



## The Art of Validation

In all our relationships (including the one we have with our child), one of the things we want most is to feel heard and understood. Yet we often feel just the opposite, and miscommunications and relationship problems abound.

To really hear someone, we must listen and then validate what we have heard them say. While this may sound simple and obvious, it seems to be consistently one of the least attended to parts of relationships. With technology and distractions of every kind, many of us find it hard to slow down and really connect with our loved one.

The first part, of course, is listening: Putting down our phone and shutting off the TV/computer and giving our child our undivided attention.

Then moving on to validating what we have heard. Validating is the simple act of acknowledging another person's experiences without judging them (invalidating them). Validation is the art of letting our child know not only have we heard what they had to say, but that we have also found a part of what they said something to which we can connect or understand.

Validating does not mean that we must agree with our loved one's thoughts or feelings. That's a major misunderstanding about validation and a barrier for people to engage in validation strategies. Validating our child is simply acknowledging how they feel and letting them know we're not going to tell them to stop feeling that way. When we validate someone, we let them know that for them there is some truth to what they are saying, and it's OK to be thinking/feeling it.

The power of validating is that it goes a long way towards helping the person with whom we are trying to connect to be more open and communicative. Maybe we need to ask our child for something. Maybe we need to address something that feels unresolved. By validating what we hear, through our words, attitude and tone, we can lower defensiveness and invite them further into a conversation. In doing so, we will likely set the stage for our child to really hear and validate our feelings even if they don't agree.

So, how do we validate? There are an infinite number of ways we can validate our child's experience, from small examples like making eye contact to larger statements like sharing a deep moment without even the need to talk. In the middle, we can practice by saying things like:

"I understand that you feel \_\_\_\_ and it makes sense to me because you've said \_\_\_\_ in the past."

This sentence shows that we heard what they had to say and that, based on their own history, we understand how they got to that feeling. Another example is to connect it back to ourselves, like this:

"I get it, because if someone had done \_\_\_\_ to me, I would also feel \_\_\_\_."

Again, we're showing that we really listened to what happened to our child by repeating it, and we're identifying with it.

The upside of tempering our judgment and opinions and trying to instead validate what we have heard our child say, is that we can have conversations where we can identify ways to be helpful or to connect more deeply. We can create an environment which will go a long way towards improving the quality of our relationships.

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