

Reflection Questions—Self Validation

- 1) Name one or two feelings that make you feel uncomfortable.
- 2) When you have this feeling, how do you usually respond? What are some of the things that you say to yourself? What are some of the things that you do when you have this feeling?
- 3) Can you imagine a better way to respond (a way that would help you tolerate the feeling and get through it more effectively)? What would that be?
- 4) Do you ever have a hard time knowing *what* you are feeling? What helps you figure out what your real feelings are?

Self Validation

By Karyn Hall, PhD

Validation is like relationship glue. Validating someone brings you closer. Validating yourself is like glue for fragmented parts of your identity. Validating yourself will help you accept and better understand yourself, which leads to a stronger identity and better skills at managing intense emotions.

Being out of control of your emotions is a painful experience and damaging to relationships. Knowing how to self-validate is important to learning to manage your emotions effectively. Self-validation means you can accept your internal experience as understandable and acceptable. But learning to self-validate is not so easy. How do you apply the six levels of validation to self-validation? Notice that mindfulness and self-validation go hand in hand.

Level 1 Be Present

Be mindful of your emotions without pushing them away. To be present also means to ground yourself and not dissociate, daydream, suppress or numb your emotions. Being present means listening to yourself. Feeling the pain of sadness, hurt, and fear is most challenging and difficult.

At the same time avoiding emotions results in quite negative consequences, while accepting allows emotions to pass and helps build resiliency. Being present for yourself validates that you matter and that you have the strength to feel.

Level 2 Accurate Reflection

Reflect means to make manifest or apparent. For self-validation, accurate reflection is acknowledging your internal state to yourself. Perhaps you reflect on what triggered the emotion and when. Maybe you reflect on the ways you feel the emotion in your body and consider the actions that go with the emotion. Reflecting means observing and describing, components of mindfulness. When you observe and describe your internal experience, you do not interpret or guess or make assumptions. You would say, "I feel angry and it started yesterday after my friend cancelled lunch. I sense tightness in my stomach, so maybe there is fear as well."

Saying, "I am a total loser and no one wants to spend any time with me," would not be stating the facts of your experience. Stating the facts of your experience is validating and helps build trust in your internal experience. Interpreting your experience in ways that you cannot observe to be true invalidates and leads to distrust in your internal experience and more

Level 3: Guessing

Sometimes you won't be sure what you are feeling or thinking. In these situations you may want to say something like, "If someone else were in this situation they would probably feel sad. Am I sad?" You might also guess by looking at the actions you want to do. If you want to hide, maybe you are feeling shame. Maybe you are thinking shame thoughts. You can notice where you feel body sensations, such as fear is often felt in the throat. If you are feeling fear, maybe you are thinking scary thoughts. Guessing your emotions and thoughts based on the information you have will help you learn more about yourself.

Level 4: Validating by History

Sometimes you will have thoughts and feelings that are based on events that have happened in your past. Maybe you are afraid when people argue because in the past arguments led to your being hurt. Validate yourself by saying, "It's acceptable and understandable that you are afraid of ..."

Level 5: Normalizing

Sometimes people who have intense emotions don't see any of their emotional reactions as being normal. Everyone has emotions. It's normal to feel sad, angry, hurt, ashamed, or any other emotion. The issue sometimes is that most people would not feel this emotion in this situation. That is important to realize. At the same time, it's just as important to validate when others would feel the same way and accept that as well. If you are sad because you didn't get a

job you wanted, remember that others would be sad if that happened to them. Check out whether what you are feeling is what most other people would experience and validate those feelings as such.

Level 6: Radical Genuineness

In terms of self-validation, this means being your real self and not lying to yourself. It means that you don't pretend to be someone you aren't. Rejecting who you are is one of the highest levels of invalidation. An important distinction is that who you are is different from what you do. You are not your behavior, yet changing some of your behaviors may alleviate some of your suffering.

Self-validation is one of the critical steps for living with intense emotions. It is part of forming relationships and thriving. Practice and more practice will help you self-validate automatically.