

Validated or Invalidated?

Recognising how others respond to your feelings

Validation communicates that your experience is real and understandable. **Invalidation** dismisses, judges or ignores it. Everyone invalidates sometimes, often without meaning to, and well-meant advice or reassurance can still leave you feeling unheard. What matters most is the **pattern**, and learning to notice it. In one study, invalidating responses led to greater emotional and physical arousal than validating ones.

01 Eight common forms of invalidation

with a validating alternative for each

Dismissing Shrinking the feeling × “It’s not a big deal.” ✓ “That sounds really upsetting.”	Judging Criticising you for feeling it × “You’re too sensitive.” ✓ “It makes sense that hurt.”	Rushing to fix Solutions before understanding × “Just stop worrying about it.” ✓ “Do you want ideas, or just to be heard?”	Comparing Weighing it against others × “Others have it much worse.” ✓ “This is hard for you, and that matters.”
Rewriting Questioning your account × “That’s not what happened.” ✓ “Tell me how it was for you.”	Forced positivity Skipping over the hard part × “Look on the bright side!” ✓ “It’s okay to feel down about this.”	Blaming Making it your fault × “What did you expect?” ✓ “That’s not what you hoped for.”	Ignoring No response, or changing the subject × (changes the topic, looks at phone) ✓ Pausing, turning toward you, asking more

02 How each can feel

tick what you recognise

WHEN I’M INVALIDATED, I MAY FEEL ... unheard confused “too much” ashamed angry or defensive alone doubting myself like shutting down	WHEN I’M VALIDATED, I MAY FEEL ... understood calmer less alone clearer respected safe to share able to think it through closer to them
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03 Spot the response

tick one for each, then check the answers on page 2

	WHEN I SAID...	THEY RESPONDED...	THIS WAS...
1	“I’m really nervous about my interview.”	“You’ll be fine, stop overthinking it.”	☐ validating ☐ invalidating ☐ mixed
2	“I feel hurt that you forgot my birthday.”	“I’m sorry. I can see why that hurt.”	☐ validating ☐ invalidating ☐ mixed
3	“I’m exhausted this week.”	“Everyone’s tired. You should try working my hours.”	☐ validating ☐ invalidating ☐ mixed
4	“I felt left out at the party.”	“That sounds lonely. What happened?”	☐ validating ☐ invalidating ☐ mixed
5	“I think you raised your voice at me.”	“I never raise my voice. You’re imagining it.”	☐ validating ☐ invalidating ☐ mixed

Noticing It in My Own Life

Recognising patterns, and responding in ways that protect me

04 My noticing log

try this a few times this week

WHAT I SHARED and with whom	HOW THEY RESPONDED their words or actions	IT FELT... validating · invalidating · mixed	WHAT I NEEDED to be heard, comforted, advised...	HOW I RESPONDED to them, or to myself

05 My people and places

no names needed if you'd rather not

I USUALLY FEEL VALIDATED WITH...
people or places where I feel heard

IT'S MIXED WITH...
sometimes heard, sometimes not

I OFTEN FEEL INVALIDATED WITH...
where I tend to feel dismissed

06 What I can do when I feel invalidated

circle the ones worth trying

Validate myself

"My feelings make sense, even if they didn't see it."

Name what I need

"I'm not after solutions, I just want you to listen."

Check the intent

Were they dismissive, or trying to help in the wrong way?

Choose who to share with

Bring tender things to people who tend to listen well.

Set a limit

"I'd rather not discuss this if it's going to be dismissed."

Next time I feel dismissed, I could say...

A pattern I'm noticing...

To bring to my next session...

When invalidation is part of a bigger pattern. If you are regularly told your memory or feelings are wrong, or it comes with control, threats or fear, this is important to talk through with your therapist. If you feel unsafe, contact emergency services or a support line.

Spot the response answers: 1 invalidating (forced positivity) · 2 validating · 3 invalidating (comparing) · 4 validating · 5 invalidating (rewriting)