UTAH CENTER
FOR EVIDENCE BASED
TREATMENT

# SIX LEVELS OF VALIDATION

A step-by-step guide from Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) to help with understanding, validating, and responding to emotions in a way that strengthens trust and connection.

## LEVEL 1: PAY ATTENTION

Be fully present. Use eye contact, nodding, and simple follow-up questions or sounds ("I see," "Uh-huh," "Then what happened?") to signal interest and encourage the person to continue.

*Examples:*

- *I see*
- *Uh-huh*
- *Then what happened?*

## LEVEL 2: REFLECT

Show that you understand by briefly summarizing what the person said in your own words. Stay neutral and check for accuracy. You don't have to agree, you're just showing that their feelings make sense enough for you to "get" them.

- *I'm hearing you say ____.*
- *Am I getting that right?*

## LEVEL 3: STATE THE UNSPOKEN

Gently name feelings or thoughts the other person hasn't said out loud but might be experiencing. Make it an educated guess, not an assumption. Check to that your guess in on track. This shows you're paying close attention and trying to understand more deeply.

- *I bet that would feel ____.*
- *I could see that feeling ___.*

## LEVEL 4: VALIDATE IN TERMS OF HISTORY OR BIOLOGY

Help the person see how their feelings make sense when viewed through their history or physical experiences. You're not judging the reaction, you're showing how it fits with what they've been through or how their body works.

- *Given___, it makes sense that___.*
- *After your past with ___, this ___ makes sense.*

## LEVEL 5: NORMALIZE

Communicate that the person's feelings are human and understandable, something many people would feel in a similar situation. Highlight the "grain of truth" without validating unhealthy behavior.

- *Most people would feel___in your situation.*
- *It's totally human to feel ___ when ___ happens.*

## LEVEL 6: RADICAL GENUINENESS

Respond honestly and human-to-human, without pity or condescension. Treat the person as an equal, acknowledge their strengths and struggles, and share your genuine reaction in a respectful, real way.

- *Oh wow!*
- *Dang, that sucks!*