Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD)

FACTS

‘Families and Carers Training and Support Programme’

A short course for family members and friends of people who have BPD

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Module 4 – Validation Skills

Validation: ‘The act of validating or making valid; Strengthening, reinforcing or confirming; establishing something as valid. To confirm, to authenticate, to verify’.

What is validation?

Validation is showing another person that you understand where they are coming from, by communicating that their feelings and behaviour make sense, and that it is understandable in their current situation.

It is seeing the other person for how they are, accepting them, finding the validity in their behaviour, amplifying it and then reinforcing it.

Validating is so important for people with BPD because they have been frequently invalidated, and are often not taken seriously. Feeling invalidated is a common experience, but people with BPD are much more sensitive to it than others are. Their self-esteem is fragile and anything that invalidates them provokes a response of either fear and anger or despair and desperation.

Validation avoids making someone feel misunderstood and increases their self-esteem. It has been described as being equivalent to ‘three-part empathy’: empathic response, expressed empathy and received empathy.

Empathic response: Understanding where the person is ‘at.’

Expressed empathy: Communicating understanding.

Received empathy: Communicating effectively so that the person feels validated.

Why validate?

Validation is a skill for family/friends to use that can help improve a person’s feeling of wellbeing and their view of their relationships, and decrease their agitation. When people are less agitated they are more able to accurately express how they feel, which in turn increases the likelihood of validation being successful. This intervention therefore breaks the ‘vicious circle’ of interaction, agitation, invalidation and increased agitation, etc.
What is involved?

There are three steps to validating:

**Active observing**: Gathering information about what has happened, listening, and observing what the person is feeling, thinking and doing.

**Reflection**: Reflecting back the person’s own feelings, thoughts, assumptions and behaviours.

**Direct validation**: A non-judgmental attitude, searching for the validity of the person’s experience and behaviour, and showing them that you understand, avoiding arguing and disagreeing with them. For example, if the person says ‘I am a fool’, the task is to find the truth, rather than just reassuring them that they are not. Saying something like ‘I understand that you have thoughts of being foolish, but you have never appeared like that to me. How did you conclude that you’re a fool?’ is much more validating, and offers them a pathway to developing an alternative perspective.

Validation is in the **eye of the beholder**. If a comment is made with the best intention to validate, it is only validating if the other person experiences it in that way. If you realise that the person has not experienced it as validating, you can always apologize and try again.

**When can you use validation?**

There are many times when you will have to work hard to find something to validate. Marsha Linehan has described this as finding the ‘kernel of truth’ – i.e. with proper examination, some amount of validity or sense can be found.

For example, we wouldn’t want to validate an act of self-harm as a solution to distress. However, it can be helpful to validate how distressed the person must have been to resort to self-harm. For example, when the person says ‘I cut myself’, ask them what happened in-between, and validate that they made an effort to try to get out of their emotion. Don’t agree with their behaviour, but try to find out what happened. Asking is validating in itself.

Validation might defuse the situation but it may take as much as 10 minutes of repeated validation before having an effect. In some situations, though, even skilful validation may not have any impact at all.

There are six common types of validation:

- **Listening**
- **Accurate reflection**
- **Articulating the unverbalized**: Putting into words what you think the emotion the person has experienced is, but suggesting it in an enquiring manner, and being ready to change if your suggestion is not correct.
- **Normalizing in the context of the current situation**: Stating that the behaviour and emotions are normal in the context of the situation. For example, you might say: ‘Most people would feel the way that you do if they were in the same situation. I certainly would.’
• **Normalizing in the context of a person’s biological sensitivity:** This takes into account a person’s low self-esteem, interpersonal problems and depressed mood. You might say: 'It makes sense that you’re anxious about this situation, given how things haven’t worked out in the past.'

• **Practical validation:** Doing what is required may be better than using words, e.g. passing tissues to someone who is crying or helping someone out after a tiring day.

**Manipulation and encouragement: how can you respond in the most helpful way?**

A common demoralizing occurrence that happens to people with BPD is that others attribute their lack of progress to a lack of motivation and effort. However, most people do want to improve, and do their very best.

It may feel sometimes that the person with BPD is ‘manipulating’ you. You may feel that they are knowingly trying to get you to behave in a certain way or to agree with them, so that they get their own way.

However, it is essential as a family member/significant other of a person with BPD that you maintain the belief that they are **doing the best they can.** Mostly they are trying to manage their feelings, and in desperation they will cajole and even coerce others to help them to do so. What they want is to feel calmer and more in control of themselves.

It is important that you remember that they really are doing their best and that you support them as much as you can. Using the techniques you learn in this course should help you to do this.
Module 4: Homework

Validation Practice

Scenario 1
One morning, Claire comes into the kitchen with puffy eyes and what looks like red marks on her arm. You think that she has been self-harming. You ask her what has happened and she tells you she has cut herself as she wanted to die. Do you:
   a) Tell her to stop being so dramatic and that cutting is really not going to help anything
   b) Shake your head and ask her why she keeps doing things like this
   c) Ask her what has happened to upset her so much that she would want to self-harm

Scenario 2
You come home one day and put on the TV, as you really need to relax after a long day. All of a sudden, your partner starts shouting ‘I have to do everything in this house! Nothing ever gets done unless I do it. I have so much to do and you don’t help me with anything’. This really upsets you. Do you:
   a) Shout back and tell him/her that you’ve had a long day and that you’re allowed time out too
   b) Tell him/her that you can imagine that it must feel upsetting for them thinking that they do everything in the house, and you would like to try and work out how to balance the chores
   c) Tell him/her calmly that they have the wrong end of the stick and that in future they should ask first why you are sitting down

Scenario 3
You receive a long and extremely angry text from David, telling you that someone had switched off the washing machine and that he has wasted an hour of his life trying to fix it. Do you:
   a) Respond immediately apologising that you were the one who turned it off, even if it wasn’t you
   b) Reply saying ‘that sounds so frustrating’ and ask what has happened with the washing machine
   c) Ignore the text and deal with it when you have more time

Scenario 4
Your 16-year-old daughter has just phoned to tell you that she is staying at a friend’s house so won’t be home for the evening. You suspect she is actually staying the night with a man she has just met. Do you:
   a) Refuse and tell her that whilst she’s living under your roof she should obey your rules
   b) Laugh it off and joke that you know she’s not really staying at a friend’s house
   c) Say: ‘Gosh, I can see that would be nice, and thanks for ringing me to talk to me about it. With school tomorrow I think it best for me to come and pick you up’.
Suggestions for ‘Scenarios’ for use in FACTS courses

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We are always looking for ideas for discussions or role-play to help explain the different skills in FACTS.
Please give us any examples and suggest which skills might be helpful.
With many thanks for your help.

Scenario

Which skill/s might have been useful? (Or leave it to us to decide how to use your suggestion).

Scenario

Which skill/s might have been useful? (Or leave it to us to decide how to use your suggestion).

Please complete this form and leave it on your seat. Alternatively, email it to BPDHarrow2015@yahoo.co.uk.
Feedback Form Module 4 Validation

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Please complete this form and leave it on your seat.

Alternatively, email it to BPDHarrow2015@yahoo.co.uk.

This information will help us to ensure the course is helpful to future participants.

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<th>Question</th>
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<td>Please rate how useful the session was to you</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Please rate the session delivery</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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<td>Please rate the Slides/handouts</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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<td>How much of the material was familiar to you?</td>
<td>None</td>
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<td>Were the contents relevant to your life?</td>
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General comments:
Was this session what you hoped for / expected?
How could the session be improved?
Other comments:

Optional: Your name/ Phone number/ Email address