

Parent Coaching

Levels of Validation



Brain-Savvy parents know the power of validation. When children and teens are upset, angry, or argue seemingly irrational points, parents sometimes feel triggered and respond by fixing, correcting, placating, arguing back, or invalidating. Most likely responses include argument escalation, acting out, giving excuses, or lying. 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 young people.¹

Level 1: Be Fully Present; Actively Listen

This is when you give your child your full attention. No words are spoken, however you are 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.

Level 2: Reflective Listening

Reflect to your child what you believe they are disclosing to you (“What I hear you saying is...”). Repeat what the child disclosed to you. Don’t think about whether or not what the child is saying is either right or wrong.

Level 3: Express the Unspoken Words and Behaviors

How do you think your child 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 have to, ask your child 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 your child 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 handling this situation more effectively.”)

Level 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. (“Even I would feel that way if that happened to me!”) Given your child going through A and B, how can C be any different? Show acceptance and be “non-judgmental” out loud.

Level 6: Radical Genuineness

Being genuine on a “radical” level. Voice your concern/happiness you have for your child. 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 your teenager’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 your teenager’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 to your teenager.

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 confuse 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 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?”