

Self-Validation vs Self-Invalidation

How I speak to myself about my own feelings

When something hard happens, we also have a reaction to our reaction. **Self-invalidation** dismisses, judges or argues with our own feelings. **Self-validation** recognises that what we feel is real and makes sense, even when we don't like it or plan to act differently. It's a core skill in Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT).

01 Two voices, one moment

The same feeling, met in two different ways

SELF-INVALIDATION

Pushing the feeling away

Treats feelings as wrong, excessive or shameful. Often learned in environments where emotions were dismissed.

"I shouldn't feel this way."

"I'm overreacting, as usual."

"Other people have it much worse."

"What is wrong with me?"

A hard moment

"My friend cancelled on me again."

← the inner response →
shapes what happens next

SELF-VALIDATION

Making room for the feeling

Acknowledges the feeling as real and understandable, which often helps it settle.

"I feel hurt, and that makes sense."

"I was looking forward to it."

"Anyone might feel disappointed here."

"I can feel this and still be kind to them."

What invalidation often leads to

Feelings grow louder or turn into shame; confusion about what you feel; harder to ask for what you need.

What validation often allows

Feelings can soften and pass; clearer sense of what you need; more room to choose a helpful response.

02 Validating is not the same as agreeing

SELF-VALIDATION IS

- ✓ Acknowledging what I feel, think or want
- ✓ Understanding why it makes sense, given my history and situation
- ✓ Treating my inner experience as real and worth attention

IT ISN'T

- ✗ Deciding my interpretation is definitely correct
- ✗ Approving of every action the feeling urges me to take
- ✗ Wallowing, or giving up on change

03 Six ways to validate myself

Adapted from Linehan's levels of validation

01

Notice

Pay attention to what you are feeling, without looking away.

"Something is stirring in me."

02

Name it

Describe the feeling accurately and simply.

"This is disappointment."

03

Look beneath

Notice what else might be there: fear, hurt, a need.

"Underneath, I feel left out."

04

Consider my history

See how past experiences shape this reaction.

"Given my past, of course this stings."

05

Normalise

Recognise that many people would feel similarly.

"Most people would feel this."

06

Treat myself as capable

Trust that you can hold this feeling and respond wisely.

"I can handle this feeling."