

Recovering from Invalidation



WHAT IS INVALIDATION?

Emotional invalidation is when your thoughts, feelings, or emotions, are judged, rejected, or said to be untrue/unreasonable. There are many ways for thoughts & feelings to be invalidated. The main way in which we experience invalidation is verbally, but it doesn't always look the same way.

TYPES OF INVALIDATION:

Assuming your feelings without asking: When someone decides they know how you feel, without actually asking you what you're thinking or feeling, they may be unknowingly invalidating your experience.

Misunderstanding what it means to validate: Validation is frequently confused for agreement. But this isn't the case—you're perfectly able to disagree with what someone is saying or feeling while simultaneously validating their experience as real. To validate what someone is saying is not to agree with them, but to let them know you understand what they're saying, why they're saying it, and what emotions or behaviors may have caused them to say or feel it.

Trying to Fix Your Feelings: ...instead of just listening to what they are. This typically comes from a good place or intention, but can damage the person whose feelings are on the receiving end of the "fixing." This is saying things like "Don't cry," or "Don't be sad." When someone is saying those things, they mean that they care about you and don't want to see you in pain. But it is invalidating all the same because you *are* sad or maybe you feel you *need* to cry, and there is nothing inherently wrong in either of those things.

Vacuuming Up Uncomfortable Feelings: Similar to trying to fix your feelings, this is when someone tries to eliminate any negative or uncomfortable feelings you may be having. "Come on, it will be fine," or "It's not such a big deal," are examples of this. While the feelings you're having may be uncomfortable, it is important to let yourself feel them. Trying to suck up any feelings that make us uncomfortable doesn't actually help us work through them, it just teaches us that some feelings are wrong.

TYPES OF INVALIDATION:

Blaming: Different than taking responsibility, blaming is when any negative feelings you may be experiencing are rendered invalid because they are “your fault.” If you ignored your tire pressure light on your car dashboard, and got a flat tire on the highway, you are still going to be stressed and upset. Saying “You’re so irresponsible, of course this would happen,” isn’t going to make those feelings disappear, it is just going to add shame on top of the uncomfortable things you are already feeling.

Judging: Saying things like “here we go again,” or “you’re overreacting,” are examples of invalidation through judgement. When you feel your emotions are judged you start to think that maybe you shouldn’t be having them. As with blaming, this type of invalidation doesn’t actually get rid of the negative emotions, it just adds shame on top of them.

Minimizing: “Stop worrying, it’s not a big deal.” If you are experiencing a lot of anxiety or nerves, and someone says that, your natural emotional reaction is invalidated.

Nonverbal invalidation includes things like rolling the eyes, looking at a phone instead of actively listening, checking a watch, etc. These things (whether intended or not) tell the other person that their time, thoughts, feelings, etc. are not important.

RECOVERING FROM INVALIDATION

THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN EXPERIENCING INVALIDATION:

Invalidation can be helpful & painful at the same time. Situations in which it is helpful include when:

→ *your facts are wrong.* Being corrected with true facts can help you reassess what you are feeling and come at it from a more accurate place.

→ *you haven’t considered another view.* If the person you are speaking with presents a point of view or idea you hadn’t considered before, it can be an opportunity for personal & intellectual growth.

Judgments are not facts. Just because someone says something to contradict how you are feeling, doesn’t make it true.

RECOVERING FROM INVALIDATION



REASONS INVALIDATION IS PAINFUL:

Invalidation can be painful for a number of different reasons, and it doesn't always feel the same. Feelings of invalidation can include:

- *feeling as though you're being ignored*
- *feeling as though you're being repeatedly misunderstood*
- *feeling as though you are being misinterpreted*
- *feeling as though important facts are being ignored or denied*
- *feeling as though you are being given unequal or unfair treatment*
- *feeling as though you are not being believed when telling the truth*
- *feeling as though your experiences are being minimized or denied*

HOW TO HANDLE INVALIDATION:

Handling invalidation has two core components: being non-defensive & checking the facts.

When you are **non-defensive** you are able to see that there are other points of view in a situation. And the existence of opposing points of view doesn't necessarily make one person right and another wrong. Instead it gives us more information about how the people in question process emotion, than it does facts about the situation.

Checking the facts is the other key step to handling invalidation. Do you have all of the correct facts? Are you assuming things based on minimal knowledge? Make sure you know the correct facts. This may change your response, but will help you to validate your feelings once you know all the facts.

YOUR TURN: PRACTICE HANDLING INVALIDATION

HANDLING INVALIDATION PRACTICE

Keep a log of when you have experienced invalidation, and check the strategies you used in response:

- checked all the facts to see if my responses were valid or invalid
- checked it out with someone I could trust to validate the valid
- acknowledged when my responses didn't make sense & were not valid
- worked to change invalid thinking, comments, or actions (stopped blaming)
- dropped judgmental self statements
- reminded myself that all behavior has cause & that I am doing my best
- was compassionate toward myself & practiced self soothing
- admitted that it hurts to be invalidated by others, even if they are right
- acknowledged when my reactions make sense & are valid in a situation
- remembered that being invalidated, even when my response is actually valid, is rarely a complete catastrophe
- described my experiences and actions in a supportive environment
- grieved traumatic invalidation in my life & the harm it has created
- practiced radical acceptance of the invalidating person(s) in my life

What was the outcome? How did you feel?
