

# **A FAMILY GUIDE** **TO VALIDATION**

*What to do when someone you love has Borderline  
Personality Disorder.*

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**VALIDATION:** The Art of Affirming Another

Getting along with someone with BPD can be very difficult. Situations that to you seem simple and uncomplicated may provoke behaviours and feelings in someone with BPD that seem *inappropriate to the situation*.

***Step One for developing better communication with someone with BPD is to validate and endorse their feelings.***

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|--|---|
| <p><b>When we validate, we:</b><br/>accept and verbally recognise another person's emotions and feelings as being their very own experience of the world.</p>  | <p><b>Validation is:</b><br/>Actively listening to someone else.<br/>Actually hearing someone else.<br/>Accepting someone else.</p> |
| <p><b>When we validate, we:</b></p>  | <p><b>"WE GET IT"</b></p>   |
| <p>1. Reflect back to the person their own feelings or emotions that we recognise.<br/>"I see you are sad about this situation."<br/>"I can sense how happy you are today."<br/>"I am aware of how angry this made you."</p> | <p><b>Validation means</b> we received the non-verbal "feeling" message someone has sent us.</p>                                    |
| <p>2. Recognise and accept another person's emotions as their expression of their own self.</p>  | <p>By learning to validate the feelings of someone with BPD, you help them and you help yourself.</p>                               |

Example: "I can see that you seem very angry. Although I wouldn't be this angry, I recognise how angry you are and I accept that it is how you are feeling. Anger is your emotional response to this situation."

## **BENEFITS AND DANGERS**

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### **Benefits of Validation:**

- Signals that you completely **accept** another person.
- Enhances **communication**
- Encourage **intimacy**
- Develops the ability of someone with BPD to **trust their feelings**
- Develops the ability of someone with BPD to **trust you**
- Decreases the **sense of isolation** someone with BPD often feels
- Helps someone with BPD to **feel connected** to other people
- When you do it right, you **validate yourself as well.**

### **Dangers of not Validating:**

- If you withhold validation from someone with BPD until you "understand the other person" this is the message you are really sending:  
*"I am your emotional thermometer. Your feelings are not valid unless they match mine."*
- Someone with BPD is on emotional quicksand, so rejection of feelings in a situation is experienced as *total* rejection. A specific rejection of a feeling in a situation becomes a global, whole person rejection.
- Judgement of how a person with BPD handled a specific situation is experienced as judgement of their *whole person*, not just the situation.
- Getting a message that their emotional perceptions are flawed teaches someone with BPD to distrust their perceptions. This makes it difficult for them to make decisions, to take action or to solve problems. This is called "Learned Helplessness"

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## **VALIDATION IS NOT understanding, praising, consoling, agreeing with, or fixing.**

- You do **not need to "understand"** what someone is feeling to validate them.
- You do **not need to know "why"** the person is feeling what they are feeling to validate them.
- You do **not have to "approve or disapprove"** of someone's feelings to validate them.
- You do **not have to "agree or disagree"** with someone's perceptions to validate them.
- You do **not have to praise someone's behaviour** to validate them.
- You do **not have to react to a situation in the same** as someone else to validate.

## WHY IS VALIDATION SO DIFFICULT?

| <b>YOU</b>  | <b>REMEMBER</b>   |
|---|---|
| <p>You don't understand the intensity of feelings. You wouldn't get as angry in situations, as sad, or as happy. The intense feelings frighten others. You really don't understand why someone with BPD feels what they feel.</p> | <p><b>YOU DON'T HAVE TO UNDERSTAND.</b></p>                 |
| <p>You don't agree with the evaluation of a situation by someone with BPD and you are uncomfortable with their feelings and responses.</p>  | <p><b>YOU DON'T HAVE TO AGREE OR TO BE COMFORTABLE.</b></p> |
| <p>Your perceptions of a situation would lead to different responses, however it is not you who is experiencing this situation.</p>   | <p><b>YOU DON'T HAVE TO REACT.</b></p>                      |
| <p>You are uncomfortable with the way someone with BPD expresses their emotions. You would not express yourself in the same way.</p>  | <p><b>THIS IS NOT ABOUT YOUR REALITY.</b></p>               |

## THE DO'S AND DON'TS FOR HELPING A PERSON WITH BPD

### DO ...

#### **LISTEN with full attention**

#### **LISTEN to feelings, not words**

#### **LISTEN to the needs**

People with BPD are extremely sensitive and will experience your lack of full attention as a rejection.

Learn to identify the emotion the person is feeling: Example, "I can understand how that experience could make you feel sad. If that had happened to me, I would feel sad, too."

Try to figure out what the person needs at the moment. If you aren't sure, ask: "What is it you would need from me to feel better?"

### DON'T ... respond in the following ways that won't work!

#### **EMOTIONAL RESPONSES**

#### **LOGICAL RESPONSES**

#### **ULTIMATUM RESPONSES**

#### **CONTROLLING RESPONSES**

#### **"FIXING" RESPONSES**

Anger, blame, criticism, guilt-trips or judgements get in the way of problem solving.

Someone with BPD suffers from cognitive distortions in their thinking (black-white thinking). Using logical reasoning won't work. Do not enter into the details of any discussions or arguments. Don't defend yourself, explain or justify your behaviour.

People with BPD have a biological inability to control impulses and regulate moods. They simply can't 'JUST SAY NO'. They don't know how. Rules and ultimatums are even more confusing because, to them, they appear to be the result of your inability to hear their problems.

Don't keep trying to win the battle, you will surely lose the war. Even if you do know better, so what! Trying to dominate a situation with someone with BPD completely invalidates them, creating stress that can aggravate symptoms. Remember, these are exquisitely sensitive people. Be Gentle!

Don't try to "fix everything" or solve problems for someone with BPD. When you do this, you are teaching what doesn't help them and doesn't help you, "Learned Helplessness". They need to learn to "fix" things themselves.

## **BE A COACH, NOT A CO-DEPENDENT**

**Instead, try asking: "How could you solve this problem?  
What skills could you use?"**

REMEMBER: HOW YOU **THINK** ABOUT A PERSON ...

DETERMINES HOW YOU **FEEL** ABOUT THE PERSON ...

DETERMINES HOW YOU **TREAT** THE PERSON ...

DETERMINES HOW YOU FIND **SOLUTIONS**.

### **HELPFUL HINTS**

**for coping with someone with Borderline Personality Disorder**

**1. LEARN:**

Read all you can; question professionals; seek information.

**2. ACCEPT:**

- BPD is a severe and persistent mental illness.
- Someone you love has BPD.
- BPD is caused by a complex interplay of biological, social and/or environmental factors. For some people these factors may relate to childhood experiences of trauma or neglect.
- Treatment for BPD works. BPD is not hopeless.
- BPD improves with cognitive behavioural therapy and skills training.

**3. PRACTICE:**

- Validating
- The DO'S and DON'TS
- Change your attitude to build a better relationship with someone with BPD so that they will start to HEAR YOU

**4. ADVOCATE** on their behalf.