that?"
- "Don't come to me if you screw up."
- "Go ask your someone else."
- "That's ridiculous!"
- "You shouldn't feel this way."
- "I don't think that should upset you this much."
- "How can you feel that way?"