

Validation vs. Invalidation

HOW WE RESPOND TO ANOTHER PERSON'S EXPERIENCE

Validation means communicating that someone's emotions, thoughts or experiences make sense, given their situation. It doesn't require agreement — only genuine acknowledgment. Invalidation, often unintentional, communicates the opposite: that a person's response is wrong, excessive or shouldn't be trusted.

Validation

Communicates that a person's response makes sense given who they are and what they are experiencing.

WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE

"That makes sense, given everything you're dealing with."

"I can see why that would upset you."

"It's understandable that you'd feel that way."

"Your feelings make sense to me."

"That sounds really difficult."

"I'm listening — tell me more about that."

"Anyone in that situation might feel the same."

"It's okay that you're not okay right now."

Effect: Tends to reduce distress, build trust, and support emotional regulation over time.

Invalidation

Communicates that a person's response is wrong, excessive, or not to be trusted — even if unintended.

WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE

"You're overreacting."

"There's nothing to be upset about."

"You shouldn't feel that way."

"Other people have it worse."

"Just get over it."

"You're too sensitive."

"At least it's not..." (minimising by comparison)

"I'm sure it's not that bad."

Effect: Can increase distress, damage trust, and — over time — make it harder to identify or trust one's own emotions.



Validating someone doesn't mean agreeing with their actions or endorsing every belief — it means acknowledging that their internal experience is real and makes sense in context. Invalidation is often unintentional and can come from a place of care, such as trying to reassure or problem-solve too quickly.

SOURCES

Linehan, M.M. (1997). Validation and psychotherapy. In A. Bohart & L. Greenberg (Eds.), *Empathy Reconsidered*. APA.
Linehan, M.M. (2015). *DBT Skills Training Manual* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.

NOTE

Evidence-informed educational resource.