

Parent Coaching

Validating your Child's Thoughts/Feelings



When children and teens are upset, angry, or argumentative; parents can often feel triggered and respond by matching the energy or escalating the argument. In this situation children and teens will likely continue to argue, act out, lie, or give excuses. But . . . validating a child or teen's thoughts and feelings can help your child/teen to feel heard, seen, and respected, which leads to stronger self-esteem and a greater parent/child bond.

1: Be Fully Present; Actively Listen

Give your child your full attention. Actively listening (nodding your head, giving eye contact, waiting your turn to talk, etc.). Show your child you are “open” to what they are saying.

2: Reflective Listening

Reflect to your child what you believe they are telling you (“What I hear you saying is...”). Don't think about whether or not what they are saying is right or wrong, just repeat back what you heard.

3: Express the Unspoken Words and Behaviors

How do you think your child feels? Be empathic! Put yourself in your child's shoes and seek to see the world through their eyes. What would you think/feel/need if you were them? Read their facial expressions and body language. Seek to understand.

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

Show your child that their reaction/behavior makes sense given the present situation he/she is in. (“I can completely see and understand why you feel that way.”) Show acceptance and be “non-judgmental” out loud.

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

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Examples of Validating Statements



Validation over Invalidation

Validation. It is important that you try to validate your teenager's feelings. Validation is helping your teen feel that you can understand how and why they feel the way they are feeling. Communicate and show them their feelings make sense. You do not have to agree with them, but you can understand their point of view. Validating your teenager's feelings is an 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.

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 your teenager, you show them you are dismissing or ignoring their thoughts, feelings and needs. Over time, 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 father/mother."
"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?"