



Validating your child's feelings: Increase self-esteem and decrease difficult behaviors

Validation is something that we all crave, and our students can especially feel like they are not understood, even by those who care for and love them the most. Validating your child's feelings, especially during difficult times, can be very effective in helping them to better understand their own array of emotions, feel better understood, and can also decrease problematic behavior in some instances. It allows you to model patience and empathy for them during a difficult situation. The following are some steps that you can take, as a parent, to show your child that you are willing to take the time to understand what s/he is feeling in a non-judgmental way:

1. **Validating a child's feelings should convey: "What you are feeling makes sense to me and you have my permission to feel this way."** It is the opposite of judging how the child is feeling or making a child feel ashamed or wrong for experiencing a particular emotion.
2. **One effective way of validating is making an observation of how your child is acting in a neutral or soft tone of voice and making a guess as to what s/he might be feeling:** "I notice that you are raising your voice. It seems like maybe you are feeling angry about something right now. Is that right?" or "It must have made you feel frustrated when your brother yelled at you." They might want to name the feeling themselves, and that's OK. It can be very empowering for young people to name their own feelings. You may want to have a visual aid, such as a printable feelings chart, at hand and have your child point to a picture of how they are feeling if they cannot verbalize it.
3. **After the feeling has been acknowledged, and you have conveyed that the feeling is accepted by you (through a non-judgmental tone of voice and body language), you can now give options for how to proceed:** Does your child want to talk about what is causing the feeling and/or behavior? Does your child need some space to self-calm? Are there any strategies that you can suggest if they do not know how to manage the difficult emotion or self-calm?
4. **After the strong emotion has dissipated, you have now set the stage to revisit the incident with your child in order to problem-solve for future similar incidents** because you have shown that you are interested in knowing more about his/her feelings, accept any emotion s/he experiences, and are ready to help your child find ways to manage strong emotions.

It should be noted that taking these steps is often not easy as a parent because responding to our children's strong emotions can trigger our own strong emotions. Be kind to yourself and make space to breathe, take breaks and talk to others who will support you.

Adapted from:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/liking-the-child-you-love/201309/five-easy-powerful-ways-validate-your-childs-feelings>