

Validating and Invalidating Behaviors in Families



Validation is:

- Listening intently and with full attention without judgment
- Repeating back what you think you hear (“Are you saying...?” “Do you mean...?”)
- Listening for the underlying emotion (“Others in this situation might feel...)
- Understanding in the context of his/her life (“Given what’s going on, it’s understandable”)
- Being genuine

Validation is NOT:

- Agreeing with what is being said
- Doing whatever is asked of you
- Saying you understand when you don’t
- Saying something that is contrary to what is being said (“Of course you have friends”, “No, you’re not ugly”)
- Defending yourself
- Telling him/her that she/he is “right”
- Validating or OKing behaviors that are not safe or healthy, allowing them to continue
- Telling someone how he/she should behave or feel
- Being unrealistic about capabilities or expressing unrealistic confidence

Validating Behaviors	Invalidating Behaviors
Paying attention, making eye contact	Not paying attention, being distracted, being anxious to end the conversation
Helping the other person to clarify what he/she is thinking, articulating what the other person MIGHT be feeling	Telling the other person what he/she DOES or SHOULD feel
Normalizing the other person’s feelings or behaviors	Pathologizing or criticizing what the other person thinks or feels
Empathy, acceptance of the other person, treating him/her as you would anyone else, not treating him/her as fragile	Patronizing, condescending or treating the other person as fragile or incompetent
Accepting what the other person says he/she can or cannot do	Asking for more than the other person is able to do
Offering and sharing self-disclosure/vulnerability in context of the other person’s vulnerability	Not responding to or validating the other person’s self-disclosure or vulnerability

