

Self-Validation vs. Self-Invalidation

HOW WE RESPOND TO OUR OWN EXPERIENCE

Self-validation means extending the same understanding to yourself that you would offer someone you care about — acknowledging that your own emotions make sense, even when they're uncomfortable. Self-invalidation does the opposite, and over time can make emotions harder to identify, trust or regulate.

Self-Validation

Acknowledging your own emotions, thoughts and experiences as real and understandable, even without others' approval.

WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE

"It makes sense that I feel this way."

"I'm allowed to feel upset about this."

"My reaction is understandable, given what happened."

"I don't need to justify how I feel."

"This is hard, and that's okay."

"I'm doing the best I can with what I have right now."

"My feelings are information, not a flaw."

"I can feel this without it defining me."

Effect: Tends to support emotional regulation, self-trust and a steadier sense of self-worth over time.

Self-Invalidation

Dismissing, judging or minimising your own emotions, thoughts or needs — often without realising it.

WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE

"I shouldn't feel this way."

"I'm being dramatic."

"Other people have real problems."

"I need to just get over it."

"I'm too sensitive."

"I have no right to be upset about this."

"I should be able to handle this better."

"My feelings are an inconvenience to others."

Effect: Can increase distress, erode self-trust, and — over time — make it harder to recognise or regulate one's own emotions.



Self-validation isn't about excusing unhelpful behaviour or avoiding accountability — it's about acknowledging your internal experience as real before deciding how to respond to it. Many people learn self-invalidation early, especially if their emotions were dismissed or criticised growing up — which makes practising self-validation a skill worth deliberately building.

SOURCES

Linehan, M.M. (1997). Validation and psychotherapy. In A. Bohart & L. Greenberg (Eds.), *Empathy Reconsidered*. APA.
Linehan, M.M. (1993). *Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment of Borderline Personality Disorder*. Guilford Press.

NOTE

Evidence-informed educational resource.