

The Difference Between Listening, Fixing & Validating

THREE RESPONSES, VERY DIFFERENT IMPACTS

When someone shares something difficult, our response can help them feel safer and more understood — or it can unintentionally make them feel dismissed. Listening, fixing and validating each sound supportive, but they serve different purposes and have different effects.

Listening

BEING PRESENT



Listening means giving someone your full attention and creating space for them to share, without interrupting or trying to change anything.

EXAMPLES

"I'm here."

"Go on, I'm listening."

"That sounds really hard."

IMPACT

Helps the person feel heard, safe and supported.

Fixing

SOLVING THE PROBLEM



Fixing involves offering advice, solutions or suggestions to make the problem go away. It often comes from a good place, but can sometimes leave the other person feeling unheard.

EXAMPLES

"Have you tried...?"

"You should..."

"Here's what I would do..."

IMPACT

Can feel helpful, but may also feel dismissive or pressured.

Validating

ACKNOWLEDGING THE EXPERIENCE



Validating means acknowledging and accepting the other person's feelings as real and understandable, even if you see things differently.

EXAMPLES

"That makes sense."

"It's understandable you feel that way."

"Anyone might feel upset in that situation."

IMPACT

Helps the person feel accepted, understood and less alone.

A Helpful Approach

Start with listening. Add validation. Then, if the person wants it, you can explore options or offer suggestions.

Validation doesn't mean agreement — it means recognising and respecting their experience.

👁️ *People don't always need a solution. Often, they just need to be understood.*

SOURCES

Linehan, M. M. (2015). *DBT Skills Training Manual* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.

Rogers, C. R. (1957). The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 21(2), 95–103.

© 2026 B&F Clinical Psychology
Evidence-informed educational resource

For educational purposes only