



*Validation:
Making Sense of the Emotional Turmoil
in Borderline Personality Disorder*

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Objectives

- To define validation.
- To define invalidation and ways we often do so with good intentions.
- To provide practical examples of ways that you can use different forms of validation with people in your life including your loved one with BPD.

What is Validation?

- To acknowledge and accept someone else's inner experience, their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors as *valid and understandable*.
- It is seeing the wisdom in another's experience given their current circumstances in the present moment.

What Validation is NOT...

- Validation does NOT mean agreement.
- Validation is NOT giving compliments.
- Validation is NOT letting go of limits, contingencies, or expectations.
- Validation is NOT about teaching or convincing someone of another position.

Why is Validation Important?

- Validation can be a gateway to change and supports change.
- Validation can support emotion regulation.
- For people with BPD, validation can help them understand their own experience as one that is real and makes sense.
- Validation improves communication and relationships.
- People listen more to what you are saying when they feel that you understand or at least are trying to understand *their* experience.

The Importance of Validation in BPD



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- People with BPD feel emotions deeper, more intensely, and are slower to return to their baseline than the average person. They are also more emotionally reactive. This is biology.
- They have difficulty identifying and validating their inner experiences. That is a skills deficit.
- The world is an invalidating place and one of the best ways to learn how to validate is from being validated by loved ones.
- Validation from people in their lives helps support their own skills practice of self-validation and validation of others.

What is Invalidation?

Invalidation is when a person's emotional experiences are rejected, ignored, or judged.

Marsha Linehan's (DBT) Characteristics of an Invalidating Environment



- Dismisses private emotional experiences.
- Punishes high displays of emotions and rewards behavioral control.
- Makes problems seem easier to solve than they do for the other person.

* There is a spectrum of invalidating environments*

Problems with Invalidation

- Invalidation increases emotional dysregulation and can make it difficult for sensitive people to regulate their emotions.
- Invalidation is particularly painful for emotionally sensitive people and people with BPD.
- Invalidation can damage relationships.
- We can invalidate with the best of intentions when we are not being mindful.

Some Ways We Invalidate

- Discounting one's experience
- Blaming
- Name Calling
- Telling someone to “let it go” or “get over it”
- Problem solving before we understand the other person's experience or what they are looking for
- Minimizing
- Body language and facial expressions

Why Do We Invalidate?

Please who invalidate are often doing the best they can!

- You may not know how to validate (skills deficit).
- You may be afraid if you validate you will get more emotion, not less.
- You want to fix what is wrong.
- You are afraid, angry or resentful.

Why Do We Invalidate (cont.)



- You want to encourage or cheerlead.
- You are overwhelmed.
- You are afraid of the other person's emotions.
- You have a different worldview.
- You don't want to accept reality as it is.
- You don't understand BPD

When We Validate We.....

- Do so tentatively, everyone is an expert in their own experience. If they say we got it wrong then we respect that.
- We validate emotions, not thoughts or statements.
- We do not validate the invalid.
- We remember that there are many truths and perspectives.
- We remember that the opposite of a truth is another truth.
- We are open to correction.

Be Present and Pay Attention

1. Do not multi-task
2. Look and act interested
3. Respond with your face
4. Make eye contact
5. Lean in

Accurately Reflect Back

1. Say back what you think you heard or observed to be sure you accurately understand their experience.
2. Remain non-judgmental in voice and tone.
3. Have an open mind (do not try to change the person's mind)
4. Use a voice and tone that allows the person to let you know if you got in wrong.

*Example: So you are angry at me because I ran late to meet you?
Did I get that right?*

Reading Minds or Guessing Unstated Feelings

1. Pay attention to what is not being said
2. Use cues like facial expressions, body language, what we know about the person, the context of what is or what has happened.

Example: When your daughter returns home hours early from plans with friends and slumps down on couch and you say, “You look really disappointed.”

Validate In Terms of the Person's Past History

1. Look at how the person is feeling makes sense given their own history.
2. Think about using phrases like “Given “X” it makes sense that you....because.”

Example: It makes sense that you are more anxious and irritable in August given your anxiety about school and your worries that you will not be able to complete the semester again.

Acknowledge the Validity of the Present and How Most People Would React

1. Show that you see the person's experience is valid based on the facts of the present.
2. Validate in terms of an experience that is a common experience for most people in that situation.

Example: It makes sense that you are anxious before your interview, job interviews can be a stressful experience.

Radial Genuineness

1. Show equality
2. Don't "one-up"
3. Do not treat the other person as fragile or incompetent
4. Be with someone in a way that they understand you understand their experience without exchanging words.

Examples: Be willing to admit mistakes or apologize; Give up being defensive; Be willing to be corrected; Tear up when you feel sadness or joy with another person; Hand someone tissues or give them a hug; ask someone for their opinion.

Did We Get It Right?

- When we get validation **RIGHT** the emotional intensity seems to decrease and things slow down.
- When we get validation **WRONG** we get an emotional eruption or a complete shut-down

Remember Relationships Are Transactional!



- We impact one another profoundly.
- Validation tends to beget more validation.
- When we change our behavior and can push the other person to change their behavior in response.
- You must validate yourself as well!

Barriers to Validation



- Not practicing!
- Believing validation is time sensitive
- Judgments
- Fear
- Exhaustion and overwhelm
- Blaming yourself
- Holding on to past hurts/disappointments
- History

Some Final Thoughts.....

- Some people are more naturally validating than others.
- Validation is a skill that can be learned (It is a pivotal tool for hostage negotiators and CEOs!)
- If you get it wrong try again.
- If you realize you “missed an opportunity to validate” remember that returning to someone to validate can be a powerful experience as it means that you have kept them in your mind.

Some Final Thoughts (cont.)

- Don't take yourself too seriously and remind your loved one with BPD that you are trying to do things differently.
- PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE When you don't need it so that you can use this skill when you do need it!



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