



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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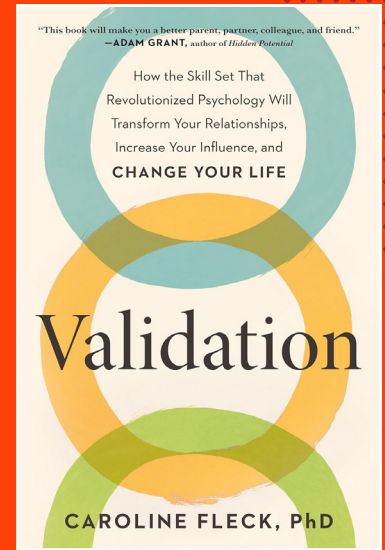
VALIDATION

By Caroline Fleck, PhD
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Validation means communicating that you're there, you get it, and you care. It's the skill that turned psychology on its head, pairing change strategies with acceptance so that people become more receptive to growth. Rather than jumping straight to problem-solving, you begin by showing genuine acceptance and acknowledging someone's reality without judging or trying to fix it. When people feel truly seen, they listen; when they're resistant, they often simply haven't felt understood.

At its core, validation combines Mindfulness, Understanding, and Empathy. First, bring your full attention—open palms, relaxed posture, eye contact—to signal you're fully present. Then, copy their words or nonverbals, reflecting back key phrases so they know you've noticed. Next, contextualize by acknowledging how, given their history or current circumstances, their reactions make sense. Equalize by reminding them that "anyone in your shoes would feel the same." These four steps lay the groundwork.

From there, you move up the Validation Ladder. Propose what you think they might be feeling—stating it gently as a suggestion or more confidently as a fact, depending on the relationship. Take Action when words aren't enough: drive a friend to therapy, bring



ABOUT THE

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dinner to new parents, step in where help is truly needed. Emote by letting your genuine reactions show—tears, laughter, a simple “I’m angry for you”—and refuse to hide behind a facade. Finally, disclose a parallel experience, sharing a “me too” moment that punctures shame and reminds them they’re not alone.

Mastering these eight skills doesn’t just improve your relationships; it can save lives. Validation improves trust, intimacy, and psychological safety. It decreases conflict by lowering sympathetic arousal, increases influence by turning trust into openness, drives behavior change through the power of verbal rewards, and fosters self-compassion by teaching you to extend the same kindness inward.

Whether you’re parenting, partnering, managing, or coping with your own struggles, validation is the universal love language. With children, it becomes your most powerful reinforcement tool: notice any small Golden Snitch moment—a kid resisting a treat or admitting a mistake—and reinforce it with genuine

pride and empathy. In intimate relationships, it counters negativity bias and punishment by focusing on small steps of progress. At work, it builds psychological safety: giving people the confidence that they can speak up, admit mistakes, and take risks.

Finally, don’t forget yourself. Everybody hurts, and self-invalidation only fuels rumination. When despair or shame rises, follow the six steps: Attend to the tightness in your body, Copy the feeling by naming it, Contextualize the factors that led to it, Equalize by asking if you’d judge a friend for feeling the same, Emote compassion with a hand on your heart, and Take Action—make tea, light a candle, then do a small meaningful thing.

Validation isn’t about control; it unlocks the potential for change through acceptance. Every single one of us wants to be seen and accepted for who we are. When you learn to bear witness with mindfulness, understanding, and empathy, you transform suffering into connection and change—yours and others’—into something profound.

