

FAMILY SKILLS MODULE:

for use in

Family Skill Training

Alan E. Fruzzetti, Ph.D.
University of Nevada

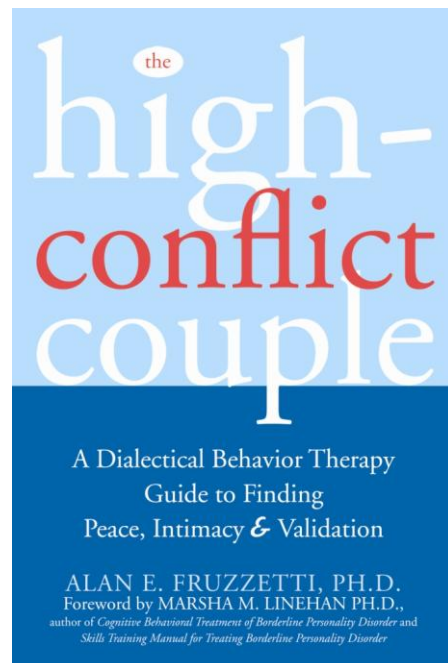
For more information, write:

Alan E. Fruzzetti, Ph.D.
Director, Dialectical Behavior Therapy
Program
Department of Psychology 298
University of Nevada
Reno, NV 89557-0062

email: aef@unr.edu

See also (for practice exercises):

*The High Conflict Couple: A DBT
Guide to Finding Peace, Intimacy, and
Validation* (New Harbinger Press) by
Alan Fruzzetti



HANDOUT 1

Awareness of Your Partner or Family Member

BALANCE IN RELATIONSHIPS

Me	You
My needs/desires	Your needs/desires
Logic/Emotion	Emotion/Logic
My goals	Your goals
My values	Your values
My problems	Your problems
My happiness	Your happiness

In a balanced relationship, each person is aware of herself/himself and the other person. *BOTH* sets are equally important to each person.

RELATIONAL (Interpersonal) MINDFULNESS

WHAT?

- **Observe:** just notice the other person
- **Describe:** Put words on the experience
- **Participate:** Involve yourself in the experience or activity with your relationship
family member

HOW?

- **Non-judgmentally:** let go of “shoulds” and right/wrong
- **One-mindfully:** only pay attention to the other person or your
- **Effectively:** Remember that this is someone you love & care about

DECREASE EMOTIONAL REACTIVITY

- Use Relational Mindfulness to sort out emotions, opinions, needs, wants, and to interrupt your negative reactions, anger, and toxic responses
- Be mindful of your role (as parent, partner, family member) and goals
- Be mindful of appropriate & effective timing of discussions
- When tired, hungry, sick, or upset, remember that emotional reactivity is high
- Increase mindfulness of pleasant things that your family member does for you, you do for your family member, or you do together

THESE STEPS ARE NECESSARY TO MAKE UNDERSTANDING,
AND THUS VALIDATION, POSSIBLE.

Relational Mindfulness, continued

Options for your attention/mental orientation:

- **Observe/notice – take the observer role**
This is especially helpful if involvement/participation is very painful, leads you to react in a problematic way, or you are avoiding something important. You can notice yourself or another.
- **Describe – this can also be from the “observer” role**
Again, this is very helpful to avoid/let go of judgments. Try describing as you would if you were a novelist or radio announcer, capturing details without commentary or opinions (or judgments). Again, you can describe your own thoughts, sensations, reactions, behaviors, etc., or the OBSERVABLE things another person is doing.
- **Participate – let go of observing, describing, or anything except actively immersing yourself into the moment, into the activity**
This is where you let go of being self-conscious, self-evaluating, let go of the chatter in your mind and move toward just experiencing the moment, situation, etc.
- **Make Judgments: right/wrong or good/bad or should/shouldn't**
Making judgments is problematic, especially concerning someone you love. This might take the form of bitter complaints, expectations that the other person should change, etc., and is very often accompanied by strong anger, sarcasm, and/or contempt.
- **Numb out**
This is where you stop acting effectively and instead go into a daze, or maybe even fool yourself into thinking you are just coping. Instead, you really are just avoiding something important.
- **Hyperactivity: run around doing many things**
This is another way to numb out, but looks like you're being very productive because of all the energy you're putting out.
- **Focus on or lament the past, or focus on the future, hate the present**
This is easy to do when just trying to “get through” the present activity. This is also “means/ends” thinking: I am only doing this in order to get X. We spend 100% of our time in the present.

HANDOUT 2

Letting Go of Anger, Finding the Other Emotions

Anger as a primary emotion: normative and justified in the situation, *and* effective to experience or express

VERSUS

Anger as a secondary emotion: non-normative or not justified in the situation, or problematic/ineffective to experience or express

Primary and Secondary *Conditioned* Emotional Reactions

Primary or Effective

Secondary or Problematic

Sadness, disappointment

Anger

Guilt or shame

Anger

Fear

Anger

Jealousy

Anger

***Judgments* (about oneself or another) also lead to anger**

See Emotion Regulation Handout #4 for a full description of emotions: situations, sensations, and so on (Linehan).

HANDOUT 3

Using Relational Mindfulness in Relationships

BEING TOGETHER WHEN YOU ARE TOGETHER

There are 3 ways to be together:

1. *Passively together*

Both people are physically present (e.g., same room or place) but are not interacting with each other and are not focusing attention on each other. They are doing separate things or activities (for example, reading, chores), and attention is focused primarily on those activities.

2. *Actively together*

Both people are doing some activity together, such as walking, watching a TV show or movie, eating, or sleeping. Attention is focused primarily on these activities, but there is some awareness of each other.

3. *Interactively together*

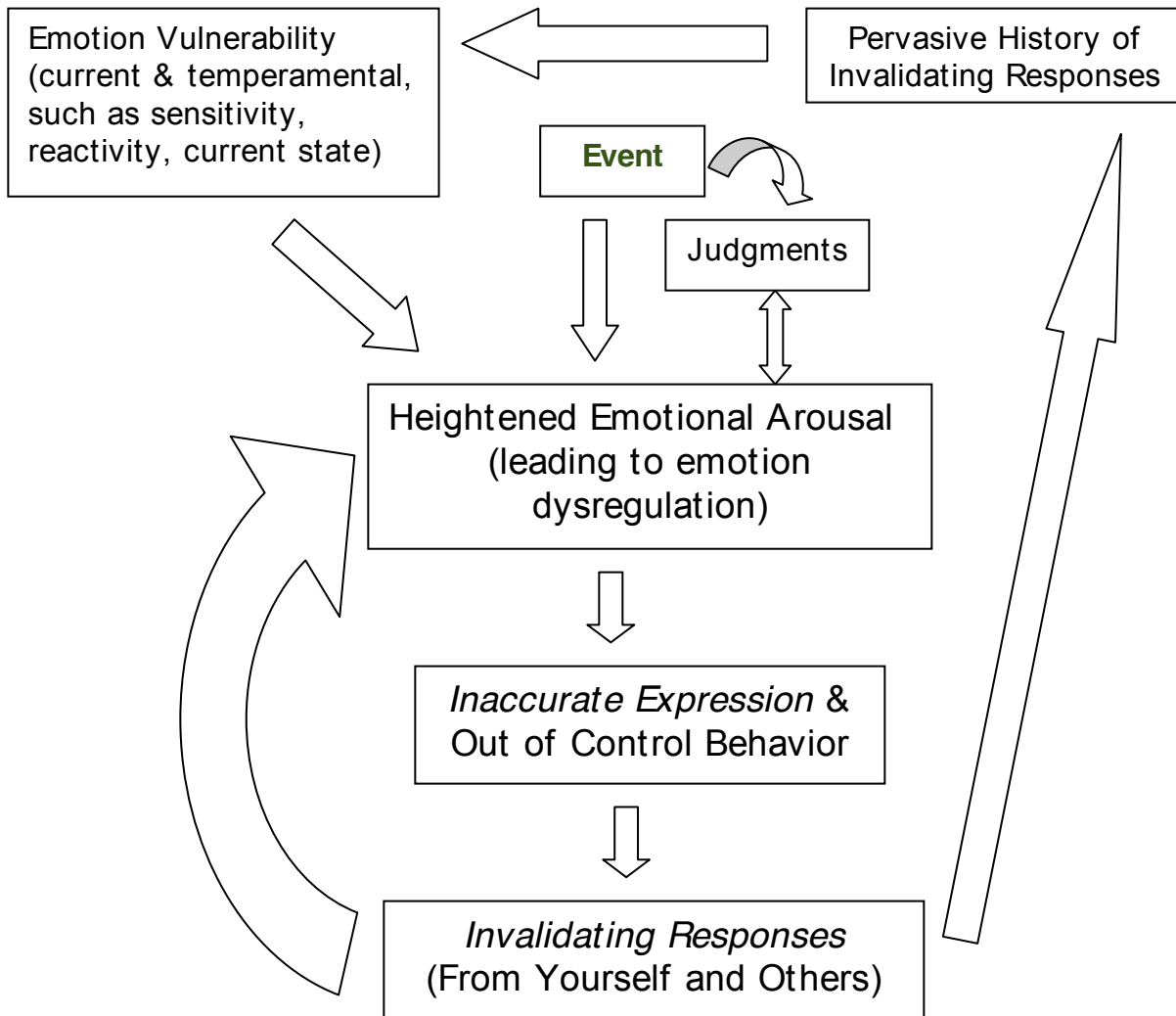
Regardless of other activities, attention and awareness is focused on each other. There may be a lot of talking, or very little, but there is enough communication for both to know that you are doing something together.

Figure 1

Why are Accurate Expression and Validation Important?

Transactional Model:

Emotion Dysregulation ↔ Invalidation



Adapted from Fruzzetti, Shenk, & Hoffman, 2005

HANDOUT 4

EXPRESSING YOURSELF EFFECTIVELY

In order to be understood, or for another person to respond in the way you want, you first must be able to identify accurately what you want (or feel, think, etc.) and tell the other person in a way he or she can understand.

ACCURATE EXPRESSION: TIMING

Know what you want:

- use mindfulness to identify what you really feel, think, and want

Is the time right?

- use mindfulness of the other person to figure out whether she or he is able to validate or work on this with you **RIGHT NOW**
- if not, **WAIT**
- if the timing is right, tell the other person what your goal is, get agreement on the goal, and proceed

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Goal:

Sort out feelings

Communicate emotion, want, opinion

Get the other person to change

Support the other person

Correct injustice

Strategy:

Describe situation, reaction
(use Handout 4)

Describe (use Mindfulness)

Describe situation, problem mindfully;
work together on solution; follow
through with support, coaching, etc.

Validate at multiple levels

Describe situation, emotion, and
negotiate

HANDOUT 5

What Validation Is, Why It Is Important

WHAT IS VALIDATION?

IDENTIFYING AND COMMUNICATING YOUR UNDERSTANDING IN A CLEAR WAY

- Communicate what you understand about the situation
- Legitimize the “facts” (including the fact of the other’s responses)
- Explain your own feelings after expressing understanding
- Acknowledge the situation, the other’s opinions, feelings, etc.
- Respect emotions, desires, reactions and goals

WHY IS VALIDATION IMPORTANT?

Validation:

- *Is the core of communication (along with accurate disclosure)*
- *Reduces negative emotional arousal*
- *Builds trust and slows negative reactivity*
- *Maintains fairness and decreases anger*
- *Enhances self-respect*
- *Is the key to getting through “rough” spots in your relationship*
- *Makes problem-solving, closeness, & other kinds of support possible*

Invalidation is toxic to relationships and to individuals

REMEMBER:

VALIDATING IS NOT NECESSARILY AGREEING.

VALIDATING DOESN’T MEAN YOU LIKE IT.

ONLY VALIDATE THE VALID.

HANDOUT 6

What, When, & How to Validate

TARGETS: What should I validate?

- **Feelings or emotions**
- **Legitimacy in wanting something**
- **Beliefs, opinions, or thoughts about something**
- **True values about something**
- **How difficult a task is**
- **How hard a person is trying to accomplish something**
- **Things a person does that are effective for herself or himself**
- **Things a person does for another**

FACTORS TO REMEMBER

- **Notice if the timing is right**
- **Try to take turns: when it's your turn to listen, listen mindfully and don't think about what you're going to say next**
- **Use an effective voice tone**
- **Keep eye contact natural and respectful**
- **Be aware of "personal space" (stay close enough, but don't invade)**
- **Don't hesitate to ask if the other person actually feels "validated"**
- **Practice non-blaming, non-black & white thinking (validating the other does not mean your perspective isn't also valid)**
- **When providing difficult feedback or disagreeing, do so only when the other person is ready and willing to discuss this; always validate first and remind the other of your goals and caring**
- **Remember that one effective, step forward is better than ten backwards**

HANDOUT 6, continued

HOW DO I VALIDATE ANOTHER PERSON?

ANY WAY you can search for understanding and communicate that understanding.

Different ways to validate verbally, in a conversation:

- 1) ***pay attention, listen actively***
use good eye contact & body posture to communicate that you are listening non-judgmentally
- 2) ***reflect her or his feelings descriptively (non-judgmentally)***
let yourself feel a little bit of what she or he is feeling, and let yourself show it (voice tone, facial expression, posture)
- 3) ***summarize her or his or my perspective descriptively, for understanding (and not to disagree, criticize, or judge, not to change her or his mind or goals, nor to get her or him to do something differently)***
clarify what it is that you hear, that you understand; ask questions
- 4) ***show tolerance; give the “benefit of the doubt” and put the thing you are trying to validate into a broader context; see how the behavior is valid in the other person’s life, given their history and experiences describe HOW what the other person is saying (feeling, thinking, their actions, etc.) DOES make sense in terms of her or his life experiences and life struggles***
- 5) ***be mindful of the other person & the relationship; stay non-judgmental; normalize thoughts, feelings, and wants in present circumstances if the other’s behavior is normal, or makes sense, say so; find parts of their experience that are normative (e.g., emotions or desires)***
- 6) ***practice willingness, be genuine; treat the other as an equal, not as fragile or incompetent if the other person has strong emotions, help her or him manage them (don’t change the subject); if they’re acting ineffectively, tell them in a supportive, caring (but clear) way***
- 7) ***self-disclose your own vulnerability (this is a form of validation) if the other person is vulnerable with you, it is very validating to be vulnerable in return (especially concerning your relationship)***

HANDOUT 6, continued

Also, you can validate without talking:

- **Respond in a way (action, not just words) that *takes her or him seriously if hungry, get him or her something to eat; if wanting company, join her or him or go do something with her or him; if wanting some “alone” time, allow it; if not wanting to talk right now, let the issue go, at least temporarily***
- **Provide nurturance and support**
think: “How would I like someone to treat me in this situation?”
ask: “What would you like me to do? What would be soothing?”
- **Balance and use interpersonal effectiveness skills (Linehan)**
balance the importance of your relationship with your self-respect (and any particular objectives you have)
remember: just because you can do something doesn’t mean that you have to; and just because it’s not your job doesn’t mean that you can’t
What would work? What is important?

HANDOUT 7

How to Validate in Difficult Situations

THE MANY WAYS TO INVALIDATE THE VALID

(or, 101 ways to corrode your relationship and help the other person, and yourself, to be miserable)

- **Do things to diminish safety (make threats, be coercive or aggressive)**
- **Ignore or don't pay attention (or pretend not to pay attention)**
- **Minimizing feelings or their legitimacy**
- **Be critical or judgmental; put the worst possible "spin" on the behavior**
- **Let miscommunication stand unrepaired**
- **Be willful (focus on being right instead of effective or decent)**
- **Insist on your solution to the problem instead of solving the problem**
- **Make assumptions about another person that are not mindful, are judgmental, not consistent with the facts, or the worst "spin"**
- **Up the ante: escalate conflict**
- **Try to win an argument by being more hostile or attacking**
- **Don't pay attention to another's pain or suffering**
- **Engage in "controlling" behavior**
- **Engage in crazy-making behavior (e.g., "gaslighting," be dishonest, or patronizing, insist she or he feels or thinks something even though they say they don't – even if you are "well-intended")**
- **Don't validate enough**
- **Treat the person as though she or he is fragile**

GETTING YOURSELF TO VALIDATE

- **Take the other person's perspective (relational mindfulness)**
- **Remember the foundation: this is your family member, your own nest**
- **Empathy = understanding and validating the other person**
- **Reality acceptance (what "is" versus what "should be")**
- **Effective assumptions promote effective behavior: when in doubt, identify assumptions, remember goals, and proceed from wise mind**

HANDOUT 8

True and Genuine (Radical) Acceptance

STEP 1: TOLERANCE

- **Stop trying to get the other person to change her or his behavior**
- **Must tolerate your own *disappointment***
 - let go of judgments
 - let go of anger
 - actually grieve the loss (you're not getting what you wanted)
- **The other person's behavior may still bother you and you may still be miserable**

STEP 2: BE MINDFUL OF NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES

- **The focus turns from tolerating disappointment/anger to noticing the full range of effects of your previous "don't accept" position**

The consequences of disappointment & anger include:

- being more vulnerable to further conflict
- more emotional distance
- more misery for the other person
- more misery of your own
- one or both stop participating in the relationship, which leads to further distance, conflict, and unhappiness

HANDOUT 8, continued

STEP 3: LET GO OF SUFFERING & ENGAGE YOUR LIFE NOW

- **Recontextualize other's behavior: mindfully, non-judgmentally bring into focus as context all the things that you like or love or value or appreciate about the other person**
- **Understand the "meaning" of the other person's behavior (the one you don't like)**
 - **given her or his life experiences**
 - **given your relationship experiences (including right now)**
 - **related emotions, beliefs, desires, etc.**
- **Appreciate the she or he is exactly as she or he should be; enjoy this aspect of the other person**
- **Participate in the relationship fully: This is someone you love, part of your life**
- **Be committed, even passionate about making the relationship work**
- **Validate, validate, validate (and self-validate, self-validate, self-validate)**
- **Participate in your life**

HANDOUT 9

HOW CAN I VALIDATE MYSELF?

- **Be mindful of thoughts & feelings: observe, describe, participate, non-judgmentally; just notice (what is, is)**
- **Notice thinking, and observe (not necessarily participating in the thought)**
- **Accurately identify feelings (primary emotions)**
- **Allow myself to feel my primary emotions**
- **Respect my own values**
- **Search for understanding and legitimacy, honestly & non-judgmentally**
- **Try radical acceptance of being, of my feelings, of thoughts, of actions**
- **Practice willingness with respect to my own experience**
- **Recontextualize the thing(s) I tend to invalidate (broaden and balance the context of the thing you're invalidating)**
- **Respond in a way (action) that takes myself seriously**
- **Normalize my normative behavior**
- **Recognize problematic behavior and target it for change**
- **Provide myself nurturance and support, or seek it from another**
- **Use wise mind**

Essence of Self-Validation

- **Let go of judgments of yourself (which typically lead to shame)**
- **Notice shame, and (if you haven't truly transgressed against your values), let it go and finding the alternative, primary emotion**
- **Describe situations, acknowledge wants and preferences**
- **Practice just being who you are, just notice & describe (see homework)**
- **When in doubt, imagine that someone you care about and respect is in your situation ... how would you respond to her or him?
Respond this way to yourself.**

“When you understand, you cannot help but love. You cannot get angry. To develop understanding, you have to practice looking ... with eyes of compassion. When you understand, you love. And when you love you naturally act in way that can relieve the suffering of people.”

- Thich Nhat Hanh

How To Validate Others Homework Sheet

Name: _____

Date: _____

Fill out this sheet during or just after a situation in which you were trying to validate another person. Describe the situation (context). Use the back of the page if you need more room.

Prompting event: Be specific.

Primary Target: Describe how you tried to understand the other and how you tried to communicate that understanding. What kind of validation did you use? See handout #6. Again, be specific.

Evaluate: Were you able to understand the other person's experience? What skills did you use to understand him or her? If not, what other information did you need to understand?

Evaluate: Were you able to communicate that understanding to the other person? What skills did you use to communicate that understanding? If not, what else could have helped you to communicate that understanding better?

Seeking Validation and Support: Homework Sheet

Name: _____

Date: _____

Fill out this sheet during or just after a situation in which you were seeking or wanted to seek validation and/or support. Describe the situation as soon as you can. Use the back of the page if you need more room.

Prompting event: Be specific.

Goals and Objectives: Clarify feelings? Wanting to feel understood? Wanting someone to do something different/new? Wanting the relationship to be different? Wanting to do something different/new for another person? Level of validation targeted? Be specific.

What did you do to be **effective**? What happened after? Be specific.

What did you do to **maintain the relationship**? What happened after? Be specific.

What did you do to **maintain self-respect**? What happened after? Be specific.

What (if anything) got in the way of you being effective?

SELF-VALIDATION

Goals:

- 1) Separate *experiences* (e.g., feelings, thoughts, desires, sensations) from:
 - explanations,
 - judgments, and
 - from future events or worries about the future (or behaviors)
- 2) Separate *aspects* of an experience that are valid from those that are not (or may not be) valid:
 - valid in terms of previous experiences but not present ones
 - valid in terms of some previous experiences and not others
 - valid in terms of the past or present, but *not* the future
- 3) Describe...primary emotions, wants, beliefs, facts (no judgments)
- 4) Connect your primary emotions to what happened (if you can): “It makes sense, given that ___ happened, that I feel this way” (see the diagram on page 2)
- 5) Be effective; empower yourself to handle any situation skillfully

Self-Validation may take one of the following forms (and some others):

<u>What</u>	<u>Verb</u>	<u>Modifier/description/referent</u>
I	am.	None (I exist. Period)
	am	physical description (here; not there; 5 ft. tall).
	feel	emotions, temperature, sensations (sad, happy, hot, cold, afraid, ashamed, excited, satisfied).
	want	object of desire or longing (not <i>needs</i> , which require an “in order to _____”)
	think	opinions, beliefs, expectations, ideas, appraisals (not necessarily <i>facts</i>)
	notice	anything that you can observe, describe, etc., non-judgmentally (see, hear, etc.)
	am doing	notice and describe without interpreting or judging

SELF-VALIDATION PRACTICE

Situation: _____

<u>What</u>	<u>Verb</u>	<u>Description</u>
I	am.	
	am	physically: _____
	feel	emotions: _____

		temperature: _____
		sensations: _____
		other: _____
	want	_____

	think	_____

	notice	_____

	am doing	_____

VALIDATING OTHERS

Goals:

- 1) Understand: What is the other person's *experience*? What can you observe?
 - Without explanations or judgments, without "should" or "shouldn'ts"
- 2) Communicate what you understand: Can you acknowledge his or her experience?
 - I know that you ____
 - I can see that you ____
 - It makes sense that you ____
 - Of course you ____ (that makes complete sense – anybody would)
- 3) Or, find out more: Can you ask about his or her experience in a way that shows you genuinely are interested and truly want to understand?
 - I know you ___ but I don't completely understand. Could you tell me more to help me understand?

Validation may take one of the following forms (and many others):

<u>What</u>	<u>Verb</u>	<u>Description</u>
You	are.	none
	are	physical description (here; not there; 5 ft. tall).
	feel	emotions, temperature, sensations (sad, happy, hot, cold, afraid, ashamed, excited, satisfied).
	want	object of desire or longing (not <i>needs</i> , which require an "in order to ____")
	think	opinions, beliefs, expectations, ideas, appraisals (not necessarily <i>facts</i>)
	notice	anything that she or he observes, describes, etc., non-judgmentally
	are	in our relationship (e.g., important to me)
	are doing	notice and describe without interpreting or judging

VALIDATION PRACTICE

Situation: _____

I know that... or, I can see that ... or, It makes sense that...

<u>What</u>	<u>Verb</u>	<u>Description</u>
You	are.	
	are	physically: _____
	feel	emotions: _____

		temperature: _____
		sensations: _____
		other: _____
	want	_____

	think	_____

	notice	_____

	other	_____

	are	relationship: _____
	are doing	_____