

FAMILY

education • skills • support



CONNECTIONS™

About the National Education Alliance for Borderline Personality Disorder and Family Connections™

The National Education Alliance for Borderline Personality Disorder (NEABPD) provides education, raises public awareness and understanding, decreases stigma, promotes research, and enhances the quality of life of those affected by Borderline Personality Disorder and related problems, including emotion dysregulation. Since 2001 NEABPD has brought together clinicians, researchers, family members, and those with emotion dysregulation through education classes, conferences, advocacy efforts, and the largest online resource of BPD information globally (www.neabpd.org). Knowing that those supporting people with emotional dysregulation needed information and skills, Dr. Perry Hoffman and Dr. Alan Fruzzetti developed Family Connections™ in 2002. Since then, Family Connections™ has been the signature program of NEABPD. NEABPD is a relatively small non-profit based in the United States and is successful due to our many volunteers including your Family Connections™ leaders.

For more information, please visit www.neabpd.org or scan the QR code below:



Module 1

Introduction



Welcome to Family Connections™!

What is Family Connections?

- Family Connections is a 12-week program for relatives of people who have difficulties managing their emotions, including emotion sensitivity and reactivity, intense emotions (e.g., shame, anger), problems thinking or problem solving, relationship problems, or rejection sensitivity, impulsivity, self-harm, and suicide attempts.
- Often these behaviors are given a diagnosis of Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), but there can be a variety of diagnoses. Regardless of what the diagnostic “labels” are, you will learn more about BPD, emotion dysregulation and understand more about your relative’s experience and behavior. Most importantly, you will learn skills for yourself to improve your own well-being, in a supportive peer environment.
- BPD and its associated problems are difficult to have and difficult to observe in a loved one. The problems and behaviors of BPD can be very difficult and painful for the person with BPD. BPD can be hell for those with the disorder and can also be an equal hell for those that love them.



CONNECTIONS

C–Connections **O**–Offers **N**–(K)nowledge **N**–New Research
E–Empowerment **C**–Community Resources **T**–Tools for Well-Being
I–Involvement **O**–Optimism **N**–Networking **S**–Skills Training

The Specific Goals of the Program

1. **Education:** To help understand the problems associated with BPD and related disorders for individuals and for families
2. **Skills:** To develop skills to manage our own emotional responses to difficult situations and to improve our family relationships
3. **Support:** To participate in a support network of family members and others in similar or related situations

Criteria of Borderline Personality Disorder (DSM-V)

1. Frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment.
2. A pattern of **unstable and intense interpersonal relationships** characterized by alternating between extremes of idealization and devaluation.
3. **Identity disturbance**: markedly and persistently unstable self-image or sense of self.
4. **Impulsivity** in at least two areas that are potentially self-damaging (e.g., spending, sex, substance abuse, reckless driving, binge eating).
5. Recurrent **suicidal behavior**, gestures, or threats, of self-mutilating behavior.
6. **Affective instability** due to a marked reactivity of mood (e.g., intense episodic dysphoria, irritability, or anxiety usually lasting a few hours and only rarely more than a few days).
7. Chronic feelings of **emptiness**.
8. Inappropriate, **intense anger** or difficulty controlling anger (e.g., frequent displays of temper, constant anger, recurrent physical fights).
9. Transient, stress-related **paranoid ideation** or severe dissociative symptoms. (Additional criteria can be found on page 1-6 and page 1-7.)

Five Areas of Dysregulation

(Linehan)

Dysregulation occurs when a person's emotions are out of control (more than just upset) and all focus is on regulating them, regardless of consequences.

1. **Emotion Dysregulation** - i.e., fear, shame, guilt, anger/rage, anxiety, depression, hopelessness, despair, loneliness, feeling trapped, burden, grief
2. **Interpersonal Dysregulation** – chaotic, conflictual, distant relationships, isolation, invalidating responses, rejection sensitivity, chaos, loneliness
3. **Self-Dysregulation** – low self-esteem, disempowerment, self-loathing, self- invalidation, lack of motivation or goals, problems with identity
4. **Behavioral Dysregulation** – suicidality, self-harm, impulsive or escape behaviors, disruption in self-care and social relationships
5. **Cognitive Dysregulation** – paranoia, distortion, negative expectations, irrational fears or beliefs, loss of complex thinking, rumination

Weekly Format

The structure of our weekly meetings will be:

1. Attention, emotion or mindfulness practice
 2. Review practice exercises from previous week
 3. Presentation of new materials
 4. Practice, questions and discussion
 5. Between meeting practice assignments (for example, practice exercises for this week are on page 1-5)
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Group Guidelines

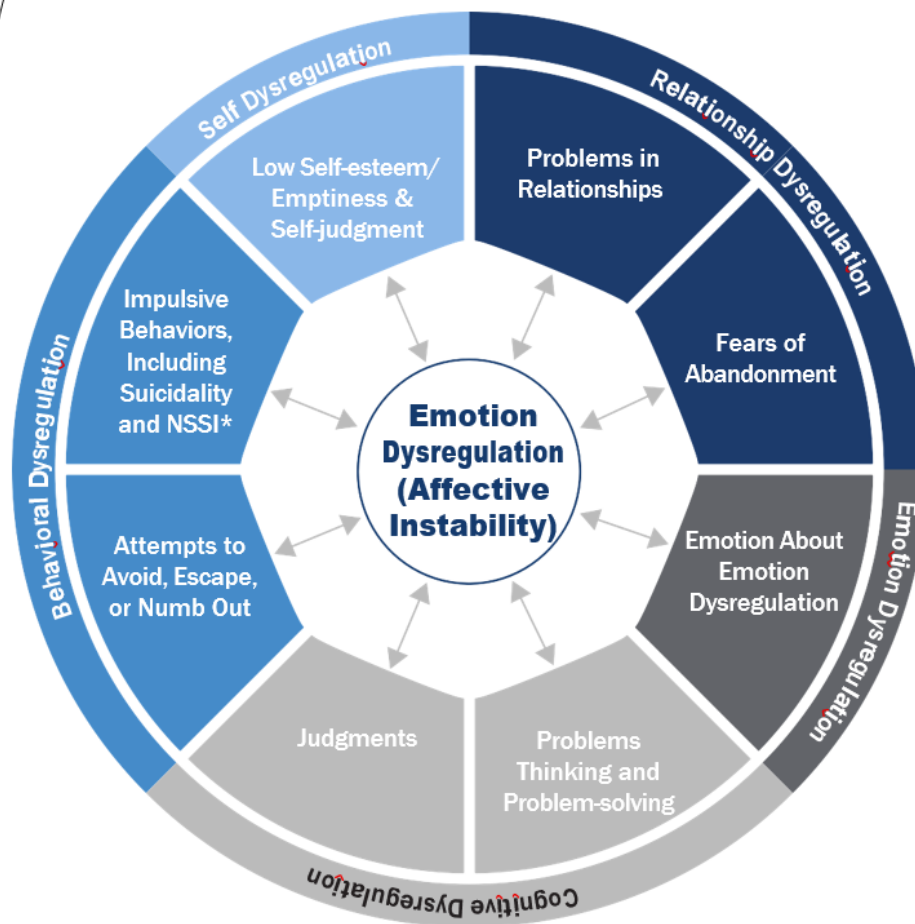
- Punctuality
 - Confidentiality
 - Practice assignments
 - Group Participation (both giving and getting consultation about, and support for skills)
 - The creation of a “no-blame” group environment
-

Rights of Relatives (To be effective and balanced)

1. We need to have “healthy selfishness” (balanced with giving).
2. We need to learn how and when to say “no” effectively.
3. We need to accept and validate our own emotional responses while learning to manage our emotions and actions effectively.
4. We need to have our own emotional support network.
5. We need to accept that we cannot solve our relative’s problems.
6. We need to accept that we will lose our cool at times.

Dysregulation

Dysregulation occurs when we are oriented to escape, to reduce negative arousal regardless of the long-term consequences of our methods. (Fruzzetti, 2003)



*NSSI is non-suicidal self-injury

Basic Assumptions (to Be Effective)

- It is more effective to interpret things in the most benign way possible (or even better – make no interpretations at all).
 - There is no one or any absolute truth about the causes of behavior or why things are the way they are.
 - Everyone is doing the best they can in this moment *and* wants to improve.
 - Everyone needs to try harder and be more effective/skillful.
-

Research on Family Connections™

There are many published studies on Family Connections™ (FC), with more on the way. These studies have shown consistently that participants benefit in the following ways:

1. Decreased grief
2. Decreased burden
3. Decreased depression
4. Increased mastery/empowerment

In addition, one recent study showed bigger improvements in treatment for teens when their parents participated in FC.

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Family Connections

HOMEWORK TASKS

MODULE 1 - INTRODUCTION



Session 1

GOALS FOR THE PROGRAM

Write down the goals you hope to achieve from participating in Family Connections

- ★ My personal goals - I want Family Connections to help me as an individual in the following ways:

- ★ My parenting goals - I want Family Connections to help me as a parent in the following ways:

- ★ My relationship goals - I want Family Connections to help my relationship with my our young person in the following ways:

Expressed Emotion Study

Higher emotional involvement predicted better clinical outcomes. This means that the more emotionally involved the key relatives were, the better the patient fared (fewer hospitalizations). (*Hooley & Hoffman*)

A goal of Family Connections™ is to teach effective emotional involvement.



High Emotional Sensitivity

1. Pick up on things with an emotional quality that others miss (something like having sensitive hearing), and people with less emotional sensitivity can be invalidating
2. Low threshold for emotional reaction—react sooner, regardless of how the other person's reaction might be
3. Big emotional events hurt more, and less sensitive others often do not understand this and can be invalidating
4. Because others don't notice the emotional events, it is easy for others to invalidate sensitive people

It's like an open wound on your hand. It feels the intensity of heat more than the rest of the hand.

High Emotional Reactivity

1. After becoming activated, emotional reactions tend to be big, more intense.
2. High emotional arousal dysregulates thinking, memory, and other cognitive processing, so that thinking and problem-solving can be impaired.
3. The magnitude of the response to the emotional event or stimuli can be higher than other people experience, and therefore can be difficult for others to understand.

Slow Return to Baseline

1. Emotional reactions are longer lasting; it takes a longer time for negative emotions to go down on their own.
2. Slow return means these people spend more time with high, negative emotions. This makes them more vulnerable to getting dysregulated when the next emotional event happens and makes becoming dysregulated more likely over time. It would be like trying to walk on a broken leg before it heals; it's more vulnerable to break again.

How Can a Social or Family Environment Be Invalidating?

- De-legitimizes one's experiences, especially private experiences (emotions, wants and desires, preferences, values, opinions, thoughts, beliefs, sensations)
 - » This can occur frequently when the other person's experiences are not only private, but when the other person does not identify or describe those experiences.
- Invalidates those experiences, **ESPECIALLY** when they are quite different from other people's experiences
- Does not accept or appreciate differences
- Values conformity or values the status quo: Tries to change or control across a variety of situations when the other person is just different
- Ignores or does not pay attention
- Is critical or judgmental
- Does not communicate acceptance and caring (even if true inside)
- Hinders problem solving, problem management, and coping
- Tries to impose solutions rather than problem solve collaboratively
- Insists on using their solutions to problems, even if there may be other ways to solve the problems

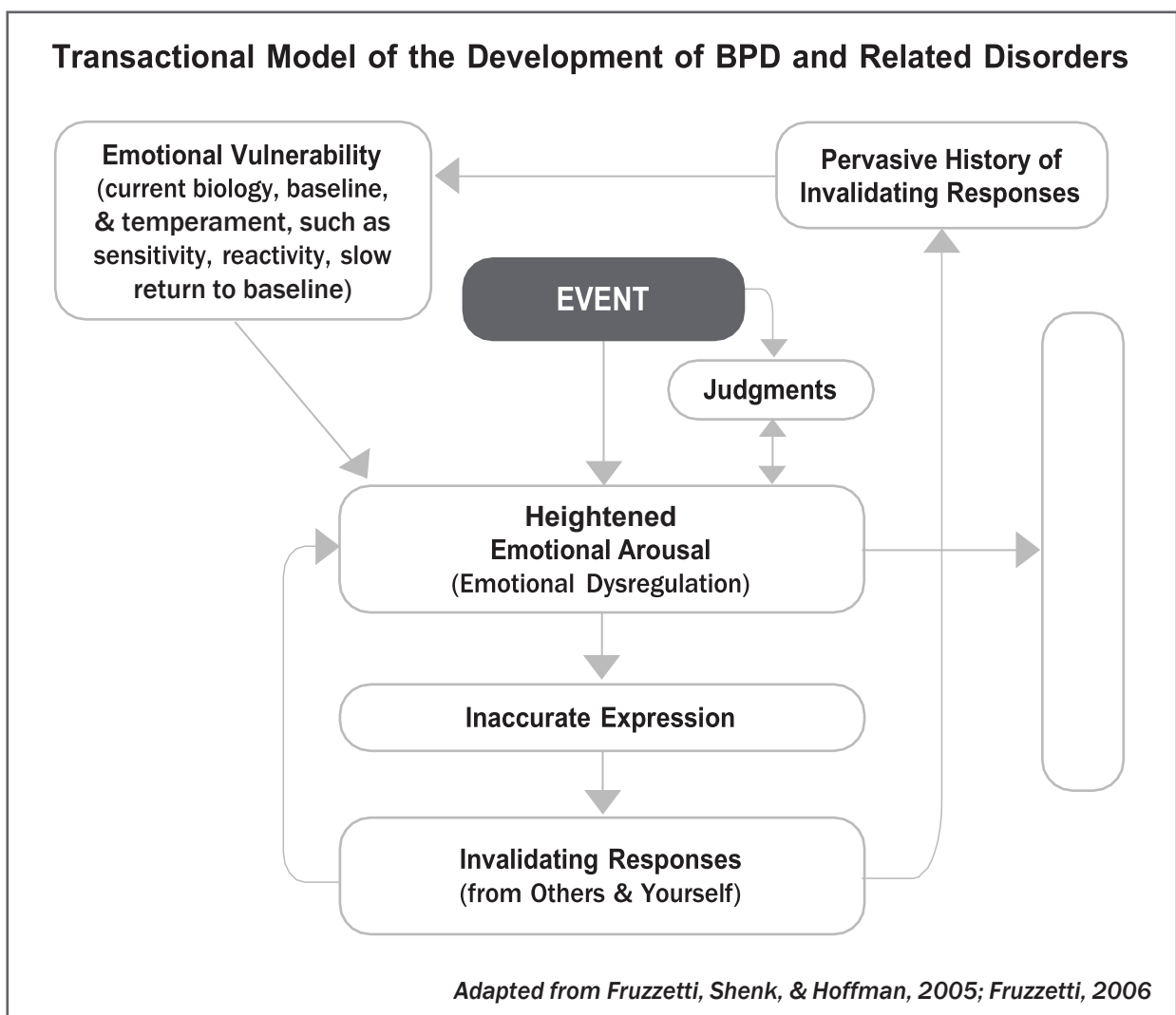
Transactional Model

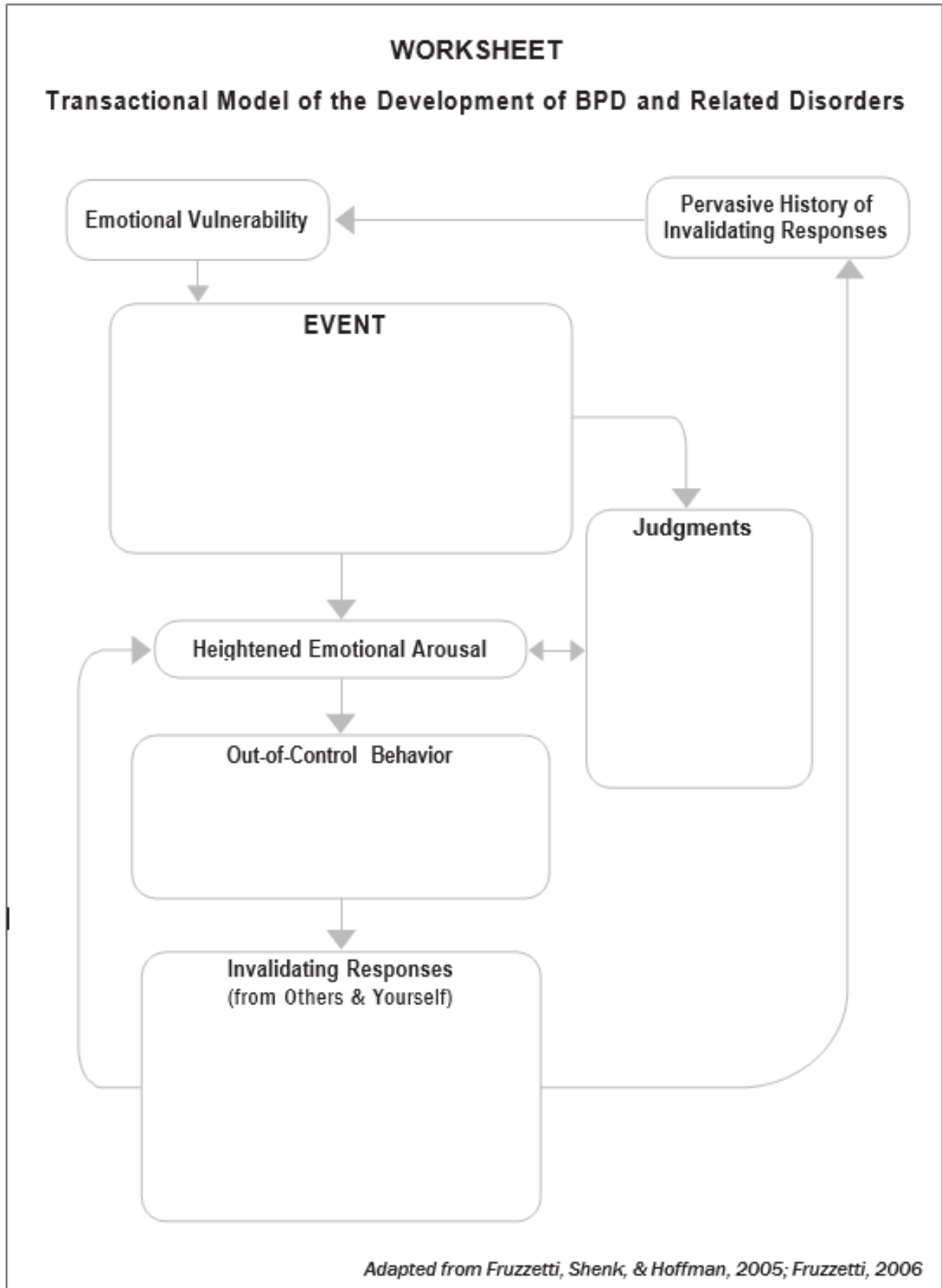
A transactional model means there is ongoing or constant movement with each person affecting the other (more on this later).

A transactional model for emotion dysregulation, or even BPD, shows how many different factors transact to result in both dysregulated emotion and dysregulated actions.

Notice the roles of:

- Events (sometimes called prompting events, or just things that happen)—these can be public or social events, or thoughts, memories, pain, etc.
- Vulnerability to becoming dysregulated – biological, temperamental and previous learning or conditioning
- Judgments
- Both inaccurate expression and invalidating responses





MODULE 2 - FAMILY EDUCATION



Session 1

1. Describe your teenage child's temperament when they were a younger child?

2. What worked to soothe them when they were upset or distressed?

3. What are your emotional sensitivities/vulnerabilities as described in the biosocial model:
 - a. High sensitivity
 - b. High reactivity
 - c. Slow return to baseline

4. What are your teenage child's emotional sensitivities/vulnerabilities as described in the biosocial model:
 - a. High sensitivity
 - b. High reactivity
 - c. Slow return to baseline

Module 3

Relationship Mindfulness Skills



Creating a more validating family environment for yourself and your loved ones

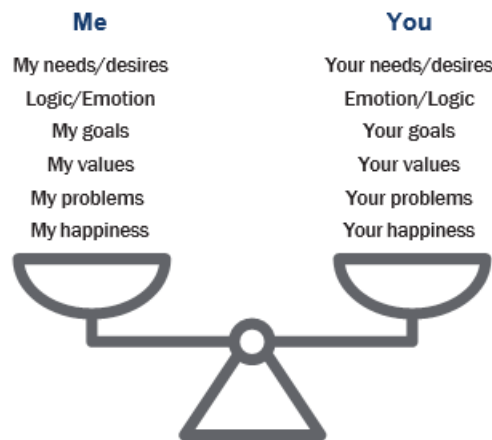
What is a Validating Family Environment?

- Legitimizes family members' experiences, especially private ones (emotions, wants and desires, thoughts, beliefs, sensations)
- Validates those experiences EVEN when they are quite different from other people's experiences (that is, validate something valid)
- Accepts, tolerates and appreciates differences; does not try to change or control for arbitrary reasons, or for conformity, or for its own sake
- Rarely uses coercive control strategies – that is, tries to collaborate on change and problem solving when needed (vs. punishment)
- Communicates acceptance and caring (it is not enough to care; you need to communicate that caring)
- Facilitates problem solving, problem management, and coping
- De-escalates invalidating behavior

Relationship Mindfulness

- Relationship Mindfulness means paying attention to another person while remembering that this is someone you love. This requires awareness of your relationship goals and non-judgmental attention to them now. It also means keeping in mind that anything you do will have an effect on them and your relationship—and therefore on you. Relationship Mindfulness helps bring your attention to what is happening now (rather than past hurts, dangerous actions, or future worries), increases empathy and builds understanding and connection.

Finding Balance in Relationships: Taking Care of Others and Taking Care of Ourselves



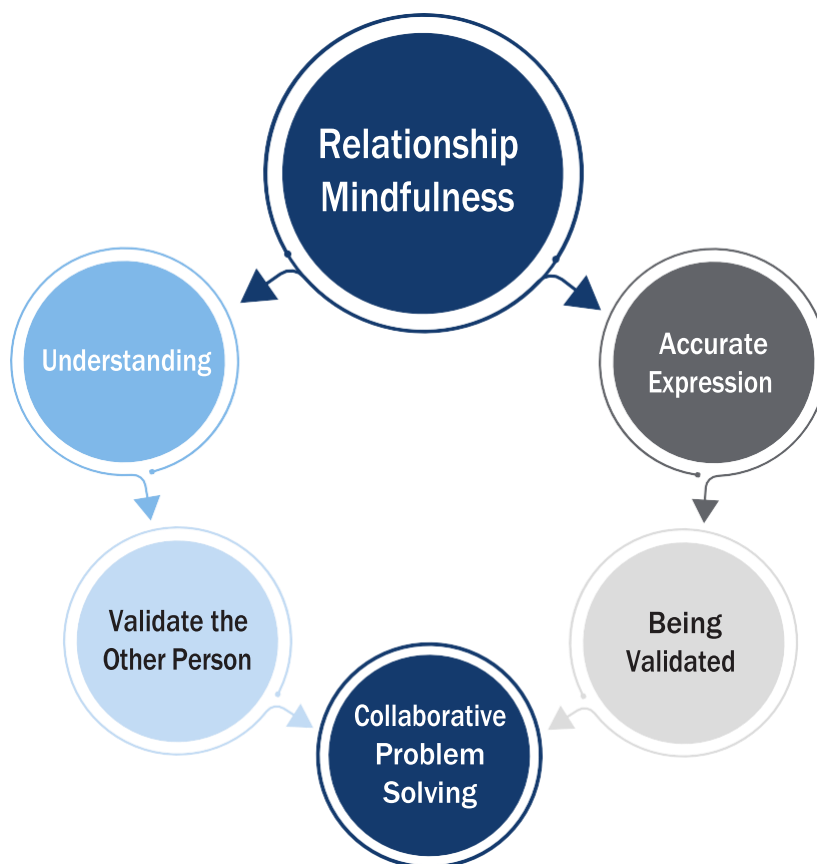
Two Parts of Relationship Mindfulness

Two KEY components of Relationship Mindfulness:

1. Be aware (gently, deeply) of your connection, love, goals & motivation.
 - » Remember this is someone you love and care about (this is your child, parent, partner, sibling, friend).
 - » Remember what kind of relationship you want to have. Will whatever you are doing, or have an urge to do, help you have that kind of relationship?
 - » Don't forget the transactional model: We are in the "same boat, same nest" in our relationship, so how we respond to the other person also affects us (reciprocity).
2. Bring your attention to what it might be like to be your loved one right now, in these circumstances. Use curiosity: What might get him/her (or anyone) to do what he/she is doing right now?
 - » We don't always know the full story, how they got there.
 - » No judgments. There are causes and conditions for everything. Judgments and anger are corrosive to relationships.
 - » Whatever happened in the past has already happened. It's not the same behavior right now even if it is similar in form.

Practice!

Key Roles of Relationship Mindfulness



Reducing Judgments

The key to Relationship Mindfulness is to be nonjudgmental. This means to see things just as they are, descriptively and without inference, interpretation, or judgment. No blame. No

adjectives. Judgments toward others, or ourselves, are toxic to our own well-being and toxic to our relationships. They get us more escalated. Try not to judge the situation, event, and/or person, or assess things as good or bad.



The key to Relationship Mindfulness is to be nonjudgmental.
No judgments, no blame, just the facts.

Healthy Ways to Reduce Anger and Judgments

Use Relationship Mindfulness to stay connected, pay attention descriptively

What	How
Observe: Pay attention, just notice the other person.	Non-judgmentally: Let go of the “shoulds,” right/wrong, good/bad
Describe: Attach words to the experience	One-mindfully: Pay attention to the other person or to the relationship in the here and now
Participate: Involve yourself in the moment, in your experience	Effectively: Remember that you love this person even if you don’t like what he or she is doing

Emotion Management

1. Be aware of rising emotional arousal (using mindfulness).
2. Recognize and label the **PRIMARY** emotion accurately. (Anger is often not the primary emotion. More typically sadness and fear are the primary ones.)
3. “Treat” the primary emotion:
 - » By acceptance of the situation or other person, or
 - » Change the situation, or your reaction to it.
4. *Open your mind before you open your mouth:* Either avoid saying anything, go on with other activities, or engage the other person constructively on a different topic.

Stop Skill

S—Stop responding automatically; interrupt your next move with ...nothing.

T—Take a step back, let go of reactivity, and maybe soothe yourself if needed.

O—Observe yourself and your reactions and use relationship mindfulness.

P—Proceed Mindfully, meaning purposely, effectively, non-judgmentally.

Steps in Identifying Emotions

1. **Events:** a) external: other people and events; b) internal: thoughts, feelings
2. Note your **vulnerabilities** to emotion dysregulation in the moment. If you are tired, sick, hungry, etc., this will amplify your emotional reaction.
3. **Interpretation** (judgments) of the event. You can make malignant or benign interpretations... or none. Give the benefit of the doubt.
4. **History/prior experiences.** Is this the first time this has happened?
5. **Bodily reactions**, including temperature, feeling flushed, sweating, increased heart rate, lump in your throat, urges (to flee, attack, withdraw, shut down, avoid, etc.).
6. **Facial expressions**, which both reflect our emotion AND feed back to our brains. Relaxing your face can reduce your negative emotions.
7. **Body posture.** Relaxed, leaning forward signals safety to your brain.
8. **Emotion labeling** (accurate or inaccurate) influences your emotion.

Primary and Secondary Emotions

1. **Primary emotion(s):** Primary emotions are authentic and more accurate. They are our initial response to any event. Fear is normative in a dangerous situation.
2. **Secondary emotion(s):** Emotional response to a primary emotion (or “jumping over” it). This is usually problematic. Primary emotions are easier for others to understand; dysregulated emotions are secondary. Fear often shows itself as anger (and judgments, which fuel anger more).



Goal or strategy: Identify and manage (honor) the primary emotion; refocus away from secondary emotions, manage as needed.

Secondary Emotions Happen in Two Ways

1. Repeated conditioning creates automatic secondary emotional reaction:



2. Judgments also create secondary emotions:



Decrease Emotional Vulnerability

1. Take care of physical illnesses and pain
2. Eat well/nutritional balance
3. Get enough sleep
4. Exercise
5. Build a sense of competency, coping, mastery
6. Soothe your senses

If you are healthier (physically and emotionally), you will react better. Give yourself the “oxygen” first.

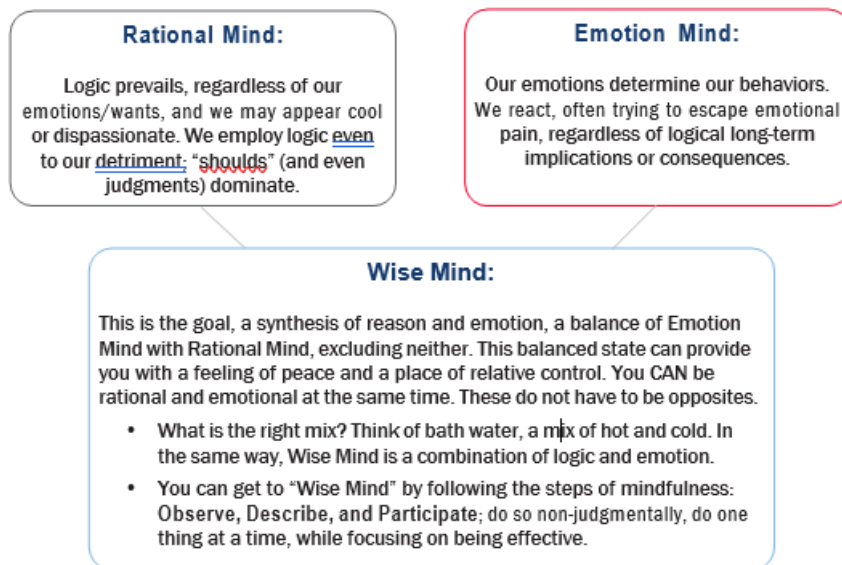
Managing our own emotions, remembering we love the other person, using relationship mindfulness and self-validation, all contribute to self-respect.



Decrease Emotional Reactivity

- Let go of strong anger (& judgments) in important relationships.
- Use relationship mindfulness to sort out emotions, needs, and wants, and to interrupt your negative reactions, anger, and toxic responses.
- Be mindful of your relationship and your goals, what’s in your heart.
- Be mindful of appropriate and effective timing of discussions.
- When tired, sick, hungry or upset, remember that emotional vulnerabilities are high (could be for you or your loved one with BPD).
- Increase mindfulness of pleasant things that your family member has done for you, you have done for your family member, or you have done together.

States of Mind



Opposite Action

- When we feel **angry**, we can act opposite to our action urge (attacking) by being genuinely **kind** or gently avoiding the other.
- When we feel **afraid** of something, we can **approach** what we fear (rather than running away), which typically decreases the fear.
- When we feel **ashamed** about something, and we are **open** about what we did in a matter-of-fact way (rather than hiding), the shame lessens.
- When we feel **sad** (shut down), we can get active, **engage**.

Summary

- Be aware of longer-term relationship goals and desires as a parent, partner, sibling, or child. Try to avoid focusing on the short term.
- Experience yourself in the context of the other and the other in the context of you...be part of the relationship; engage.
- Act from this context effectively, rather than from judgments, anger, etc.
- Reduce judgments, manage emotions effectively.

MODULE 3 - RELATIONSHIP MINDFULNESS



Session 1

1. Read the list, 'What is a Validating Environment' (p. 17) - write below which ones fit your family.

2. Practice Relationship Mindfulness skills

- try to understand the other's perspective
- try to accurately express your own
- stay with what's happening in the moment in the interaction
- stay connected with what matters to you about this relationship

a. First with a non-family member

b. Then with your relative

Did you notice that this approach led to fewer judgments?

Session 2

1. Pick a time during the week when you felt strong emotion and fill in the steps below practice identify your emotion by filling in the steps below (p. 21)

The event:	
Vulnerabilities:	
Interpretations:	
Previous experiences:	
Bodily reactions / facial expressions / body posture:	
Accurately label the emotion:	

2. Practice observing anger and interrupting it. What emotion were you missing when focusing on anger?

3. Come up with the best strategy for you to decrease your emotional reactivity i.e. decrease how intense your emotions get. (p. 22)

4. What State of Mind do you function in primarily? What particular situations bring you there? (p. 21)

5. Be aware of when you are in Wise Mind. What helps you get there? (p.

Module 4

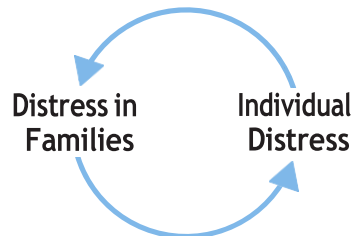
Family Environment Skills



Individual and family wellbeing are intertwined.

Individual and Family Wellbeing

- Psychological disorders (for example, depression, substance abuse, eating disorders, anxiety disorders, etc.) negatively affect relationships.
- Distressed family or relationship distress affects the individuals involved.
- They can both feed each other reciprocally. *Review the Transactional Model.*



Family Variables

We don't know very much about family functioning in families with a member who has borderline personality disorder (neither family of origin nor current family). However, data are clear that it is very difficult for the person with BPD and family members.

What Makes It Difficult for Us to be Skillful?

(Fruzzetti)

1. Severe individual distress and disorder
2. Bad habits, patterns, etc.; forgetting that this is a person you love
3. Judgments (right/wrong; should/shouldn't; good/bad)
4. Anger (it can be toxic in families)
5. Other invalidating responses (minimizing, not paying attention, using coercion, impatience, destructive criticism, etc.,)
6. Inaccurate self-expression
7. Lack of understanding
8. Poor conflict management skills (e.g. escalating or polarizing)
9. Lack of acceptance ("it shouldn't be this way")

The Blame Game

(Fruzzetti)

Who's to Blame?

		FAMILY SAYS	
		Your Fault	Our Fault
PERSON WITH BPD SAYS	Your Fault	1 Contempt, conflict, bitterness; blame each other	2 Suffering, guilt; blame family
	My Fault	3 Suffering, guilt; blame loved one	4 Suffering together

1. YOUR FAULT/ YOUR FAULT:

- Contempt, conflict, bitterness; blame each other



2. YOUR FAULT/ OUR FAULT:

- Suffering, guilt; blame family



3. YOUR FAULT/ MY FAULT:

- Suffering, guilt; blame patient



4. MY FAULT/ OUR FAULT:

- Suffering together... can be soothing

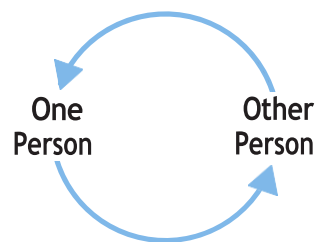


The No Blame Alternative

- No blame
 - Focus on describing the situation, your goals, emotions, wants, thoughts
 - Understanding the other person's goals, emotions, wants, thoughts
 - Be sad together when things are different from what you want
-

A Transactional Process

Transactional Model: Factors



Making the Transition to a More Validating Family Environment

- A more validating family environment may be a relief for everyone.
- It may also be useful prevention/early intervention strategy for a variety of both individual and relationship problems.
- There is reciprocity in relationships: Transactions that occur create a cycle and pattern of either positive reactions or a pattern of negative reactions; reducing invalidating responses is a huge start.
- Even ONE reverse step slows a negative reaction, and cycle down. A few more can begin to change a pattern of negativity and reactivity and slow down polarizing, misunderstanding and invalidation.
- Changing our own reactions and responses: When we reduce our own judgments and invalidation (even unintended or passive invalidating responses), these act as invitations to others to respond in kind.
- And, all we can do is focus on presenting the “best” version of ourselves; we can’t do anything that will make others respond to us better...only invite them to do so and make it easier for them.



A more validating family environment is a relief for everyone.

Finding the Balance (or, Synthesis): Primary Polarities or Dialectical Tensions

- Acceptance vs. Change
- Autonomy vs. Closeness
- One person’s desires/goals vs. another’s
- Individual behavior vs. relationship behavior
- Individual dysfunction and psychopathology vs. relationship dysfunction
- Nurturance vs. limits (insisting or saying no)

Basic Assumptions (to Be Effective)

- It is more effective to interpret things in the most benign way possible (or even better – make no interpretations at all).
- There is no one or any absolute truth about the causes of behavior or why things are the way they are.
- Everyone is doing the best they can in this moment *and* wants to improve.
- Everyone needs to try harder and be more effective/skillful.



Acceptance and Change

Changes occur in the context of acceptance of life as it is.
This is a dialectical concept; acceptance creates the possibility of change
– and change requires, and leads to, acceptance.

Radical Acceptance

(Linehan, 1993)

The most impactful acceptance skill is Radical Acceptance. (Steps involved in Radical Acceptance may be found in Module 6.)

Acceptance

When we stop fighting reality: tolerate reality (white knuckle), allow what is real (without fighting it), notice, describe or participate (in your experience)

- Acceptance may be the only way out of hell. Acceptance is YES to reality and recognizes that every event has real causes.
- It is the only way we can take suffering that feels as if it can't be tolerated and turn it into pain that can be tolerated.
- Tolerating distress can be the first step; then, notice reality, notice what is real AND that we don't like it. What about it is undesirable? Describe and notice emotion; self-validate.

Grief and Loss: Steps in Grieving

(Fruzzetti)

Elements of my life are not what I planned or hoped for, and elements of my loved-one's life are not what I planned or hoped for.

Radical acceptance helps us live in reality. However, it is important to notice the losses, and grieve the losses, fully:

1. Start with a cue about a loss, maybe a small one.
2. Describe what you wanted and didn't get, without judgments, "shoulds," or "what ifs."
3. Allow your sadness to come and go; notice the sadness as you breathe in, let it go as you breathe out – try this for a few breaths or even a few minutes – but do not get stuck in only sadness...there is more!
4. Gently and deeply, slowly, breathe in, breathe out. Allow your sadness to come and go like a wave. Allow your sadness to come up as you inhale, then allow it to go down as you exhale. Repeat for 2-3 breaths.
5. Notice that your sadness and disappointment makes sense; self-validate.
6. Soothe yourself as needed.
7. Consider seeking validation from someone else.
8. Re-engage, re-activate your life right now...do what you need to do in the present; engage in it fully, bringing your attention fully to it.
9. Repeat this whole process as needed, over time.

MODULE 4 - FAMILY ENVIRONMENT SKILLS



Optional Videos

The Blame Game Brené Brown

<https://biggeekdad.com/2015/07/the-blame-game/>

Open your mind before you open your mouth M4:

[https://www.youtube.com/embed/UMi-](https://www.youtube.com/embed/UMi-fyappM?modestbranding=1&rel=0&wmode=transparent&showinfo=0)

[fyappM?modestbranding=1&rel=0&wmode=transparent&showinfo=0](https://www.youtube.com/embed/UMi-fyappM?modestbranding=1&rel=0&wmode=transparent&showinfo=0)

Session 1

1. Read the list below of “What Makes It Difficult for Us to be Skillful” (p. 27) and rank each factor in the order of relevance for your family;

- ___ Severe individual distress and disorder
- ___ Bad habits, patterns, etc.; forgetting that this is a person you love
- ___ Judgments (right/wrong; should/shouldn't; good/bad)
- ___ Anger (it can be toxic in families)
- ___ Other invalidating responses (minimizing, not paying attention, using coercion, impatience, destructive criticism, etc.)
- ___ Inaccurate self-expression
- ___ Lack of understanding
- ___ Poor conflict management skills (e.g. escalating or polarizing)
- ___ Lack of acceptance (“it shouldn't be this way”)

- Which of the above factors do you think can change?
- What will it require?

Session 2

1. Using “Finding the Balance: Primary Polarities or Dialectical Tensions” (p. 30) identify which dialectical tensions is the most present in your relationship with your loved one and describe how this tension plays out in your relationship

2. Use Benign Interpretation of someone else’s behaviour. Note what it is like to deliberately interpret behaviour benignly. What happens to your reaction(s) when you practice benign interpretation?

Answer either q 3 or q 4:

3. Name one thing you had to radically accept in your life. (p.31)

- Briefly describe the situation

- Describe what the process was like for you

OR

4. Choose one relatively minor situation from this week and practice the skill of Radical Acceptance. (p. 31)

- Briefly describe the situation

- Describe what the process was like

5. Identify something about your relative that you want to work on to radically accept

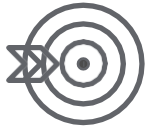
6. The action of Radical Acceptance can open us to the losses we have experienced in relation to the hopes and dreams for our loved one and ourselves as parents/ caregivers. The acceptance of reality can begin the process of grieving.

Choose one (small) element of your life that is related to your loved one’s problems and see if you can go through the grieving steps outlined on p 4-6. The process of grieving is slow and cannot be rushed or forced; we need to practice radical acceptance with the process of grief itself.

What was it like to open the door to grief in this way?

Module 5

Validation Skills



Identifying and communicating your understanding of what the other person is saying, feeling, or wanting

What is Validation?

Identifying and communicating your understanding of what the other person is saying or feeling or wanting in a CLEAR way:

- C**—Communicate what you understand about the situation
- L**—Legitimize the “facts” or another’s reactions or responses (thoughts, feelings, desires, sensations, and so on)
- E**—Explain your own feelings after expressing understanding
- A**—Acknowledge the situation, the other’s opinions, feelings, wants, etc.
- R**—Respect their and your emotions, desires, reactions, and goals

Types of Validation

Verbal Validation: Validation through words. For example, saying things like: “I agree.” “You are right.” “Of course you would do that.”

Behavioral Validation: Validation through behaviors and actions. For example, patting someone’s hand, giving a smile or a hug.

Why is Validation Important?

Validation:

- Is the core of communication (along with accurate disclosure)
- Builds trust and slows negative reactivity
- Decreases anger
- Enhances self-respect
- Is the key to getting through “rough” spots in the relationship
- Makes both the sender and recipient feel more positive about the relationship
- Makes problem solving, closeness, and other kinds of support possible

Validation Targets: What Should I Validate?

- Feelings or emotions (e.g., “I can see you are really upset with me.”)
- Legitimacy in wanting something (“I know you want money to decorate your apartment because you want it to look nice. Right now I don’t have money to give you.”)
- Beliefs, opinions, or thoughts about something
- True values about something
- How difficult a task is (“I understand how difficult things are for you.”)
- How hard a person is trying to accomplish something (“I know you are trying to do the best you can right now.”)
- Things a person does that are effective for herself or himself (“I know how hard you are working on things and it looks like it is paying off. You are really trying and it is helping the situation.”)
- Things a person does for another (“You were so helpful to your grandmother.”)
- Efforts made (reinforce)



Only validate valid things...

AND

There are always valid parts!

How Do I Validate Another Person?

ANY WAY you can! Search for understanding and communicate that understanding.



Different Levels of Validation

1. **Pay attention**, listen actively, use good eye contact and body posture to communicate that you are listening non-judgmentally. Listen mindfully; be an active versus a passive listener.
2. **Reflect** their feelings descriptively (non-judgmentally); let yourself feel a little bit of what they are feeling, and let yourself show it (voice tone, facial expression, posture). Say back what you are feeling. Acknowledge the other person's experiences, desires, emotions, thoughts, opinions.
3. **Summarize** their or your perspective descriptively. For a better understanding, clarify, through questions, what it is that you hear, that you understand. (Be careful not to disagree, criticize, or judge, not to change their mind or goals, nor to get them to do something differently.) Be aware that some questions may be interpreted as opinions or judgments.
4. **Show tolerance**; give the benefit of the doubt and put the thing you are trying to validate into a broader context; see how the behavior is valid in the other person's life, given their history and experiences. Be non-judgmental.
5. Be mindful of the other person and the relationship; stay non-judgmental; **normalize** thoughts, feelings, and wants in present circumstances. If the other's behavior is normal, or makes sense, say so; find parts of their experience that are normative (e.g., emotions or desires).
6. Practice **willingness and genuineness**. In spite of how you may feel or that you have the right answer, try to do what is effective for the moment.
7. **Self-disclose your own vulnerability** (this is a form of validation). If the other person is vulnerable with you, it is very validating to be vulnerable in return (especially concerning your relationship). Be genuine. "Me, too!"

The Many Ways to Invalidate the Valid

(or, 101 ways to corrode your relationship and help the other person be miserable)

- Do things to diminish safety (make threats, be coercive or aggressive)
- Ignore or don't pay attention (or pretend not to pay attention), including not paying attention to pain and suffering
- Minimize feelings or their legitimacy
- Be critical or judgmental; put the worst possible "spin" on the behavior
- Let miscommunication stand unrepaired
- Be willful (focus on being right instead of effective or decent)
- Insist on your solution to the problem instead of solving the problem
- Make assumptions about another person that are not mindful, or are

judgmental or not consistent with the facts

- Up the ante: escalate conflict
- Try to win an argument by being more hostile or attacking
- Engage in “controlling” behavior
- Engage in crazy-making behavior (e.g., be dishonest, or patronizing, insist they feel or think something even though they say they don’t – even if you are well-intentioned)
- Don’t validate enough

Validation Tips

- Take the other person’s perspective.
- Remember the foundation: this is your family member.
- Empathy = understanding and validating the other person
- Reality acceptance (what “is” versus what “should be”)
- Effective assumptions promote effective behavior.
- Typically, in everyday situations, if you can make three validating statements in a row, the conversation will change for the better, or at least the situation will stop from escalating.

Validation Factors to Remember

- Validating doesn’t mean you like it, doesn’t mean you agree.
- Validating is not problem solving (right now, at least).
- Validation is not placating (e.g., agreeing with the other person to just get him or her to be quiet).
- Validate yourself.

Summary:

1. Validate only the valid.
 2. Don’t invalidate the valid.
 3. Don’t validate the invalid.
 4. Invalidate the invalid only occasionally... and only after validating the valid a lot!
-

What is Self-Invalidation?

- Not knowing what we are feeling or getting stuck in secondary emotion
- Ignoring what we are feeling when we know what we feel
- Discounting what we are feeling after we have acknowledged it, i.e., saying that it does not really matter
- Allowing someone to treat us in ways that distress us, or harm us
- Not observing our limits

Consequences of Self-Invalidation

- It is “de-skilling,” reducing our ability to cope with a given situation.
- It reduces our sense of coping mastery vis-à-vis another person.
- It promotes depression, guilt, shame, and burden.
- It decreases our general sense of well-being including our physical health.
- It increases our emotional vulnerability.

How to Decrease Self-Invalidation: Self-Validation Skills

(Fruzzetti, 2006)

- Use Core Mindfulness Skills to be aware of your thoughts and feelings.
- Acknowledge the emotion by labeling it. Is it sadness, anger, guilt?
- Validate yourself as you would if someone else expressed the feeling.
- Use Radical Acceptance of your feelings, your thoughts, your actions. You might not like the feelings but you accept that they are there.
- Identify the areas where you most often self-invalidate.
- Reconsider the particular feeling from another perspective, i.e., justified guilt vs. unjustified guilt. Should you feel guilty or are you taking on guilt when it isn't justified? Example: You did not cause your relative to have BPD.
- Support your own primary emotions. They are your feelings. Let go of secondary emotions
- Do not do “shoulds”: I should feel this way or that. Your feelings are your feelings!
- Do not second guess your feelings when someone else's behavior or actions contradict what you are feeling.
- Encourage and accept validation from other people.

Observing Your Limits May Be Self-Validating

(Linehan)

Having a relative with BPD can push you sometimes to do or accept things that you might not normally do. You might allow yourself to be treated in way that you never thought you would accept.

Situations like that are not good for you personally and can cause you to “burn out.” Example: You give more money than you are able to give. People need to observe their limits. This is different from setting limits. “Setting limits” is not allowing someone to do something based on a rule that may or may not apply in this situation. Observing limits is more flexible, more powerful.

Why?

- Helps to reduce burn-out.
- Helps to preserve the relationship.
- Helps preserve sense of self.

How?

- Identify what you are willing to accept.
- Identify what goes beyond your limits and your self-respect.
- Accept that it is okay to say no.

Sticking with Your Limits

When all is said and done, the most validating concept is the importance of the other person in your life and the importance of the relationship.

Paradoxically, sometimes you must manage your own emotions and needs first, before you can take care of someone else.



Relationship Priorities

DBT identifies three major priorities that help observe limits (*Linehan*):

1. Objective Effectiveness:

Obtaining your objectives or goals in a given situation. Getting something concrete to happen, i.e., money to be returned, a salesperson to take back an item.

2. Relationship Effectiveness:

Getting or keeping a good relationship; acting in a way that is positive for the overall good of the relationship.

3. Self-Respect Effectiveness:

Preserving or improving your sense of self-respect, maintaining your values and liking for yourself in the context of the relationship.

DEAR MAN

(Linehan)

DEAR is to guide you in the initial discussion and MAN is to guide you in your response to their responses.

D–Describe the situation. Be concise and clear, not too wordy. Aim for only two or three sentences. Only the facts.

Example: “Yesterday you asked me for \$50 and said you needed it right away.”

E–Express. Express your feelings and opinions about the situation.

Example: “It upsets me when you ask for money at the last minute. It puts me in a very pressured position.”

A–Ask for what you want.

Example: “Please ask me several days before so that I am prepared.”

R–Reinforce (reward) the other person for giving you what you are requesting.

Example: “That way the money is more likely to be available for you or we can think of alternative solutions.”

M–Be Mindful about what you are doing, keeping focused on the objective. Be a “broken record” if necessary by keeping strong in the point you are making and when it is appropriate.

A–Appear confident with a strong voice, good body posture, good eye contact.

N–Negotiate, if necessary. Example: “What time frame might work for you?”

This DEARMAN skill takes practice and can be one of the most effective skills.
Aim for short statements rather than long explanations.
One to two minutes for the entire DEAR MAN is the goal.



GIVE FAST

(Linehan)

GIVE & FAST are how a DEAR MAN is accomplished: A style you often use with your best friend.

G–Gentle. Be moderate in your approach

I–Interested. Listen and be interested in the other person. Don't interrupt.

V–Validate or acknowledge the other person's feelings, wants, and opinions about the situation.

E–Easy Manner. Use a little humor, if possible; don't be intense.

F–Be Fair to yourself and to the other person.

A–(no) Apologies. Don't apologize for making a request, saying no, for disagreeing.

S–Stick to your own values. Don't sell out when you disagree or if it goes against your beliefs.

T–Be Truthful. Don't lie or exaggerate.



Reminder: Self Validate

- Let go of judgments of yourself (which typically lead to shame).
- Notice shame, and (if you haven't truly transgressed against your values), let it go and find the alternative, primary emotion.
- Describe situations, acknowledge wants and preferences.
- Stay with, allow, appreciate, and validate your primary emotions.
- Practice just being who you are, just notice and describe.
- When in doubt, imagine that someone you care about and respect is in your situation ... How would you respond to them? Respond this way to yourself.

Examples of VALIDATING Statements

Remember not to focus on what happened, but how your loved one with BPD feels about it. Address their feelings, not the situation. Do so by using emotional language, not rational or judgmental language. If you want a validating statement to feel true, make it about the truth of the situation for the other person. That truth is the way they *feel* about the event. Actively listen and pay attention.

Below are some examples of validating statements. There are many, many more. Add your own voice to make them fit you.

Reflect their feelings descriptively/ non-judgmentally

- Wow, that must have made you feel really [angry, sad, hurt, etc.].
- It must make you feel horrible to have someone do that.
- That's gotta be so [difficult, upsetting, frustrating, etc.] for you.
- I can see how that might make you feel really sad.
- I'm thinking this must have been [upsetting, sad, frightening, scary] for you.
- I'm thinking you must have been [upset, sad, frightened, scared, etc.]
- I bet you feel disappointed.
- Darn, I know how much that meant to you.

Summarize their or your perspective, clarify through questions

- Here's what I'm hearing you say.
- It sounds like *you feel* that's really unfair and you shouldn't be asked to do that.
- I don't have the same beliefs as you, but I can see this is important to you.
- I can see you're overwhelmed. What's going on?
- I am not sure I understand. Can you tell me more about it?
- I know you're scared. This is hard stuff to figure out. Can I help?

Show tolerance

- That must have been hard for you.
- What a frustrating situation to be in!
- I can see you are making an effort.
- I can see how hard you are working.
- I can see this is important to you.
- Wow, how hard that must be!
- What a horrible feeling that must be.
- What a tough spot.
- That must be really discouraging.

Normalize thoughts, feelings, and wants

- Of course you are [upset, angry, sad etc.] about that.
- It makes sense you would feel [upset, angry, sad etc.] right now.
- That really stinks!
- That's messed up! (Use stronger language, if you are so inclined!)
- How frustrating!
- Fair enough.
- You may be right!

Self-disclose your own vulnerability

- Me, too! I would have felt the same way in that situation.
- I would be [upset, nervous, sad, scared, frightened, scared], too!!
- I feel [sad, disappointed, upset, frustrated, etc.] about this, too.
- We are both feeling sad...we are suffering together.
- Your suffering is my suffering (because I love you).

Examples of INVALIDATING Statements

When you are trying to validate someone, DO NOT:

- Make it about you. "I hated it when that happened to me."
- Try to one-up the person. "Oh, you think you have it bad..."
- Tell them how they should feel. "You should feel lucky, blessed..." "What's the big deal?"
- Try to give them advice. "What you really should do is..."
- Try to solve the problem. "I'm going to call that girl's parents and..."
- Cheerlead (there is a time for this, but not now). "I know you can do it..."
- Make "life" statements. "Well, life's not fair..."
- Make judgmental statements. "What you did was wrong/bad/stupid...good/great..."
- Make "revisionist" statements. "If you had only..."
- Make it about your feelings. "How do you think that makes me feel?"
- Make "character" statements. "You're too sensitive." "You're so dramatic."
- Rationalize another person's behavior. "I bet they were just..."
- Call names. "You're such a baby." "Don't be such a wimp."
- Use reason or the "facts." "That's not what happened..."
- Use "always" or "never" statements. "You always get yourself into these situations..."
- Compare the person to someone else. "Why can't you be like your sister?"
- Label the person. "You're nuts...crazy", etc.
- Advising to cut ties or ignore the situation. "I'd dump him/her" or "Just ignore him."

Examples of Probing/ Curious Questions

- Would you like my opinion or do you just want me to listen?
- Is there anything I can do to help you?
- Can I ask some questions?
- Is this a good time to talk?
- Tell me more.
- What are you feeling?
- Help me to understand.
- What exactly happened? (Ask fact-checking questions...)
- What am I not getting?
- Are you mad at...upset with...me?
- What would help the most right now?
- How can I help you out of this pain?
- Can you give me a stress #? 1 = I'm OK, 10 = I'm drowning!!
- Are you safe?
- I will worry if you...[don't keep in contact, don't call when you leave the house, go there alone..]
- I'm worried where this will go.
- Does this make sense?

Buy More Time Statements

- I need time to think about it.
- I need to talk to [mom, dad, etc.] about this.
- Let me check on some things and get back to you.
- I really want to talk to you about this and give you my full attention, and right now is not a great time. Can I talk to you tomorrow?

Module 6: Collaborative Problem Solving

Module 6



Collaborative Problem Solving



Integrating and building on earlier skills to facilitate change in ourselves and families

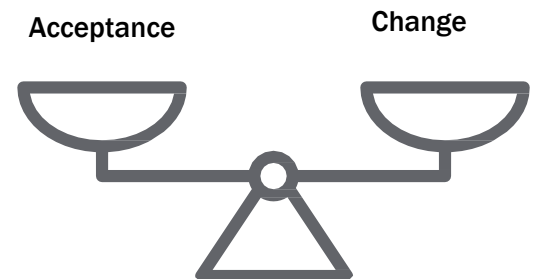
Options for Approaching Problems

1. Stay stuck and miserable (maybe make it worse); neither accept nor change the problem, keep trying to change the other person ineffectively, negatively.
2. Accept the problem and the way you feel about it, stop negative controlling efforts to change the other person (Radical Acceptance).
3. Change the way you feel or react to the problem (Opposite Action, pay attention to what you miss).
4. Solve or manage the problem collaboratively, building on skills from Modules 1 - 5.

Stay Balanced: The Dialectical

If you don't want to stay miserable, then realistically, you must focus your energy on either acceptance or change.

1. Acceptance:
 - Manage own emotions
 - Relationship mindfulness leads to understanding
 - Validate (the valid)
 - Self-validate (the valid)
2. Change:
 - Acceptance first!
 - Then DEAR MAN (with GIVE & FAST)



Module 6: Collaborative Problem Solving



Being Skillful is Difficult! Especially when the other person is reactive in a judgmental, critical, threatening or invalidating way.

Judgments from others; Offense cannot be given, it can only be taken. Taking offense is itself a judgment (in a mindful, non-judgmental world).

Observing or Stretching Our Limits

- Requires “wise” mind
- Employ rarely: consider “needs” vs. “wants”
- Different people have different limits
- Make sure it’s about safety or self-respect
- Clarity and consistency (even collaboration)
- How to observe a limit (FAST) when it is wise (and really difficult): use DEAR MAN (with plenty of GIVE)

Before you start:

- Create a priority list for changes
 - » Be wise, not impulsive
 - » Prioritize safety, then what else?
 - » We can only work on one (or two) change at a time
- Choose one thing, one target, to start to work on (safety or genuine limit)
- Recognize that change is hard, and usually takes multiple efforts over time
 - » Self-validate that this can be disappointing and frustrating

Module 6: Collaborative Problem Solving

Four Types of Problem Solving:

1. Imposed or Coercive
2. Unilateral (quietly collaborative)
3. Collaborative
4. Non-Collaborative (for now)

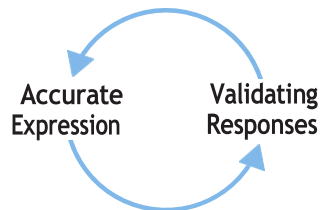
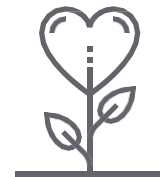
1. Imposed or Coercive (often self-righteous)

- Using power, force, coercion, negative consequences or other means to try to make the other person change, independent from our change (keeps us stuck and miserable, can make it worse...even if we “solve” the problem)



2. Unilateral (quietly/hopefully collaborative)

- Employ our own change as an invitation for the other person to change
- Utilize the transactional model
 - » Recognize that our behavior, and the other’s behavior, is transactional (reciprocal)



- “I change, and hope you will follow” approach
- Great for enhancing longer-term change
- Ask Yourself:
 - » What is my contribution to staying stuck?
 - » How could I contribute to the solution?
 - » What makes it hard for the other person to change in ways that I want? (Relationship Mindfulness)
 - » What could I do to make it easier for the other person to do what I want?

Few big problems with others can be solved unilaterally quickly, so this approach requires patience, commitment, and genuineness. Lots of skills here!



Module 6: Collaborative Problem Solving

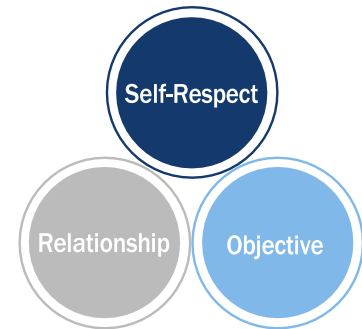
1. Collaborative

- Invite/engage the other person, work together
- Dialectical approach



The goal of Collaborative Problem Solving is to balance all three:

- **Self-Respect:** Only choose truly important targets, with important outcomes, or important to your self-respect— **FAST**
- **Relationship:** Respect & be aware of the other, and your relationship with them—**GIVE**
- **Objective:** Ask for what you want in that situation, and stay focused on that only—**DEAR MAN**



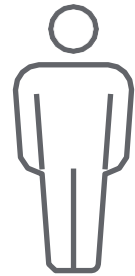
Before Opening Your Mouth:

- **Check:** Is this at the top of my list?
- **When:** spontaneous (now) vs. proactive (planned) problem solving
- **Can I find common ground?**
 - » What is the problem?
 - » Is this the same as, or related to, their definition of “the” problem? Can the two be linked?
 - » Think about being committed to solving the problem flexibly and not being committed to your solution...solve both problems, if you can
 - » If they can jointly own the solution, yay!

Module 6: Collaborative Problem Solving

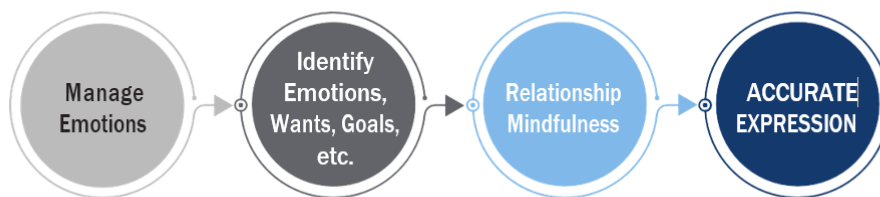
DEARMAN

- **Describe** the situation: No judgments, assumptions, criticisms.
- **Express** your emotions.
- **Ask** for what you want. Be clear & descriptive.
- **Reinforce** their behavior. What might enhance their motivation?
- **Stay Mindful** of your goal...to solve the problem.
- **Appear** gently confident or neutral, matter-of-fact.
- **Negotiate**—How does the other person want to go about this? Don't insist on your solution, but be flexible. Find common ground. Share the solution. Give in order to get what you want. This is the “COLLABORATE” part!



Express yourself in a way that the other can understand, and will get you what you want (clear targets, strategy, accurate expression).

Steps Toward Accurate Expression



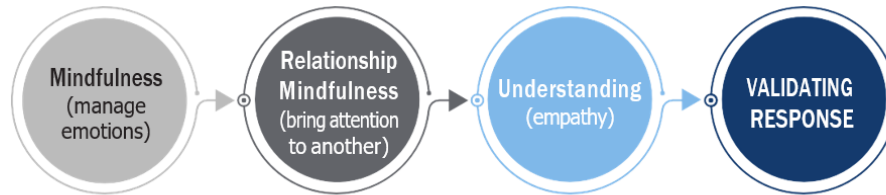
Relationship: GIVE

- **Gentle**
- **Interested** in the other person (relationship mindfulness)
- **Validate** (YES, all those earlier steps)
- **Easy Manner** (keep managing our own emotions)



Module 6: Collaborative Problem Solving

Steps Toward a Validating Response



Self-Respect: FAST

- **Be Fair** (negotiate in good faith)
- **No Apologies** (you want what you want)
- **Stick** to your values (from the top of your list)
- **Be Truthful**



Note: managing our own emotions, remembering we love the other person, using relationship mindfulness and self-validation all contribute to self-respect.

Additional Considerations

- **Foot-In-The-Door:**
 - » Start with a small piece of the problem first
 - » Build on success
 - » Reinforce progress
- Trading can be part of negotiating.
- No punishment, no threats!
 - » Reinforce, find what might naturally reinforce
 - » Collaborate on reinforcement
- Timing matters.
- Different relationships and even different situations require different strategies.
- Problem management vs. problem solving: Does this problem need to be solved or simply managed?

Module 6: Collaborative Problem Solving

3. Non-Collaborative (for now)

- Last resort, final path to change (has negative consequences)
- Use it when change is important and the other does not collaborate (cannot or is not willing)
- Do your best new DEAR MAN (& GIVE)
- Observe your maximum limit(s)
 - » Recognize this is your solution, not the other person's
- Recognize the imbalance (imposition), and soothe and validate the other person's experience, including disappointment, frustrations, helpless/hopeless experience
- Move to reinforce any effective behavior
- Revisit collaborative problem solving whenever possible



When problem solving and problem management fail, again and again, with chronic, intransigent problems: Turn conflict into closeness.

BACK TO RADICAL ACCEPTANCE

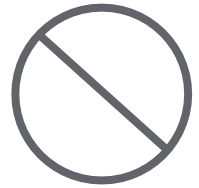


Module 6: Collaborative Problem Solving

3 Steps to Radical (True) Acceptance

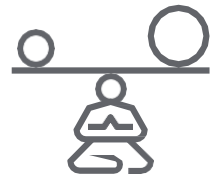
Step 1: Cease and Desist: At least temporarily, stop trying to change it

- For a time, stop trying to make the other person change their behavior (unless it is dangerous)
- Tolerate your own disappointment—let go of judgments and anger (acknowledging judgments but not expressing them – being descriptive instead. It leads to fewer judgments and less anger)
- Accept that the other person’s behavior may still bother you (e.g., not willing to go to AA meetings).



Step 2: Be mindful of negative consequences

- The focus turns from tolerating disappointment/anger to noticing the full range of effects of your previous “don’t accept” position, including what is missing, or what you lose, by focusing on the problem, such as:
 - » Being more vulnerable to further conflict
 - » More emotional distance from the other person
 - » More misery for the other person
 - » More misery of your own
 - » One or both stop participating in the relationship, which leads to further distance, conflict and unhappiness
- IF you decide to work on radical acceptance, you must GRIEVE the loss of what you wanted. Your life will NOT be as you preferred it.



Step 3: Let go of suffering and engage in your life as it is

- Understand the “meaning” of the other’s behavior
 - » In their history
 - » Given current/typical context
 - » Related emotions, beliefs, desires, etc.
- Imagine your life as it is... and this dimension NEVER changing
- Practice “stimulus control” or adjusting the things to which you pay attention. What have you been missing by focusing on the problem?
- Engage fully in your life as it is: what you have, rather than what’s missing; what you love, not what you wish were different.



Module 6: Collaborative Problem Solving

How to Self-Validate

1. Identify self-invalidation...ignore content

2. Describe what happened (it's all about description); no judgments or evaluations

3. Describe your reaction to the event
 - » Focus on primary emotion, authentic desires, etc.
 - » Look for disappointment, etc.

4. Describe the event to your reaction - In what ways do your reactions make sense?

5. State self-validation clearly
 - » It makes sense that ... (anybody would...of course I feel/want/did)

Accurate Expression is Self-Validating

- Acknowledge and express accurately or describe your distress/emotion/wants
- Communicating your own distress allows others to be validating
- Non-disclosure (inaccurate expression) can lead to invalidation and is self-invalidating
- Non-disclosure (hiding, inaccurate expression) contributes to stigma and isolation, further distress and further invalidating responses

Module 6: Collaborative Problem Solving

MODULE 6 - COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING



Session 1

1. Identify one area for change where you can practice unilateral problem solving. (p. 51)
2. Create a priority list of targets for change with your loved one that you would like to work on *collaboratively* at some point. (p 52)
 - Pick one target and determine your limit
 - Write down how you define the problem
 - Is this the same as your loved one's definition of the problem?

Module 6: Collaborative Problem Solving

REFLECTIONS FOR FINAL SESSION

1. After learning the Transactional Model what ways have you been able to empower yourself over the 12 sessions to improve the dynamic of your relationships?
2. Review the skills that you have learned in this course. Where have you made the most progress?
3. What is one skill that you want prioritise to work on? Review the material and keep practicing!

Module 6: Collaborative Problem Solving
