

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 your 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.