Validating Emotions

Validation- the practice of treating something as real

- When practicing validation, you are responding to emotions (that are real) rather than content (which may or may not be real—and should not be disputed)

- When you successfully validate another individual by communicating that you understand the emotion, you reduce that emotion. When you address or contend content, you increase the emotion

Required components of validation

1. Regulated your own emotions (check in with your body and your initial emotional reactions)

2. Be awake, alert, and interested (be present)

3. Make encouraging noises and communicate interest non-verbally

4. Name the emotion - Dan Siegle’s “Name it to Tame it”
   - (e.g. “I can tell you are very sad about that.” “When I hear you talk about that, I can hear how scary all this is for you.”)

Components 1-4 MUST be present to validate an emotion. You get bonus points if you can…

5. Validate by context
   - Communicate that the emotion makes sense based on environment (e.g. “Anyone in that situation would feel that way.”)
   - Use validation by context only if it makes sense to do so

6. Validate by referencing to self
   - (e.g. “If I was in this situation, I would feel exactly the same way.” “I would be mad, too, if…”)
   - This is NOT supposed to be a long story about you or about your own experience, we are just normalizing the emotional experience here

7. Validate by referencing the other’s history
   - You may not feel that way, but given the person’s past experience, their reaction makes sense
   - PEOPLE ALWAYS MAKE SENSE IN THE CONTEXT OF THEIR STORY
This means NOT saying or communicating things like, “No one in the world would feel that way but you,” “I don’t get why you are so upset” or “it’s no big deal”

Components 7-9 are the most powerful ways to validate an emotion, but also the most risky

8. Validate by using accurate reflection
   • When you see an emotion but you don’t understand where it’s coming from, reflect back content to get more information (this is more than just parroting)
   • Be prepared: This technique will give you more emotions
     i. Are you prepared to take in the information?
   ii.

9. Validate by using radical genuineness
   • Describe your own emotional response to their experience
   • (e.g. “Aww that breaks my heart.” “I wasn’t even there and I’m upset”)
   • It MUST be genuine. (You must actually be experiencing it)
   • Say it, don’t spray it. (Don’t act a larger than the emotion your child demonstrates; model effectively communicating upsetting emotions.)

10. Utilize functional validation
    • Treat the emotion as so real that you take action to help manage (NOT FIX) the emotion
    • (e.g. Offer a Kleenex, provide comfort, pause go for a walk to relieve anger)
    • This is NOT fixing the problem that caused the emotion or advice giving

Validate when you see the emotion coming up, it doesn’t help to ignore the families emotional experience or pretend you don’t notice.

What to do after you’ve validated:
   ● ONLY once the emotional has come down, is the appropriate time to problem-solve.
     (wait for an affect change, a deep breath, a change in tone or facial expression)
   ● An affect change is your cue that you have validated the emotion and you can move on, resume the session or begin to address other needs in the family or system
   ● When problem solving:
     o Ask the parent what their plan for dealing with the situation is. The family may have a great solution. If it’s a solution that isn’t possible, ask the parent if you can offer an alternative. (Provider: “Hmmm. Can I offer a suggestion?)
     o This requires that you demonstrate respect and a belief that the family can find a solution to their identified challenge