

The Incredible Power of Validation and How To Do It

By [Jonice Webb PhD](#)



What Does Validation Look Like?

Tim and Barbie sat slumped in their chairs feeling exhausted and hopeless. A full hour of talking had failed to make progress toward resolving their conflict. In fact, they were now much farther apart than they were when they started.

I see it all the time and everywhere. In families, marriages, friendships, politics, and the workplace. People going head-to-head and toe-to-toe, often with the best intentions to reach a resolution, only to find that their attempts to discuss it makes things worse.

If all these people knew that there is a simple, almost magical thing they can do to reach through the conflict, connect with the other person, and forge forward, I'm sure that they would do it right away.

As she slumped in her chair, Barbie realized that she was perseverating on her own point of view. She became aware of how angry she was at Tim for not listening and not seeming to care how she felt. Then suddenly, a lightbulb went on in her head, and she said, "Tim, please tell me again why you refuse to spend the holiday weekend with my family."

Validation is not about compromising your own point of view. It's not about giving in. It's not about manipulation, or agreeing, or even resolving. Validation is something that can happen in one sentence, in one moment. It's a blip that occurs in a conversation that can make all the difference in where that conversation goes.

"As I already explained multiple times, I cannot stand being around your brother that long," Tim explained. "He is the most boorish, obnoxious, unpleasant person I have ever met. He will ruin the holidays for me, and I don't want our children around him," Tim repeated with exasperation.

Keep reading, because validation has not happened yet. Barbie is, however, listening intently to Tim's words, looking directly into his eyes as he talks. This is something she did not do for the entire hour of their previous conversation.

"I get it," Barbie said. "I totally understand why you feel that way."

This was the moment of validation. If you were watching this conversation happen between Barbie and Tim, you would see Tim's angry posture slightly relax as he took in Barbie's words. In that moment, he feels unexpectedly heard and understood. He feels validated.

To validate someone is not at all the same as agreeing with them. It's only a way to say that you *understand their feelings*. That one moment of understanding has the power to change the course of your interaction, sending you on the road to a resolution.

3 Steps to Validate Someone

- 1. Change to a listening posture.** Listen to what the person is saying, and try to grasp the feelings behind it. When Barbie did this, she realized that Tim finds her brother far more offensive than she does. She puts a realization together in her head: Tim didn't grow up with her brother, and doesn't understand him as she does. Tim takes her brother's behavior at face value and is greatly offended by it.
- 2. Try your hardest to feel what the other person is feeling, especially if you don't agree with it.** When Barbie actually listens and imagines being Tim, she is able to feel his frustration and irritation. As she feels Tim's feelings for just that moment, he experiences a moment of validation. In that moment, he finally feels heard and understood.
- 3. Tell the other person you understand why they would feel that way.** You don't need to say, "I feel the same way," "I agree," or "You are right." You only need to say that you get it.

When you give someone a moment of validation, you are accomplishing several goals simultaneously. You are establishing a meeting-of-the-minds, you are connecting, and you are helping the other person open up to your point of view as well.

People who feel validated are far more open to the opinions of others. Now that Barbie has validated Tim's feelings, he will be far more able to hear what she has to say, and imagine what she is feeling.

If you grew up with a lack of validation yourself (Childhood Emotional Neglect, or CEN), you will likely have a hard time validating others, especially during times of conflict or anger. Yet validation has the power to turn a negative cycle into a positive one.

About Jonice Webb PhD

Jonice Webb has a PhD in clinical psychology, and is author of the book *Running on Empty: Overcome Your Childhood Emotional Neglect*. She has been interviewed on NPR and over thirty radio shows across the United States and Canada about the topic of her book, and has been quoted as a psychologist expert in the *Chicago Tribune*. She currently has a private psychotherapy practice in the Boston area, where she specializes in the treatment of couples and families.

To read more about Dr. Webb, her book and Childhood Emotional Neglect, you can visit her website, Emotionalneglect.com.

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