

INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS HANDOUT 17

(Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 12)

Validation

VALIDATION MEANS:

- Finding the kernel of truth in another person's perspective or situation; verifying the facts of a situation.
- Acknowledging that a person's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors have causes and are therefore understandable.
- *Not* necessarily agreeing with the other person.
- *Not* validating what is actually invalid.

WHY VALIDATE?

- It improves our relationships by showing we are listening and understand.
- It improves interpersonal effectiveness by reducing:
 1. Pressure to prove who is right
 2. Negative reactivity
 3. Anger
- It makes problem solving, closeness, and support possible.
- Invalidation hurts.

IMPORTANT THINGS TO VALIDATE

- The valid (and *only* the valid).
- The facts of a situation.
- A person's experiences, feelings/emotions, beliefs, opinions, or thoughts about something.
- Suffering and difficulties.

REMEMBER:

- Every invalid response makes sense in some way.
- Validation is not necessarily agreeing.
- Validation doesn't mean you like it.
- Only validate the valid!

Note. Adapted from Linehan, M. M. (1997). Validation and psychotherapy. In A. Bohart & L. Greenberg (Eds.), *Empathy reconsidered: New directions in psychotherapy* (pp. 353–392). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. Copyright 1997 by the American Psychological Association. Adapted by permission.

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A “How To” Guide to Validation

1. **Pay Attention:**

Look interested, listen, and observe. No multitasking. Make eye contact. Stay focused. Nod occasionally. Respond with your face (e.g., smile at happy statements; look concerned when hearing something painful).

2. **Reflect Back:**

Say back what you heard or observed to be sure you actually understand what the person is saying. *No* judgmental language or voice tone!

Try to really “get” what the person feels or thinks. Have an open mind. (No disagreeing, criticizing, or trying to change the person’s mind or goals.) Use a voice tone that allows the other person to correct you . . . and *check the facts!*

Example: *“So you are mad at me because you think I lied just to get back at you. Did I get it right?”*

3. **“Read Minds”:**

Be sensitive to what is *not* being said by the other person. Pay attention to facial expressions, body language, what is happening, and what you know about the person already. Show that you understand in words or by your actions. *Be open to correction.*

Example: *When you are asking a friend for a ride at the end of a long day and the person slumps down, say, “You look really tired. Let me look for someone else.”*

4. **Understand:**

Look for how the other person feels, is thinking, or if he or she is making sense, given the person’s history, state of mind or body, or current events (i.e. the causes)—even if you don’t approve of the person’s behavior, or if his or her belief is incorrect. Say *“It makes sense that you . . . because . . .”*

Example: *If you sent a party invitation to the wrong address, say, “I can see why you thought I might be excluding you on purpose.”*

5. **Acknowledge the valid:**

Show that you see that the person’s thoughts, feelings, or actions are valid, given current reality and facts. Act as if the person’s behavior is valid.

Example: *If you are criticized for not taking out the garbage on your day, admit that it is your day and take it out. If people present a problem, help them solve it (unless they just want to be heard). If people are hungry, give them food. Acknowledge the effort a person is making.*

6. **Show Equality:**

Be yourself! Don’t “one-up” or “one-down” the other person. Treat the other as an equal, not as fragile or incompetent.

Example: *Be willing to admit mistakes. If someone introduces him- or herself by first name, introduce yourself by your first name. Ask other people for their opinions. Give up being defensive. Be careful in giving advice or telling someone what to do if you are not asked or required to do so. Even then, remember you could be wrong.*

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INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS HANDOUT 18A

Identifying Validation

For each A and B pair, check the more effective response.

- 1A.** Think about your day when the other person is talking about his or her day.
- 1B.** Throw yourself into listening about the other person's day.

- 5A.** Remember that people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors don't always match. Check the facts.
- 5B.** Assume that you can tell exactly what people are feeling and thinking.

- 2A.** If you are uncertain of people's thoughts and feelings, ask them what they are thinking or feeling, or try to imagine yourself in their situation.
- 2B.** Assume that if people want you to know what they are thinking or feeling, they will tell you.

- 6A.** Evaluate other people's behaviors and thoughts, and tell them that they are wrong or that they should be different when you feel sure you are right.
- 6B.** If you do not agree with what another person is doing or thinking, try to understand how it could make sense if you understood the causes.

- 3A.** Observe the small clues that indicate what is going on in social situations.
- 3B.** Observe only what people say, and ignore nonverbal signals.

- 7A.** Assume that if you tell a person his or her request of you makes sense, that's all you have to do to validate the person.
- 7B.** When a person asks you for something, giving the person what has been asked for is validation.

- 4A.** Jump to conclusions about what people mean.
- 4B.** Realize that the same behavior can mean many things.

- 8A.** Assume that other people's reactions to you have nothing to do with yours to them.
- 8B.** Treat each person with respect and as an equal.

Recovering from Invalidation

NOTICE THAT INVALIDATION CAN BE HELPFUL AND PAINFUL AT THE SAME TIME

**Remember:
Invalidation Is Helpful When**

1. It corrects important mistakes (your facts are wrong).
2. It stimulates intellectual and personal growth by listening to other views.
3. Other: _____

Invalidation Is Painful When

1. You are being ignored.
2. You are not being repeatedly misunderstood.
3. You are being misread.
4. You are being misinterpreted.
5. Important facts in your life are ignored or denied.
6. You are receiving unequal treatment.
7. You are being disbelieved when being truthful.
8. Your private experiences are trivialized or denied.
9. Other: _____

(continued on next page)

Be Nondefensive and Check the Facts

- Check ALL the facts to see if your responses are valid or invalid. Check them out with someone you can trust to validate the valid.
- Acknowledge when your responses don't make sense and are not valid.
- Work to change invalid thinking, comments, or actions. (Also, stop blaming. It rarely helps a situation.)
- Drop judgmental self-statements. (Practice opposite action.)
- Remind yourself that all behavior is caused and that you are doing your best.
- Be compassionate toward yourself. Practice self-soothing.
- Admit that it hurts to be invalidated by others, even if they are right.
- Acknowledge when your reactions make sense and are valid in a situation.
- Remember that being invalidated, even when your response is actually valid, is rarely a complete catastrophe.
- Describe your experiences and actions in a supportive environment.
- Grieve traumatic invalidation and the harm it created.
- Practice radical acceptance of the invalidating person.

**Validate Yourself Exactly the Way You Would
Validate Someone Else**