

# AI-01751 Validation and When Not To Validate

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**Explain the concept of validation. What is the significance of not validating someone else action. List 22 examples.**

Explaining the Concept of Validation

In psychology and communication, validation is the process of acknowledging and accepting another person's internal experience—their thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and even their behaviors—as understandable, given their unique context and history. It's about communicating that you hear them, you see them, and you can understand why they might feel or think that way, even if you don't agree with their perspective or approve of their actions.

Validation is a powerful communication tool because it:

- Builds connection and trust: When someone feels validated, they feel seen, heard, and understood, which strengthens relationships.
- De-escalates intense emotions: Knowing that their feelings are acknowledged can help someone feel calmer and more able to regulate their emotions.
- Fosters emotional expression: When people feel safe and understood, they are more likely to open up and share their true selves.
- Promotes self-worth: Validation communicates that a person's experiences and feelings matter, reinforcing their sense of identity and value.
- Can lead to problem-solving: Once someone feels understood, they are often more receptive to considering solutions or different perspectives.

Key distinctions in validation:

- Validating feelings vs. validating facts: Feelings are always valid. You can feel angry, sad, joyful, or frustrated. These emotions are real experiences. However, the facts or interpretations that lead to those feelings might be inaccurate. Validation acknowledges the feeling, not necessarily the factual basis.
- Validating feelings vs. validating actions: This is crucial. You can validate someone's feeling (e.g., "I can understand why you'd feel frustrated"), without validating or condoning their inappropriate or harmful actions (e.g., "but yelling at me is not okay").

#### The Significance of Not Validating Someone's Actions (Especially Harmful Ones)

While validating feelings is generally beneficial, it is profoundly important not to validate or condone someone's inappropriate, harmful, or destructive actions. This distinction is critical for several reasons:

- Reinforcement of Negative Behavior: Validating a negative action (e.g., aggression, manipulation, lying) can implicitly teach the person that such behavior is acceptable or effective. It can reinforce the idea that their actions are justified, making them more likely to repeat them.
- Lack of Accountability: If you validate harmful actions, you remove the impetus for the person to take responsibility for their behavior. They won't see a need to change or make amends if their actions are deemed "understandable" in a way that excuses the harm.
- Erosion of Boundaries: Consistently validating inappropriate actions erodes your personal boundaries and signals to the other person that they can get away with violating them.
- Damage to Relationships: Over time, a pattern of validating harmful actions will lead to resentment, distrust, and a breakdown of healthy relationships. The victim of the harmful action will feel unseen and unprotected.
- Impedes Growth and Change: For someone to grow and develop healthier coping mechanisms or interaction styles, they need to understand that certain behaviors are not acceptable or effective. Not validating the action provides a necessary boundary for self-reflection and change.

- **Moral and Ethical Implications:** In extreme cases, validating harmful actions can have significant moral and ethical implications, contributing to a culture where such behaviors are tolerated.

It's about finding the balance: Validate the person and their feelings where appropriate, but never the harmful behavior. You can understand why someone felt angry, but you don't have to agree that hitting a wall was an acceptable way to express that anger.

Examples: Validating Feelings vs. Not Validating Actions

Here are examples illustrating the difference between validating feelings and not validating actions:

Scenario 1: Someone yells at you because they're frustrated.

- Not validating the action (yelling): "I understand you're feeling frustrated right now, and it's okay to feel that, but I need you to speak to me calmly. I won't continue this conversation if you're yelling."
- Invalidating the feeling (and not validating the action): "You shouldn't be so frustrated. And there's no need to yell." (This dismisses their emotion).
- Validating the action (harmful, to be avoided): "I guess you had a really tough day, so it makes sense you'd yell." (This excuses the yelling).

Scenario 2: Someone lies to avoid consequences.

- Not validating the action (lying): "I can see you're scared of the consequences, and that's a difficult feeling. However, lying is not acceptable, and it breaks my trust."
- Invalidating the feeling (and not validating the action): "Don't be silly, there's nothing to be scared of. And you shouldn't lie."
- Validating the action (harmful, to be avoided): "You probably just wanted to avoid trouble, so it's understandable you'd make up a story."

Scenario 3: Someone constantly complains about their job but refuses to look for a new one, then blames everyone else for their unhappiness.

- Not validating the action (blaming/inaction): "It sounds like you're really unhappy and frustrated with your job, and I hear that. But focusing on blaming others isn't going to change your situation. What steps are you willing to take to address this?"

- Invalidating the feeling (and not validating the action): "Just get over it. Everyone hates their job sometimes. Stop complaining."
- Validating the action (harmful, to be avoided): "Yeah, your boss is truly awful, and your colleagues are useless. It's totally their fault you're miserable."  
Scenario 4: A child throws a tantrum because they didn't get a toy.
- Not validating the action (tantrum): "I know you're really disappointed and sad that you can't have that toy, and it's okay to feel sad. But screaming and throwing things is not okay. When you're calm, we can talk."
- Invalidating the feeling (and not validating the action): "Stop being a baby! There's no reason to be upset over a toy."
- Validating the action (harmful, to be avoided): "Oh, you poor thing, you really wanted that toy, didn't you? Go ahead and scream if it makes you feel better."  
(This teaches them that tantrums get results).  
Scenario 5: An adult friend frequently "borrows" money and doesn't pay it back, then gets defensive when asked about it.
- Not validating the action (not paying back, defensiveness): "I understand you might feel embarrassed or cornered right now, but I need to address the fact that you haven't repaid the money you borrowed. My expectation is that you will repay it, as agreed."
- Invalidating the feeling (and not validating the action): "You have no right to feel defensive, you owe me money!"
- Validating the action (harmful, to be avoided): "It's totally fine, I know you're going through a tough time, so don't worry about paying me back." (This enables the behavior).

In essence, validation is about empathetic understanding of the internal experience, not necessarily approval of the external manifestation. Drawing this line is crucial for healthy relationships, personal growth, and accountability.

Validation, in a general sense, refers to the act of confirming or establishing the truth, accuracy, or legitimacy of something. In interpersonal contexts, it often means acknowledging and accepting another person's feelings, thoughts, or

experiences as understandable and legitimate, even if you don't agree with them. It's about communicating that you hear and understand their perspective.

The significance of not validating someone else's action, particularly when that action is harmful, unethical, or goes against your own values, is crucial for several reasons:

1. **Maintaining Personal Boundaries and Integrity:** Not validating harmful actions allows you to uphold your own moral compass and boundaries. It prevents you from implicitly endorsing behavior that you find unacceptable.
2. **Preventing Reinforcement of Negative Behavior:** When harmful actions are validated (even implicitly), it can encourage the perpetrator to continue or escalate such behavior, as they perceive it as acceptable or even justified.
3. **Protecting Victims:** Validating harmful actions can be deeply invalidating and re-traumatizing for victims. By not validating, you stand in solidarity with those who have been wronged.
4. **Promoting Accountability:** Not validating an action can be a subtle but powerful way to communicate that the action has consequences or is not condoned, thereby promoting accountability.
5. **Encouraging Growth and Change:** Sometimes, the absence of validation can prompt individuals to reflect on their actions and consider alternative, more constructive behaviors.
6. **Self-Respect and Authenticity:** To validate something you genuinely disagree with or find wrong can lead to a sense of inauthenticity and a loss of self-respect.

Here are 22 examples of situations where you might choose not to validate someone else's action, along with a brief explanation of why:

7. **Someone making a racist joke:** Not validating means not laughing, not agreeing, and perhaps even challenging it. Validating would normalize and encourage bigotry.
8. **Someone spreading malicious gossip:** Not validating means not participating, not spreading it further, and not accepting it as truth. Validating contributes to harm and division.

9. Someone intentionally breaking a rule or law for personal gain: Not validating means not excusing their behavior or helping them cover it up. Validating condones illegality.
10. Someone gaslighting another person: Not validating means not accepting their distorted reality or manipulative narrative. Validating allows the gaslighter to continue their abuse.
11. Someone constantly blaming others for their own mistakes: Not validating means not agreeing with their excuses or shifting of responsibility. Validating prevents them from taking accountability.
12. Someone engaging in persistent victim-blaming: Not validating means not agreeing that the victim is at fault for their own suffering. Validating further harms the victim and perpetuates injustice.
13. Someone making harmful generalizations about a group of people: Not validating means not agreeing with or repeating their stereotypes. Validating reinforces prejudice.
14. Someone being verbally abusive to a service worker: Not validating means not excusing their rudeness or aggression. Validating can empower further abuse.
15. Someone consistently making irresponsible financial decisions and then expecting others to bail them out: Not validating means not enabling their behavior by constantly providing financial support. Validating prevents them from learning financial responsibility.
16. Someone lying to get out of a commitment: Not validating means not accepting their lie as a legitimate excuse. Validating can encourage dishonesty.
17. Someone disrespecting personal boundaries: Not validating means not allowing them to continue overstepping, and reinforcing your boundaries. Validating can lead to further intrusion.
18. Someone purposefully excluding someone from a social group without justification: Not validating means not participating in or condoning their exclusionary behavior. Validating contributes to social isolation.
19. Someone consistently making excuses for not putting in effort at work or school: Not validating means not agreeing that their lack of effort is

acceptable. Validating can hinder their personal and professional growth.

20. Someone using emotional manipulation to get their way: Not validating means not giving in to their manipulative tactics. Validating reinforces unhealthy communication patterns.
21. Someone engaging in cyberbullying: Not validating means not liking, sharing, or commenting positively on their harmful posts. Validating amplifies the bullying.
22. Someone attempting to pressure you into doing something you're uncomfortable with: Not validating means not giving in to their pressure and asserting your boundaries. Validating compromises your comfort and values.
23. Someone making light of serious issues or tragedies: Not validating means not joining in their insensitive remarks. Validating can be disrespectful to those affected.
24. Someone promoting conspiracy theories without evidence: Not validating means not engaging with or spreading their unverified claims. Validating can contribute to misinformation.
25. Someone acting entitled and demanding special treatment: Not validating means not catering to their unreasonable demands. Validating can reinforce their sense of superiority.
26. Someone making promises they consistently fail to keep: Not validating means not continuing to believe their unfulfilled promises without evidence of change. Validating enables their unreliability.
27. Someone engaging in self-destructive behavior and seeking validation for it: Not validating means not condoning the self-destruction, but rather encouraging healthier choices. Validating can enable further harm.
28. Someone attempting to incite hatred or violence against a particular group: Not validating means actively rejecting their hateful rhetoric and not allowing it to spread. Validating can contribute to real-world harm and discrimination.

**If I validate a negative behavior, explain and elaborate the effects.**

Validating negative behavior, as opposed to validating the underlying feelings or person, has significant and often detrimental effects on the individual exhibiting the behavior, on the relationship, and even on the broader environment. This is where the crucial distinction between validating an emotion ("I can see you're really angry") and validating an action ("It's okay that you screamed at me") becomes paramount.

Here's an elaboration of the effects of validating negative behavior:

### **Effects on the Individual Exhibiting the Behavior:**

1. **Reinforcement and Entrenchment:** This is the most direct and impactful effect. When a negative behavior is validated (either explicitly through words or implicitly through a lack of consequences or even a positive outcome), it acts as a reinforcer. The individual learns that this behavior is acceptable, effective, or even rewarded. This makes them more likely to repeat the behavior in similar situations, leading to its entrenchment as a coping mechanism or interaction style.
  - **Elaboration:** This aligns with principles of operant conditioning, where behaviors followed by a "positive" outcome (even if it's just avoiding a negative one, like confrontation) are strengthened. If yelling gets them attention, or sulking gets them out of a chore, they'll continue those behaviors.
2. **Lack of Accountability and Responsibility:** Validating negative behavior absolves the individual of responsibility for their actions. If their aggressive outburst is met with "It's okay, you were just stressed," they don't have to confront the impact of their aggression or take steps to manage their stress in healthier ways. This hinders their ability to learn from mistakes and develop self-awareness.
3. **Hindered Personal Growth and Skill Development:** If negative behaviors "work" to achieve a desired outcome (attention, avoidance, control), the individual has no motivation to develop healthier, more constructive skills. Why learn to communicate assertively if aggression gets faster results? Why learn emotional regulation if throwing a tantrum brings immediate comfort? This can stunt their emotional intelligence and social competence.



4. **Reliance on Maladaptive Coping Mechanisms:** Negative behaviors are often maladaptive coping mechanisms – ways of dealing with difficult emotions or situations that ultimately cause more problems. Validating them encourages continued reliance on these unhealthy strategies instead of exploring effective alternatives.
5. **Shallow Relationships and Isolation:** While dramatic or manipulative behaviors might initially gain attention, over time, they exhaust and alienate others. If a person's only way to interact is through drama or control, relationships become based on fear, obligation, or superficiality rather than genuine connection. This can lead to long-term loneliness and isolation, even if they're constantly surrounded by people they're manipulating.
6. **Low Self-Esteem (Paradoxically):** Despite potentially getting immediate gratification, individuals who rely on negative behaviors often struggle with genuine self-esteem. They may implicitly know their behavior isn't healthy, leading to internal conflict, shame, and a deeper sense of inadequacy. The validation they receive is often conditional (based on their performance of drama) rather than unconditional (based on their intrinsic worth).  
Effects on the Relationship and Others:
  7. **Erosion of Trust and Respect:** When negative behaviors (like lying, manipulation, aggression) are validated, trust is severely damaged. The person on the receiving end learns that their feelings and well-being are secondary to the dramatic person's agenda. Respect for the dramatic person also diminishes over time.
  8. **Creation of Unhealthy Dynamics:** Validating negative behavior often creates a co-dependent or enabling dynamic. The person doing the validating might feel responsible for "managing" the other person's emotions or preventing outbursts, leading to constant walking on eggshells. This dynamic is draining and unsustainable.
  9. **Resentment and Burnout:** Being consistently exposed to dramatic or manipulative behavior, especially if it's implicitly validated, leads to deep resentment in others. They feel used, unappreciated, and emotionally drained. This can lead to burnout in caregivers, partners, or friends.

10. **Modeling of Undesirable Behavior:** If children or younger individuals witness negative behavior being validated, they may learn that this is an acceptable or effective way to interact. This can perpetuate a cycle of unhealthy communication and emotional expression across generations.
11. **Stifling of Open Communication:** If someone's emotional outbursts are always validated, others might become hesitant to express their own needs or feelings for fear of triggering another dramatic episode. This leads to a lack of genuine communication and unresolved conflicts.
12. **Enabling of Escalation:** In some cases, validating negative behavior can lead to an escalation of that behavior. If a small dramatic outburst gets attention, a larger one might be tried to get even more. This can lead to more destructive and harmful patterns over time.

In summary, while the intention behind validating may sometimes be rooted in empathy or a desire to avoid conflict, validating negative actions ultimately undermines healthy development, accountability, and genuine connection. It creates a cycle where harmful behaviors are reinforced, and individuals fail to learn more constructive ways to navigate their emotions and interactions.

### **At what human age validation and invalidation is best appropriate to start implementing?**

The beautiful thing about validation (and the careful application of invalidation for actions) is that it's appropriate to start implementing from birth.

Emotional development begins at the earliest stages of life, and how caregivers respond to a child's emotions lays the foundation for their emotional regulation, self-esteem, and relationship skills throughout life.

Let's break down how this applies across different ages:

Infancy (Birth to ~18 months):

1. **Validation:** Even before a baby can speak, their emotions are real and communicate needs. When an infant cries because they're hungry, tired, or uncomfortable, responding with soothing words, a gentle touch, and meeting their need is a form of validation. It teaches them that their feelings are heard and that their world is a safe place where their needs will be met.

- Examples: Comforting a crying baby, cuddling a fussy infant, acknowledging their delight with a smile, mirroring their happy babbles. This is largely about attunement and responsiveness.
2. Invalidation (of actions): This stage is less about "invalidation" in the strict sense, as infants' actions are primarily driven by instinct and basic needs. It's more about setting gentle boundaries for safety (e.g., gently moving a baby away from a dangerous object) rather than judging their behavior as "negative."
- Toddlerhood (Ages ~18 months to 3 years):
3. Validation: This is a crucial period for big emotions and developing independence. Toddlers experience intense frustration, anger, and sadness. Validating their feelings ("You're really mad that your tower fell down!") helps them understand and label these powerful emotions, even if you don't approve of their tantrum.
- Examples: "I see you're really sad that your friend left," "You're frustrated because that toy isn't working," "It's hard when you can't have what you want."
4. Invalidation (of actions): This is when clear boundaries and consequences for actions become vital. You validate the feeling but not the behavior.
- Examples: If a child hits another: "I know you're angry, but hitting is not okay. We use gentle hands." If a child throws food: "You seem upset, but we don't throw food. Food stays on the plate." This teaches that all feelings are okay, but not all ways of expressing them are.
- Preschool and Early Childhood (Ages 3-6 years):
5. Validation: Children at this age are becoming more articulate about their feelings and often engage in imaginative play that reflects their emotional world. Continue to listen actively, reflect their feelings, and normalize them. Help them develop an emotional vocabulary.
- Examples: "It sounds like you felt really disappointed when your turn was over," "You seem worried about starting school today, that's a normal feeling."

6. Invalidation (of actions): Reinforce that actions have consequences and that respectful behavior is expected.

- Examples: If a child shouts "I hate you!": "I hear you're very angry right now, but we don't use hateful words. When you're ready to talk respectfully, I'm here." If they lie: "I understand you might be scared to tell me, but lying makes it hard for me to trust you. It's important to tell the truth."

School Age (Ages 6-12 years):

7. Validation: As children face more complex social situations and academic pressures, validating their feelings about friendships, school performance, and family dynamics becomes increasingly important. It helps them build resilience and self-compassion.

- Examples: "It sounds like you're really frustrated with that math problem," "It makes sense you'd feel left out when your friends played without you."

8. Invalidation (of actions): Continue to hold them accountable for their choices and behavior, emphasizing problem-solving and healthy coping.

- Examples: If they cheat on a test: "I know you were worried about getting a bad grade, but cheating is not the right way to handle it. Let's talk about how we can study better next time." If they gossip: "I understand you might want to fit in, but talking about others behind their backs can hurt feelings and is not a kind thing to do."

Adolescence (Ages 13+):

9. Validation: This period is marked by intense emotional shifts, identity formation, and increasing independence. Validating an adolescent's complex feelings (anger, confusion, excitement, anxiety) is crucial for maintaining open communication and supporting their mental health.

- Examples: "That sounds incredibly stressful to balance all those expectations," "It makes sense you'd feel overwhelmed with everything going on."

10. Invalidation (of actions): This is where setting firm boundaries around risky behaviors, disrespectful communication, and manipulative tactics is absolutely critical.

- Examples: If an adolescent is disrespectful or verbally abusive: "I understand you're upset, but speaking to me like that is not acceptable. We will talk when you can speak respectfully." If they break curfew repeatedly: "I know you want more freedom, but breaking curfew shows me you're not ready for it. Consequences will follow." If they engage in self-harm (even to manipulate): As mentioned before, take all self-harm threats seriously and seek professional help immediately, while not giving in to manipulative demands.

In summary:

11. Validation of feelings and the person should begin at birth and continue throughout life. It's a foundational element of healthy emotional development and strong relationships.
12. Invalidation of negative or harmful actions (while still validating the underlying feelings) should also begin as soon as a child is capable of understanding cause and effect and moral reasoning, typically starting in toddlerhood and becoming increasingly important through childhood and adolescence. This teaches accountability, boundaries, and helps them develop healthier coping strategies.

The key is always to separate the person and their emotions (which are always valid) from their actions (which may or may not be acceptable).

ChatGPT version

Concept of Validation

Validation is the act of recognizing, affirming, or acknowledging another person's thoughts, feelings, experiences, or behaviors as understandable or legitimate. It does not necessarily mean agreeing with them, but simply showing that you understand why they might feel or act a certain way.

Validation is rooted in empathy. It says: "I see you, I hear you, and your experience makes sense."

### **Significance of Not Validating Someone's Actions**

When we do not validate someone's actions—especially when they are seeking acknowledgment—it can lead to feelings of:

- Rejection
- Shame
- Confusion
- Defensiveness
- Emotional disconnection

Refusing to validate can feel like erasing their experience, even if unintentionally. This often damages relationships and trust, increases conflict, and reinforces feelings of being misunderstood, invisible, or judged.

But sometimes, choosing not to validate is necessary—especially when:

- The action is harmful, abusive, or manipulative.
- The behavior crosses boundaries or violates ethics.
- Validation would enable dysfunction or codependency.

In such cases, not validating becomes an act of integrity or protection.

## **22 Examples of Not Validating Someone's Actions and Their Impact**

1. A friend vents about quitting their job impulsively.  
You say, "That was dumb. Why didn't you think it through?" → They feel ashamed and unsupported.
2. Your partner cries after a long day.  
You respond, "You're overreacting." → They feel dismissed and emotionally alone.
3. Your child is afraid of a thunderstorm.  
You say, "Don't be silly." → Their fear is ignored, and they feel invalidated.
4. A coworker shares they're burned out.  
You reply, "Everyone is tired. Get over it." → They feel unheard and isolated.
5. Someone admits to feeling jealous.  
You say, "You're so insecure." → They regret being honest.
6. A teen says they feel ugly.  
You respond, "You're fine. Stop fishing for compliments." → Their vulnerability is rejected.

7. Your friend opens up about trauma.  
You say, "That happened years ago. Move on." → They feel retraumatized.
8. A colleague is excited about a small win.  
You say, "That's not a big deal." → Their joy is crushed.
9. Your spouse talks about a bad day.  
You reply, "You think you had a bad day?" → You center yourself, not them.
10. A family member comes out.  
You respond, "It's just a phase." → Their identity is denied.
11. A friend expresses regret.  
You say, "Told you so." → They feel judged instead of supported.
12. A person apologizes.  
You reply, "Whatever." → Forgiveness or understanding is withheld.
13. A coworker reports harassment.  
You say, "Maybe you're just too sensitive." → They feel gaslit and unsupported.
14. Someone says they're depressed.  
You say, "Just think positive." → Their mental health is minimized.
15. A friend says they feel excluded.  
You reply, "You're being dramatic." → Their feelings are ignored.
16. Your child says they hate school.  
You say, "Suck it up." → They feel powerless and alone.
17. A stranger shows emotion in public.  
You stare or mock them. → They feel embarrassed and unsafe.
18. Your partner expresses sexual boundaries.  
You say, "You're being too uptight." → Their consent is invalidated.
19. A friend says they don't drink.  
You say, "Come on, just one!" → Their choice is disrespected.
20. Someone says they're scared of change.  
You say, "You're just lazy." → Their fear is mislabeled.

21. A parent is anxious about their child.

You say, "Relax, it's not that serious." → Their concern is dismissed.

22. A person grieves a pet.

You say, "It's just a dog." → Their loss is trivialized.

### **Key Insight**

Not validating someone's actions or feelings—especially during moments of vulnerability—often results in emotional disconnection or harm. But thoughtfully withholding validation can also serve to set boundaries, prevent enabling, or uphold your values.

In essence, the skill lies in knowing when to validate the person without endorsing the behavior, and when silence or firm feedback is an act of respect or self-protection.