

I Want to Understand

An In-Depth Approach to Validation of Your Loved One with BPD

Candace K. Eddy, LICSW
3 East Boys DBT Program
Harvard Medical School Department of Psychiatry
DBT-Linehan Board of Certification, Certified Clinician



Overview

- What is validation?
- Why is validation important?
- The impact of validation vs. invalidation
- Targets (What can I validate?)
- Factors to remember when validating
- Different ways to show understanding
- How to validate in difficult situations



What is Validation?

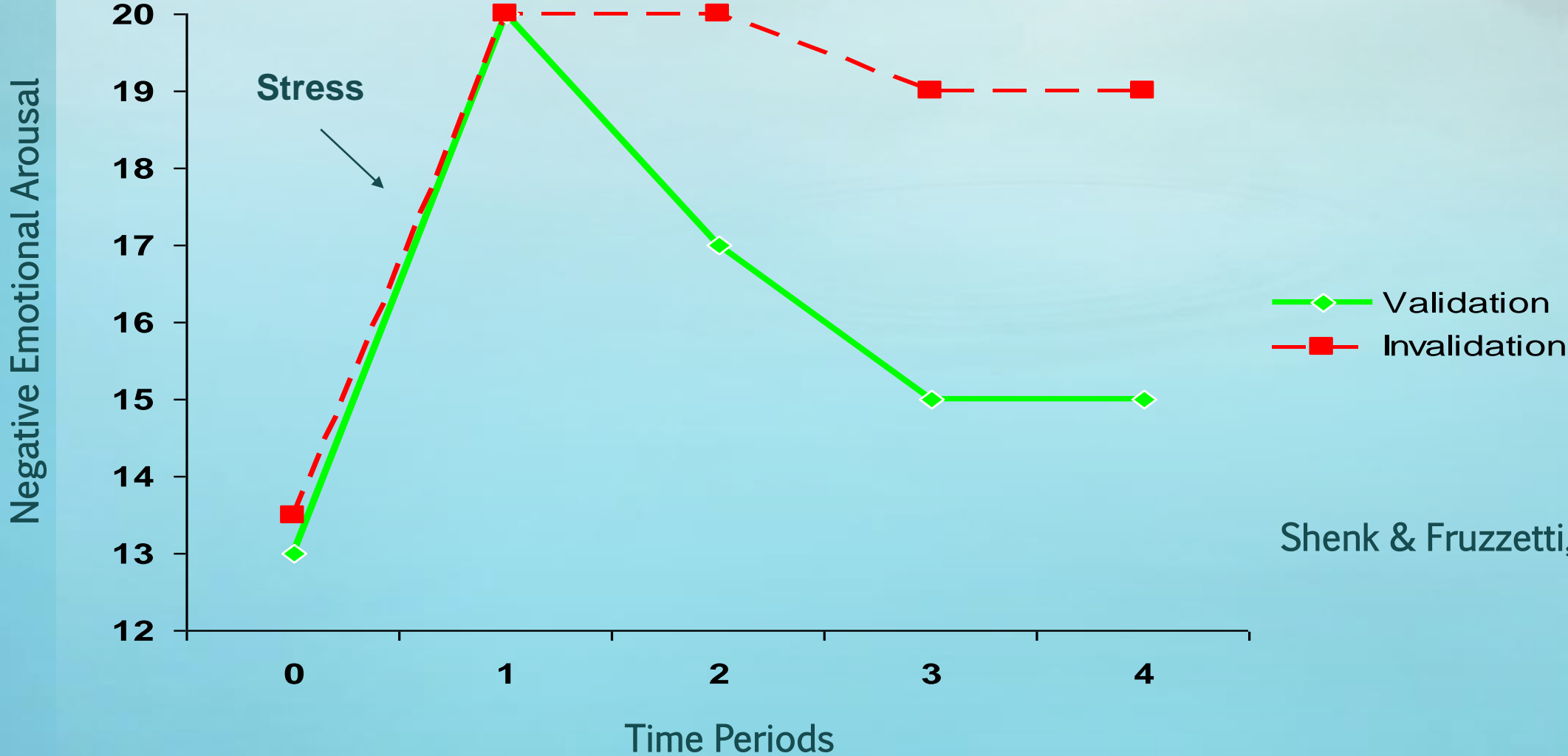
- Expressing your understanding and acceptance, and the legitimacy, of the other person's experiences and behavior
- Identifying and communicating your understanding in a CLEAR way
 - Communicate what you understand about the situation
 - Legitimize the facts
 - Explain your own feelings after expressing understanding
 - Acknowledge the situation, the other's opinions, feelings, etc.
 - Respect your own, and his/her emotions, desires, reactions and goals

Why are Validating Responses Important?

- Validation:
 - Is the core of communication
 - Reduces negative emotional arousal
 - Slows negative reactivity
 - Builds trust
 - Maintains fairness and decreases anger
 - Enhances self-respect
 - Is the key to getting through rough spots in your relationship
 - Makes problem-solving, closeness and other kinds of support possible
 - Can be the gateway to change

-Experiential Exercise

Impact on Negative Emotional Arousal of Validating vs. Invalidating Responses



Shenk & Fruzzetti, 2011

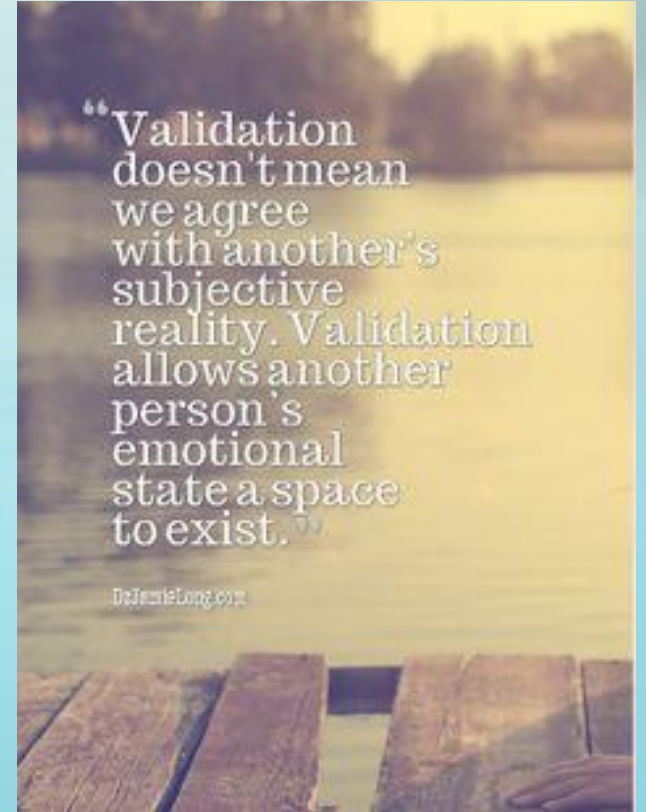
Validation soothes the other person's emotion!



Allows for a more regulated response,
including more accurate expression

Remember:

- 1) Validation does NOT mean agreement or giving in.
- 2) Even in difficult situations, or with problematic behaviors, something valid can be found.
- 3) Anger (if it includes judgment) is corrosive in relationships, even when justified.



Targets: What can I validate?

- Feelings or emotions
- Legitimacy of wanting something
- Beliefs, opinions or thoughts about something
- How difficult a task is
- Effort toward trying to accomplish a task
- Things a person does that are effective
- Things a person does for another

Factors to remember:

Timing

Take turns

Effective or gentle tone

Be aware of personal space

Practice non-blaming, non-black & white thinking

When providing difficult feedback or disagreeing, do so when the other person is ready; validate first and remind the other person of your goals and caring

One effective step forward is better than ten backwards



Different Ways to Validate



1. Pay attention
2. Acknowledge or reflect
3. Summarize, ask questions, be curious
4. Show tolerance
5. Normalize
6. Show empathy and acceptance
7. Reciprocal vulnerability
8. Validate with your actions

Validating Responses

1. Pay attention: listen actively, eye contact, put away distractions, show that you are listening non-judgmentally
2. Acknowledge the other person's experience, and/or reflect what he or she is communicating/demonstrating
 - It's valid in some way (even if we don't like it)
 - "I can see that you're _____, Wow, you're really _____ or I know you want (or think, or feel) _____"
 - "You seem _____. Is that right?"
 - "I can see that you're really upset with me..."

Validating Responses, continued

3. Summarize the other person's experience or perspective

- Be curious, ask questions, try to understand
 - What does not make sense? Ask about it in a genuinely curious (rather than challenging) way
 - Read between the lines

4. Show tolerance; Understand & broaden context

- We are not defined by our most recent mistake...take a look at larger context
- Neither excuse nor judge problematic behavior
- How does the experience make sense for the other person?

Validating Responses, continued

5. Normalize emotions, etc. (that are normal)
 - “Makes sense” or “anybody would feel that way” or “of course”
 - *Primary emotions* are always normative
 - Even the most frequently dysregulated people have mostly normative reactions

6. Be genuine; show acceptance
 - Don't treat the other person as fragile

7. Match vulnerability of the other person
 - Self-disclosure of your own vulnerability can be very validating

8. Be behaviorally responsive
 - Do what the other person needs/wants (rather than simply give a verbal response)

Quick Validating Responses

1. I know.
2. Of course.
3. That makes sense.
4. What happened?
5. Makes sense.
6. Me too!

Practice, Practice, Practice!

Validation can be hard, especially when someone is expressing themselves in a way that is not very accurate or effective (i.e. shutting down, showing anger, etc.)

Practice Exercise:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cjgdiy_SGjA



Thank you!

Candace K. Eddy, LICSW