

Parenting Tool: Validation

Validation is a parenting tool that shows your child they are heard and understood. This handout explains how to validate your child's feelings and behaviors.

What is validation?

Validation is a parenting tool that lets your child know that you understand, and accept their thoughts and feelings.

Why is validation an important parenting tool?

Validation shows your child that they are important enough for you to listen to and understand. If your child does not feel heard or understood they may react by using emotions and behaviors to get you to pay attention. By using validation your child will feel that you take them seriously and you accept them. Your child may have less intense emotional reactions and be more willing to talk about their feelings.

How can I show validation?

- Sit quietly and listen to your child without showing any judgment
- Tell your child "I am listening"
- Acknowledge your child's feelings
- Try to understand what your child is feeling or telling you

Sometimes it can take practice to find the best way to validate your child. Do not give up, even if your child doesn't respond at first.

Why should I validate my child's feelings when they are acting out?

It can be very hard for parents to want to validate their child's feelings and behaviors when they seem strange, out of control, or dangerous and especially if they are aimed at you. It helps to remember that when you are validating your child's feelings you are not saying you agree with or like their behavior. Validation only means that you are listening and trying to understand your child's point of view.

To Learn More

- Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine Unit 206-987-2195
- Outpatient Psychiatry Program 206-987-2164
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

How do I start using validation?

Below are some steps to use to practice validating your child's feelings. Remember as you review these that practice is important. You can use the worksheet on the next page to practice.

Step 1: Stop what you are doing and think about the situation

- Take a moment before responding.
 - Watch the situation.
 - Calm yourself down before acting.
 - Decide what your goal is.
 - Try not to react with strong emotions.
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Step 2: Look at your child with new eyes

- Be aware of your old ways of communicating and come up with new ways of thinking and responding.
 - Remember your child is doing the best they can in the moment.
 - Try to find out what emotion your child is feeling. If you don't know, can you ask?
 - Think about what might be causing your child's current behavior.
 - Think about what your child is going through. Is this situation bringing up difficult memories for your child?
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Step 3: Explore what might be getting in the way

- Think about past or current concerns you bring to the situation. Has this event triggered old memories or feelings in you?
 - Be aware of your thoughts and feelings about the situation.
 - Decide if you are judging your child or yourself in this moment.
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Step 4: Make a validating statement

- Practice making statements that calm you and your child.
 - For example, "It makes sense that we're frustrated. This is a tough situation."
 - Show your understanding and acceptance of your child.
 - For example, "I'm okay with you being frustrated right now."
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Recommended Reading

Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child: The Heart of Parenting by John Gottman with Joan Declaire.

Practice worksheet

1. This is what my child is doing (watch and describe the situation):

2. These are my thoughts and feelings about what my child is doing:

3. I can accept my child when I remember that she is doing the best she can.
I can let her know that I am hearing her by saying:

4. The outcome of this situation is:

I feel: _____

My child responds by: _____
