



Expanding the V in GIVE: Levels of Validation

Pay Attention: Look interested in the other person instead of bored (no multitasking - turn off the phone, computer, and TV). Make eye contact, demonstrate expression on your face.

Reflect Back: Say back what you heard the other person say or do, to be sure you understand exactly what the person is saying (eg., “Sounds like you’re very stressed about xyz. It’s hard having so much on your plate.”) Avoid judgmental language or tone of voice.

“Read Minds”: Be sensitive to what is *not* being said by the other person. Pay attention to facial expressions, body language, what is happening, and what you know about the person already. Show you understand in words or by your actions. Check it out and make sure you are right. Let go if you are not. (eg., “It must be stressful to have so many assignments due on the same week” or “I remember how tough the holidays were for you last year. How are you managing this year?”)

Understand: Look for how what the other person is feeling, thinking, or doing makes sense, based on the person’s past experiences, present situation, and/or current state of mind or physical condition (i.e., the causes). For example, “I understand why you’d want to skip dance tomorrow considering how anxious you’re feeling about the performance.” This doesn’t mean you’re validating the proposed behavior of skipping dance....you’re validating the emotion that’s motivating that urge. And it will be much harder to discourage the behavior without first offering validation.

Acknowledge the Valid: Look for how the person’s feelings, thinking, or actions are valid responses because they fit current facts, or are understandable because they are a logical response to current facts. If you’re stuck finding what’s valid, try to label the emotion they’re experiencing and acknowledge how tough that can be to feel. Even if you’re completely disagreeing with another person you can validate that you’re both feeling stuck and passionate.

Show Equality: Be yourself! Don’t “one-up” the other person. Treat them equal, not as fragile or incompetent.

Adapted From DBT Skills Training Handouts and Worksheets, Second Edition, by Marsha M. Linehan.