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Mental Health and Substance Use Family Support Services

Tips and resources for people who want to be more effective in supporting adults with mental health/substance use concerns.

MESSAGE FROM YOUR HOST



Welcome back families and friends. With every family member/friend we meet, we are in awe with your commitment. We see you taking risks in learning new skills, gaining knowledge in areas unknown, and learning something new about your self along the way. All of this takes courage and you are that person.

There is unfortunately no play book about 'how to' support a person with a mental illness and/or addiction but if there was one, **validation** would be a main chapter. Providing a validating home environment is important because it (1) conveys to your loved one that you understand, or are trying to understand, what they are feeling and/or thinking; (2) helps your loved one build their feelings vocabulary by helping them put words to their feelings; (3) de-escalates your loved one's emotional arousal state. Feeling understood by even one person can build enough emotional resiliency in your loved one to keep them moving forward in their recovery. So let's learn about validation so you can become effective in this skill.



What is a validation?

Validation is communicating to your loved one that their feelings, thoughts, behaviour and sensations are understandable and providing reasons why you think they are feeling the way they do. To do this you have to be 100% present when listening and accepting what is told to you without judgement. You may not understand or personally agree with what your loved one is saying or feeling, but you are trying to understand it from their perspective, which may be very different from your own. You will want to be clear when communicating your understanding and provide reasons why you believe their feelings to be true to them.

It is an easy concept but hard to do, and you have to keep focused and practise.

Practise, practise, and practise.

Types of validation

thinking or feeling, and reflecting that back to them.

For example, Jane has a daughter Sarah, who is 30 years old and moved back home with her after a recent hospitalization due to a mental health relapse. Prior to living with Jane, Sarah had her own place, was working, had a partner and felt good about her life. Since her relapse, Sarah lost all of the above. It is morning in Jane's home and yet again, Sarah has not cleared her dishes from after breakfast. Jane gently reminds Sarah that she agreed to pitch in with her share of the household duties and Sarah yells back "all you've been doing since I've been here is nagging at me. Just lay off and leave me alone. I hate you!!!" Jane is stunned and shocked because she believed she has been very mindful about not putting too many expectations onto Sarah since she's moved in. In this moment Jane has two choices: (1) assert her expectations and expect a fight to erupt; (2) try to find the kernel of truth in Sarah's anger and validate her anger, even though she may not agree or approve of the anger. Jane makes a decision to validate the anger and says "hey, okay, I get it... you are really angry right now. I could only guess how hard it is for you to be living back home after all these years of having your own place, so I understand why it would be so aggravating for you when I'm asking you to clean up after your self. I also get the anger because you must feel really lousy about living back home at 30." In this moment Jane decides to validate Sarah's anger. Jane also had to take a guess at what was behind Sarah's anger and that is what is referred to as the "kernel of truth". Jane guessed that the kernel of truth in Sarah's anger was her own frustration about having to move back home at 30. Jane was not agreeing or approving of Sarah's anger; Jane was simply letting Sarah know she understood it.

You may be thinking to yourself, "Sarah needs to follow through with Jane's expectations". Using validating statements is not about getting your loved one to do something you need them to do, it is **only** a communication skill to help your loved one feel heard, seen and understood. There are other skills to use to help you communicate setting your boundaries.

gestures, such as a hug or a smile.



First step to validating

To validate effectively, you will need to be completely emotionally present with your loved one. You want to be calm and grounded when validating. This may be difficult if you are getting triggered by the inaccurate expression your loved one is showing. Inaccurate expression is when you think or believe your loved one is overreacting to the situation they are struggling with.

For example, in Jane's situation, you may think Sarah's anger was not justified because (1) Sarah agreed to the expectations before moving back home; (2) her anger was over the top for being gently reminded to put away her cup and bowl. It would have been easy for Jane to react to Sarah's anger (inaccurate expression) instead of validating the kernel of truth in her anger which may be "it sucks to be 30 and living back home".

You won't always know why your loved one is feeling the way they are and that is why sometimes you have to guess. Try to mind read what your loved one is feeling. You will only be able to do this if you are not reacting to the inaccurate expression of emotion.

Tips

Providing validation is easier if you know what you are wanting to validate. You should try to validate

- Feeling or emotions
- A want or desire for something
- Belief, opinions or thoughts about something
- True values about something
- How difficult a task is
- How hard your loved one is trying to accomplish something
- Things your loved one does that helps his/her mental health
- Things your loved one does for others
- Efforts made
- Normalize what your loved one is feeling and/or thinking.

Validation is not agreeing or approving

This is an important point to remind yourself of because you can fall into the trap of thinking you don't want to validate something you don't agree with. Validation is not about agreeing or approving, it is about letting your loved one know you **UNDERSTAND** their feelings.

In Jane's story, Jane made a decision to try to understand and validate Sarah's anger. Jane did not want to get into an argument with Sarah about Sarah not having the right to feel angry when being told to put away her dishes because ultimately Sarah has the right to feel what ever she chooses to feel about being told to put away the dishes, and only Sarah can change how she feels about that. Jane also knew that if she tried to tell Sarah she has no right to be angry with her, it would lead to another argument and Sarah would likely become even angrier. In Jane's decision to validate Sarah's anger, Sarah calmed down and felt that her mother understood the pain and frustration she was experiencing about having lost her independence.

from becoming worse.



Tips for staying calm

One way to stay grounded and calm before validating is to practise mindfulness. If you feel you are going to be reactive, first focus your attention on your breathing before responding or take a time out.

A second way to find your calm is to remember the 4 Basic Assumptions.

1. Benign interpretation (you don't attach hidden meaning to what your loved one is saying or doing)
2. There is no one absolute truth (everyone has a right to think and/or feel and it's not wrong or right, it just is)
3. Everyone is doing the best they can in the moment
4. Everyone needs to keep trying and try differently next time

If you stay focused on these 4 basic assumptions, you will less likely respond with reactivity.



Self validation

When you are in a supportive role it is easy to lose sight of your own needs and feelings. This is where self validation is important. You want to remember your feelings and thoughts are also valid. You want to honour and give space to your thoughts and feelings. This is you practising self care and you know self care is important so you can keep supporting your loved one. Self invalidation is when you don't know what you are feeling, you ignore what you are feeling when you know what you feel, you say to yourselves that what you are feelings doesn't matter, you allow someone to treat you disrespectfully, and you don't observe your limits.



How does it relate to your loved one's recovery?

and fully accepted for who they are. Just imagine how good it would feel to know you have one person in your life, who 100% accepts you for who you are, with faults and strengths. It's a powerful gift you can give, one that will help your loved one move forward in other areas of their life and recovery.

When you are able to create a validating environment it can slow down the negative reactivity in your loved one, may decrease anger in your loved one, and enhance self-respect and problem solving skills in your loved one. All things that are important for your loved one's recovery.

RESOURCES

Videos explaining validation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HANLHwZ47Hc>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLR5h6h7mJk&feature=youtu.be>

Video from Dr. Alan Fruzzetti

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDSIYTQX_dk

Cartoon video demonstrating validation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUno4r4i3MQ>

Information adapted from Psychologytoday.com; Sashbear Foundation



Reflective Box

in that you have had a hard time coping with. Now I would like you to write out on a piece of paper one validating statement you could say to your loved one to let them know that you understand why they engage in that behaviour. Remember validating is not agreeing or approving, it just letting your loved one know that you understand them. Now I encourage you to say that validating statement to your loved one when the time seems appropriate and right.

Remember, if you want to get better at validating you have to keep practicing.



There are no current
updates

CONTACT

Mental Health and Substance Use Family Support Services
Monday-Friday
9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
(hours may vary to include evenings)

1 (833) 898-6200

Are you in a crisis?

Call the Fraser Health crisis line:

604-951-8855 or
1-877-820-7444 (toll free)

Trained volunteers provide emotional crisis support, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



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