

Validation

Graybar's 1st Law of Human Behavior

"All behavior is a message, and a behavior won't begin to change until the person knows the message has been received"

Validation (also known as "mirroring" or "reflecting")

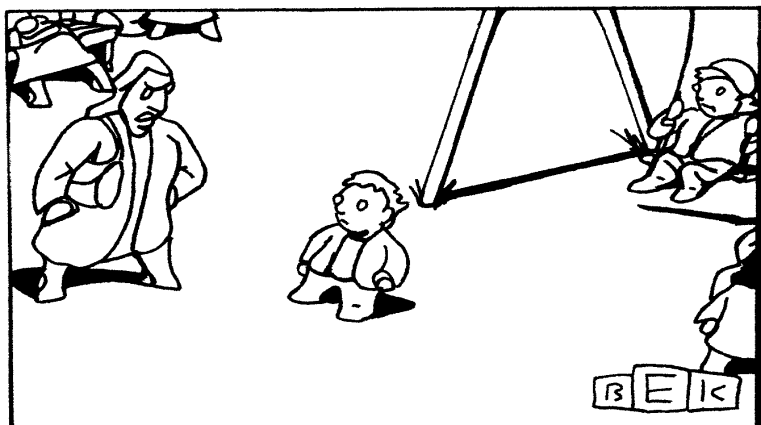
- Closes the communication loop: "message received"
- Provides accurate and nuanced emotional vocabulary
 - "Frustrated" instead of "Angry"
 - "Nervous" instead of "Scared"
- Replaces ineffective *reassurance* in many situations
- *Connects* certain thoughts and feelings with certain situations
 - Frustration with a challenging homework problem
 - Jealousy at another child's birthday party
- *Disconnects* thoughts and feelings from old behavior patterns and *redirects* child toward a better behavior
 - You can be angry and not hit; *use your words*
 - You can be nervous and still do what's expected; *be brave*
- Can include describing the interpersonal process or dance; both currently and what's possible. I like to include a "time stamp" such as "now" or "here" that suggests this unhappy state of thinking and feeling is both situation specific and temporary.
 - "You're having those scary ideas right now and you want me to go upstairs with you now. I can do that in a few minutes".
- Promotes "mentalizing": the awareness of, and curiosity about, one's own thoughts and feelings and those of others. Curiosity is a new and different relationship to the thought or feeling instead of automatically regarding it as true and a problem.
 - "Huh, I wonder why that thought is showing up now?"
- Young children, and all of us under stress, will regard thoughts as literal and true. This leads to big upsets when others have different ideas or the child's expectations aren't met. Validation directs thinking toward the idea of "ideas"; mere thoughts that may or may not match with reality or come true in the future.
 - "Ah, you had the idea there were popsicles in the freezer"
 - "Oh, you were expecting to go straight home and now you're angry because we need to go by the store"

- Validation says nothing about your agreeing with that thought or feeling or the “appropriateness” of your child’s state at the time

Validation Techniques

- It’s best to leave out the “I understand” as in “I understand you’re upset”. It’s unnecessary and kids will go right to “You DON’T understand!” and now you’re arguing about whether or not you truly understand.
- Use emotional vocabulary that is as specific as possible, adjusted for the child’s age. Instead of “upset”, use a more specific or nuanced word as described above; “nervous”, “jealous”, “frustrated”, “contrary”. This is part of stepping back from and being interested in and curious about feelings and “ideas” instead of being pushed around by them. Introduce your child to new emotion words such as “dudgeon”. Look it up.
- Simple and specific “Ah” statements:
 - “Ah, you’re feeling *frustrated*”
 - “Ah, you’re having one of those ‘I can’t do it’ thoughts and you want my help”
- “I wonder” statements if you’re not sure what’s going on with your child or you want a more subtle or less intrusive approach at that moment.
 - “I wonder if you’re thinking you won’t know anyone there and that thought is inviting you to be nervous”
- “Refusal rights” with older kids
 - “I could be wrong, but you look like you’re feeling nervous right now”
- Always keep validation very, very brief. It’s not a lecture. It’s a simple and specific, “message received”.

Whole Body Validation



“Mommy needs to get mad at you in a weird calm voice now”

- 80% of human communication is **non-verbal**, and people will believe your non-verbals over your verbals

- So, resist taking on the opposite emotional state of your child in the moment; e.g., super-calm when he is angry or perky when he is sad. This is both invalidating and annoying.
- Instead, when you validate be O.K. with showing some emotion in line with what your child is feeling at the moment so that he knows you really get it. After all, the heart of validation is your expressing *empathy* for your child in that moment. Facial expression and tone of voice will help you do that in a meaningful way.
- Please note, *validation won't turn off your child's behavior like flipping a switch*, but it can be an important first step in winding down an emotional episode and getting to some reasonable communication, problem-solving and/or coping