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2018 Fall Leadership Summit

Adolescent Mental Health: The Role of

Validation



OBJECTIVES

Participants will be able to:

- ❖ Explain the concept of validation and understand its roll in relationships.
- ❖ Recognize the toxic effect of chronic invalidation to health and wellness.
- ❖ Differentiate between the concepts of acceptance, tolerance, acquiescence and validation.
- ❖ Demonstrate how to validate perspectives that are in in complete opposition to one's point of view.



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VALIDATION





What is Validation?

- ❖ To acknowledge and accept a person's feelings, thoughts, behaviors and internal experience as valid and understandable.
- ❖ To confirm or strengthen what is relevant, true, or effective about a response, be it a thought, emotion, physical sensation, or action.
- ❖ Validation requires empathy (the accurate understanding of the person's experience) but validation also includes the communication that the person's response makes sense.



It Means:

- ❖ Validation Means:
 - ❖ Finding the kernel of truth
 - ❖ Verifying the facts of a situation
 - ❖ Acknowledging that emotions, thoughts, and behaviors have causes and therefor are understandable
 - ❖ *Not* necessarily **agreeing**
 - ❖ *Not* validating what is actually invalid



Validation is Key for

- ❖ Strengthening relationships because it searches non-judgmentally for the wisdom in the position of others.
- ❖ Reducing emotional dysregulation. Student and staff outbursts often stem from frustration which in many cases comes from not being listened to or understood.
- ❖ Strengthening the sense of identity in another person by recognizing the foundations of who they are.
- ❖ Countering hurtful invalidation.



What to Validate

- ❖ Important Things to Validate
 - ❖ The valid (and *only* the valid)
 - ❖ The facts of the situation
 - ❖ Experiences, feelings/emotions, beliefs, opinions, or thoughts
 - ❖ Suffering and difficulties



Validating Responses

- ❖ Listening, paying attention
- ❖ Reflecting, acknowledging the other's points
- ❖ Working to understand; asking questions, making hypotheses
- ❖ Understanding their problems in context
- ❖ Normalizing their responses when they are normative
- ❖ Extending, matching with your own vulnerability



Steps to Validation: be CLEAR

CLEAR can help you remember the process of validating:

Communicate

Legitimize the facts of another person's responses

Explain your own feelings after expressing understanding (empathy)

Acknowledge the situation

Respect the other person's feelings, reactions, goals, emotions



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EXERCISE IN VALIDATION



What is Invalidation?

- ❖ Pervasively dismisses, judges or negates behavior, emotions and/or identity, independent of the actual validity of the behavior, emotions or identity
- ❖ Indiscriminately rejects communication of private experiences
- ❖ Punishes emotional displays but...
- ❖ ...intermittently reinforces emotional escalation
- ❖ Makes a big deal of self-control
- ❖ Oversimplifies ease of problem-solving and meeting goals



Reasons we Invalidate

- ❖ We have a different world view
- ❖ We want people to have characteristics that will help him or her be successful
- ❖ We want to feel close to others
- ❖ We want to **fix** what is wrong
- ❖ We find reality is too difficult to accept
- ❖ We are angry or resentful
- ❖ We don't understand another's struggle
- ❖ Solutions seem simple to us



Even More!

- ❖ We are afraid of emotions
- ❖ We are overwhelmed emotionally
- ❖ We know the other person's habits
- ❖ We don't want others to struggle
- ❖ We want to encourage
- ❖ We are in a hurry
- ❖ We are fearful



Invalidating Responses

- ❖ **Counter-argument:** Stating opinions instead of listening
- ❖ **Interrogation:** “Why, how, what” questions
- ❖ **Command:** Demanding behavior change
- ❖ **Warning/Threatening:** Without understanding the context of what is happening
- ❖ **Evading/missing/avoiding the point:** Focusing on own point of view instead of the other person
- ❖ **Trying to make sense:** Using logic/lecturing/argument
- ❖ **Should’s and ought to’s:** Telling others what they should/ought to think, feel, do
- ❖ **Making things ok:** Validating the invalid by reassuring/sympathizing/consoling, leaving it at that



For example

1. Reject self-description as inaccurate

Your student just passed a difficult math test. They say “I feel like Einstein”. You say, “You’re no genius.”

2. Reject a normal response.

You are really into teaching class, but not so much into lesson planning. The Head says to a colleague. “He doesn’t want to do his lesson planning because teachers these days are lazy.”

3. Reject response to events as incorrect or ineffective.

A student yelled at you today and you just told your partner what happened. She says, “That’s stupid to feel that way. He’s just a student.”

4. Dismiss or disregard.

Your beloved dog just was hit by a car. Your brother says, “Oh well, stuff happens.”

5. Directly criticize or punish.

You are at a family party and your mother asks you to pass glasses of red wine to the guests. You accidentally drop a glass. Your mother says, “You idiot. You don’t need wine if you just pour it all over my floor.”

6. Reject and link responses to socially unacceptable characteristics.

You are helping your colleague staple papers. You get a paper cut and your colleague says: “Crying means you are weak. Suck it up.”



Leo Tolstoy

“Why are you so sad?”

“Because you speak to me in words and I look at you with feelings.”



Invalidation is Painful When:

- ❖ Being ignored
- ❖ Being repeatedly misunderstood
- ❖ Being misread
- ❖ Being misinterpreted
- ❖ Important facts are being ignored or denied
- ❖ Receiving unequal treatment
- ❖ Being disbelieved when actually being truthful
- ❖ Private experiences are trivialized or denied

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Invalidation teaches others to:

Actively self-invalidate and search the social environment for cues on how to respond

Oscillate between emotional inhibition (masking) and extreme emotional styles

Form unrealistic goals and expectations of self and others



Leading others to:

- Further dysregulation (escalate in order to get needs met: NOT NECESSARILY MANIPULATION)
- Not learn how to tolerate difficult moments
- Not learn how to regulate emotional arousal
- Not learn to trust their own emotions as reasonable responses to events
- Self-invalidate
- They tend to rely on others to tell them the “right” way to respond to stimuli
- They tend to oversimplify the ease of solving life’s problems



Reflect On:

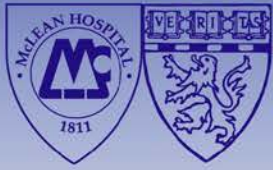
Have you ever felt invalidated?

What does invalidation feel like?

Why do you think invalidation is so hurtful?

How has invalidation impacted you?

If someone is invalidating you, what can you do?



Invalidation is Helpful When:

- ❖ It corrects important mistakes
- ❖ It stimulates intellectual and personal growth



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EXERCISE IN INVALIDATION



Your colleague does something that upsets you, and you express your anger to them.

Response 1: “I’m so sorry I upset you, what can I do to make it better?” imagine how you would feel.

Response 2: “I can’t believe you’re giving me a hard time about that, you do that all the time!”

What would happen to the negative emotion you’d feel in each scenario? What is likely to happen next?



What's the Big Deal

Increasing Mental Health Concerns:

- ❖ Although overall children's hospitalizations did not increase between 2006 and 2011, hospitalizations for all listed **mental health conditions increased by nearly 50% among children aged 10 to 14 years.**
- ❖ Inpatient visits for suicide, suicidal ideation, and self-injury increased by 104% for children ages 1 to 17 years, and by 151% for children ages 10 to 14 years during this period.

Torio, Encinosa, Berdahl, McCormick, & Simpson (2014)



Suicide

- ❖ The suicide rates for adolescent boys and girls have been steadily rising since 2007 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- ❖ The suicide rate for girls ages 15 to 19 doubled from 2007 to 2015, when it reached its highest point in 40 years, according to the CDC.
- ❖ The suicide rate for boys ages 15 to 19 increased by 30 percent over the same time period. The analysis looked at data from 1975 to 2015, the most recent year those statistics were available.
- ❖ The suicide rate for teen boys increased from 12 suicides per 100,000 individuals in 1975 to 18 suicides per 100,000 people in 1990, when it reached its highest point. The numbers then declined from 1990 to 2007 and then climbed again by 2015.
- ❖ The suicide rate for teen girls was lower than for teen boys, but also followed a similar pattern — increasing, then declining, then sharply spiking by 2015.



Self-Injury

- ❖ From 2009 to 2015, the nation's emergency rooms saw a sharp rise in treatment of girls 10 to 24 who intentionally injured themselves.
- ❖ Among girls 10 to 14 years old, rates of ER visits for treatment of self-harm surged 18.8% yearly between 2009 and 2015.



Concepts to Ponder

- ❖ At any given point we are all doing the best we can.
- ❖ We can do better
- ❖ We want to live life effectively
- ❖ We may not have caused all of our problems, but we have to solve them anyway.
- ❖ You cannot give that which is not yours to give
- ❖ Fairness is a point of view
- ❖ You can't make anyone love you
- ❖ The universe cannot exist without you
- ❖ We need one another
- ❖ Finding blame and excuses prevents us from being strong
- ❖ Attachment is at the root of all our suffering



Wisdom 101: Regulation

A person must *regulate* before they can
reflect

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Wisdom 102: Understanding

Meaning is in the understanding of the receiver and not in the intention of the deliverer



Wisdom 103: Curiosity

Don't ask: "What is wrong with that child?
(or other person). Instead ask: "What
happened?"