

## How to Validate Your Child's Feelings and Experiences

### Validation Skills

**Validation** occurs when you communicate to another person that his or her feelings, thoughts, and actions **make sense** and are understandable to you in a particular situation. For example, "It makes sense that you are a little nervous about your test" or "You are really sad today." Who validates you? \_\_\_\_\_

**Invalidation** communicates (intentionally or not, through words or actions) that another person's feelings, thoughts, and actions in a particular situation make no sense, are "manipulative" or an "overreaction," or not worthy of your time, interest, or respect. We can all be invalidating at times. Can you think of a time when you have been invalidated and by whom? \_\_\_\_\_

### Remember: Validation ≠ Agreement!

Validation *does not* mean that you like or agree with what the other person is doing, saying or feeling. It means that you are trying to understand where they are coming from.

Validation has benefits!

- Validation can deescalate conflict and intense emotions
- Validation can show that we are listening, we understand while caring about the relationship, and we can disagree without having a big conflict.

How to Validate Others:

1. Validate feelings, thoughts and behaviors in others. (You can validate a feeling *without* validating the behavior. For example, validate someone feeling **upset** about a low test grade even though you know he or she didn't study, but *don't* validate the lack of studying that led to the low grade.)
2. Actively Listen! Avoid blocks to listening, make eye contact and stay focused.
3. Be mindful of your verbal and nonverbal reactions in order to avoid invalidation (e.g., rolling eyes, heavy sighing, walking away, making light of serious things, or saying, "That's stupid" or "Whatever!")
4. Observe what the other person is feeling in the moment. Look for a word that describes the feeling.
5. Reflect the feeling back without judgment. The goal is to communicate that you *understand* how the other person feels (e.g., "It makes sense that you're angry"; "I understand you are having a tough time right now").

Show tolerance! Look for how the feelings, thoughts or actions make sense from the other person's perspective or situation, even if you don't approve of their actions.

## How to Validate Your Child's Feelings and Experiences

### Validating & Invalidating Statements and Curious Questions

Remember, not to focus on what happened; focus on what your relative *feels* about it.

Address her/his feelings, not the situation. To address her/his feelings, you must do so using emotional language, not rational or judgmental language.

#### EXAMPLES OF INVALIDATING STATEMENTS ...

When you make a validating statement, you **SHOULD NOT**:

- Make it about you. "I hated it when that happened to me."
- Try to one-up the person. "Oh, you think you have it bad ... "
- Tell them how they should feel. "You should feel lucky, blessed..." "What's the big deal?"
- Try to give them advice. "What you really should do is ... "
- Try to solve their problem. "I'm going to call that girl's parents and ... "
- Cheerlead (there is a time for this, but not now). "I know you can do it..."
- Make "life" statements. "Well, life's not fair..."
- Make judgmental statements. "What you did was wrong/bad/stupid ... good/great... "
- Make "revisionist" statements. "If you had only..."
- Make it about your feelings. "How do you think that makes me feel?"
- Make "character" statements. "You're too sensitive." "You're so dramatic."
- Rationalize another person's behavior. "I bet they were just... "
- Call names. "You're such a baby." "Don't be such a wimp."
- Use reason or the "facts." "That's not what happened... "
- Use "always" or "never" statements. "You always get yourself into these situations ... "
- Compare the person to someone else. "Why can't you be like your sister?"
- Label the person. "You're nuts ... crazy", etc.
- Advising to cut ties or ignore the situation. "Just ignore him."

#### EXAMPLES OF VALIDATING STATEMENTS

If you want a validating statement to feel "true", make it about the truth of the situation for the other person. That truth is the way they feel about the event.

- I can see that you are very (upset, sad, frightened, scared)
- Here's what I'm hearing you say (summarize with fact checking).
- I guess that must have been hard for you.
- I can see you are making an effort.
- I can see how hard you are working.
- Wow, that (she/he) must have made you feel angry/sad, etc...
- I can see this is important to you.
- What a frustrating situation to be in!
- It must make you feel horrible to have someone do that.
- That's got to be so (difficult, frustrating, etc.) for you.
- Wow, how hard that must be.
- That really stinks!
- That's messed up!
- How frustrating!
- Yeah, I can see how that might make you feel really sad.
- It makes sense you would be so upset about that.
- What a horrible feeling that must be.
- What a tough spot.
- That must have been very upsetting for you.
- I'm thinking this must have been (upsetting, sad, frightening, scary) for you.
- I'm thinking you must have been (upset, sad, frightened, scared, etc.)
- I would have been (upset, sad, frightened, scared, etc.) too. (Self-disclosure)
- Of course ... me, too! I would have felt the same way. (Self-disclosure)
- Don't have the same beliefs as you but I can see that this is important to you.
- We are both feeling sad ... we are suffering together.
- Your suffering is my suffering (because I love you).
- You may be right!
- It sounds like you feel that's really unfair and you shouldn't be asked to do that.
- That must be really discouraging.
- I bet you feel disappointed.
- Darn, I know how much that meant to you.
- Tell me more. (shows interest)
- I would be (upset, nervous, sad, scared, frightened, scared) too!!
- I can see you're overwhelmed. Let me help you with that.
- Can we talk?
- I know you're scared. It's going to be hard ... and I know you will figure it out.

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### EXAMPLES OF PROBING/ CURIOUS QUESTIONS:

- Can I ask some questions?
- Is this a good time to talk?
- Can we talk?
- Tell me more.
- What are you feeling?
- I don't understand.
- Help me to understand.
- What exactly happened? (Ask fact checking questions ... )
- What am I not getting?
- Are you mad at ... upset with ... me?
- What are you feeling?
- How can I help you out of this pain?
- Is there anything I can do to help you?
- Can you give me a stress#? 1 = I'm OK, 10 = I'm drowning!!
- Are you safe?
- I will worry if you ... (don't keep in contact, don't call when you leave the house, go there alone .. )
- I'm worried where this will go.
- I'm thinking I might have a feeling of what you're going through.
- Would you like my opinion or do you just want me to listen?
- Let me help you ...
- Can I help you with that?
- Do you want to know what I think?
- Does this make sense?
- I need time to think about it. .. this. (Buy more time)
- I need to talk to (mom, dad, etc.) about this. (Buy more time)
- I/ we will get back to you. (Buy more time)

... And, of course, many, many more. Put your own "voice" into them!