

Levels of Validation Summary

Level One Validation "Listening and Observing"

This level of validation is done continuously and involves basic attention, listening skills, and ordinary non-verbal communication; behaviors that communicate genuine interest and attention, deep listening, and openness. Maintaining focus on the other person's words, facial expression, voice tone, and posture is critical. *Showing* that we are doing this with our own words, expression, posture, and voice tone is also critical. Our words and tone communicate a non-judgmental curiosity and our posture is open and relaxed. This level of validation is all about intentional awareness of the other person.

Examples of open-ended questions that we might ask include:

"Tell me more"

"Can you explain that?"

"What were you thinking just then?"

Examples of **INVALIDATION** at Level 1: Not paying attention, allowing yourself to be distracted, abruptly changing the subject, being visibly anxious to leave or to end the conversation, thinking about your own answer while the other person is talking, interrupting, answering the phone or responding to email while someone else is speaking. More subtle (but still powerful) invalidation includes having a disapproving, or uninvolved facial expression, expressing emotion that is unrelated to what the other person is saying, failing to make or maintain an "interested" level of eye contact, maintaining closed body posture, allowing judgment to creep into your voice tone or words.

Level 2 Validation Accurate Reflection of What is Stated

Reflecting the other person's words back in a thoughtful way, adding or taking away nothing, acknowledging the other's statements; what s/he is thinking/feeling/wanting; or functionally responding to her/him by answering or problem-solving. Linehan suggests that we accurately summarize (only) what the other person has said, in a succinct and coherent way, so that they know that s/he has been heard and understood in a deep and meaningful way. By doing this, the other person is empowered and authenticated for who s/he is.

Examples of **INVALIDATION** at Level 2: Not participating actively—listening without response or missing spoken validation opportunities, not providing evidence of tracking the other person; responding to their words with an unrelated topic, or being functionally unresponsive by not answering questions or by not offering problem-solving assistance. Repeatedly stating their words inaccurately, offering an interpretation of their words, or insisting that you know what they mean without showing them and pushing forward to the next topic.

Levels of Validation



When a person confides in you, they are not usually looking for advice or problem-solving unless they specifically ask for it. Rather, they are looking for validation. If you are not used to validating, here are some suggestions. There is no greater way to set a person at ease.

Level One

Overall show interest in the other person (through verbal, nonverbal cues), show that you are paying attention (nodding, eye contact, etc.)

Ask questions - "What then?" Give prompts - "Tell me more," "Uh-huh."

Level Two

Use accurate reflection - "So you're frustrated because you son hasn't picked up his room."

Summarize what the person is sharing, then ask - "Is that right?"

Take a nonjudgmental stance toward the person, be matter-of-fact, have an "of course" attitude.

Example: "My therapist doesn't like me."

Validation: "You are feeling really certain she hates you." Note that you don't have to actually agree with the person about their perceptions.

Level Three

Try to "read" a person's behavior, imagine what they could be feeling, thinking or wishing for. It feels good when someone takes the time to think about our life experiences. Remember to check for accuracy. It is best to not make assumptions.

Level Four

Validate the person's behavior in terms of causes like past events present events even when it may be triggered based on dysfunctional association.

*Validate feelings like, "Since your new boss reminds you of your last one, I can see why you'd be scared to meet with her," or "Since you have had panic attacks on the bus, you're scared to ride one now."

Level Five

Communicate that the person's behavior is reasonable, meaningful, effective.

*Validate feelings like, "It seems very normal to be nervous before a job interview - that sure makes sense to me," or "It sounds like you were very clear and direct with your doctor."

Level Six

Treat the person as valid - not patronizing or condescending.

Recognize the person as they are with strengths and limitations.

Give the person equal status, equal respect.

Be genuine with the person about your reactions to them and about yourself.

Believe in the other person while seeing their struggles and pain.

All of these levels of validation are very important skills for building and maintaining relationships with others.