Five Minutes to Thrive: Validation

Emotional validation is the process of learning about, understanding and expressing acceptance of another person's emotional experience. It is distinguished from emotional invalidation, in which when another person's emotional experiences are rejected, ignored or judged. Validation does not mean agreeing or approving. When your best friend or a family member makes a decision that you really don't think is wise, validation is a way of supporting them and strengthening the relationship while maintaining a different opinion. Validation is a way of communicating that the relationship is important and solid, even when you disagree on issues. Here are the steps of emotional validation.

Step 1: Identify and Acknowledge the Emotion
  ➢ Take time to listen to what the person is saying and what they are feeling; identify the emotion, "It sounds like you are feeling…" If you aren't sure what the person is feeling, just ask, "You seem… Is that what's going on?" If you're wrong, don't sweat it. Your efforts to understand show that you are willing to be present for the person physically & emotionally.

Step 2: Acknowledge the Source of the Emotion
  ➢ Identify the situation or cue that triggered the emotion. Ask what it is that is causing the response, e.g. "What is it that is making you feel that way?"

Step 3: Validate the Emotion
  ➢ You can validate the person's feelings by communicating that you accept what they are feeling, <u>even if you don't follow their reasoning</u> – e.g. "It's understandable that you would be feeling this way because of…" This step is about validating what the person is feeling, the emotion, <u>not the logic that brought on that emotion</u>. It's important to not judge or argue with the person, but to simply state your understanding of the feelings.

Note: validating the emotion will not make the emotion go away, but it will show understanding that what the person is feeling is normal and okay.

Validating someone's emotions does not mean that your thoughts and feelings are not right or as important. The purpose of validation is to connect and show understanding for others' feelings. Learning how to use validation effectively takes practice, but the rewards are worth it. The next time you talk with someone who is experiencing strong emotions about something, listen, acknowledge what the person is saying and validate the emotion.