

TOUGH TALK TOOLKIT



6 LEVELS OF VALIDATION

Validation is a way to tell someone that they are seen, heard, and respected without necessarily agreeing with everything they're saying.

Dr. Marsha Linehan has identified six levels of validation.

Level 1: Presence

Be present to the person by listening and feeling empathy. Show you are paying attention through eye-contact, nonverbal communication (e.g. nodding), and open questions (e.g. what then?).

Level 2: Verbal Reflection

Summarise what the person said to you with your own words and check in (e.g. sound right?).

Level 3: Empathic Reflection

Let them know what emotions you feel they're feeling and then check in (feel right?).

Level 4: Understanding History

Discuss what's happening in the context of them experiencing previously challenging experiences.

Level 5: Normalise Behaviour

Point out that their reaction is normal for the situation and shared by many people.

Level 6: Radical Genuineness

Meet someone as an equal and express support while believing they can solve their own issues.

Most of the time there are aspects of what someone is saying that are true and useful for them. However, other parts of what they're saying may be contributing to their issues. Acknowledging the truth of someone's experience helps them see that you understand and respect them, which may help them accept your challenges to other aspects of their point of view.