

“Sounds like you don’t want all the reminders I give you” mom replies. (Mom connects with his “nag” comment).

“Yeah, because I am old enough to take care of my own stuff in my own time. I’m not a baby anymore” (Eddie).

“Well, I see what you’re saying—I wouldn’t want to be treated like a baby either” (Mom validates his experience and tries to understand how that feels to him).

“Exactly, so will you just leave me alone?” (Eddie).

“Eddie, I really want to leave you alone to take care of this stuff. Some of it is my habit of reminding you, but some of my nagging has to do with the timing of when things finally get taken care of. Could I have permission to remind if you it doesn’t get done by 9:30 at night?” (Mom acknowledges her hope for him becoming a responsible emerging adult but still acknowledges why her reminding him is hard for her to let go of).

When mom validates Eddie’s experience, it doesn’t mean she needs to agree with it. She can connect with and understand his valid points, but she can express her own thoughts once he has been validated. Then a true compromise can take place. Both parties will have a sense of being understood as well as understanding the other.

The opposite of validating is dismissing and discounting. Dismissing and discounting lead to separation and disrespect. Thus, our efforts to pause and tell ourselves to find the understandable part of the other’s experience, is crucial to making a connection (preventing loneliness), and being assured of being treated better in return.

Often the road to change begins with sharing of thoughts on what we hope to change. Share these with a friend. With God’s help, we can make that change become a reality.

Validation is Not Agreement

By: Suzan Myhre, MSSW, LICSW, LPC

“ I don’t want you nag me about picking up my room” Eddie said to his mom.

“You resist me 24-7 and I’m sick of it” his mom replies.

“You would too if you had to listen to ‘do this do that’ all day long” Eddie swiftly retorts.

We can all find ourselves at odds with others in this manner. Each party has an important message, but there is no acknowledgement of that message. Or conversations can end in silence. One party becomes frustrated and leaves, and a sense of incompleteness lingers in the air. The conversation seems unfinished. There is even a sense of loss—a lost opportunity to be heard (understood), and to hear and understand the other’s viewpoint.

This conversation can also happen with couples:

“I think its time we look at a new car” Irv comments.

“There is nothing wrong with this car. This one is running just fine” replies Janis.

“Hey, you don’t even know what I’m thinking!”

Again, the couple has different viewpoints on the same topic, which is very, very, common. Most communication about issues, stuff, people, and situations involve different viewpoints and priorities as two different people communicate. A key part of communication is that before you share your own opinions and thoughts on the topic, **you take time to validate and understand the other party’s opinions, thoughts and feelings.**

In my 17 years of counseling families and couples, I find that many people resist this step. People often think that if they listen to the other’s valid reasons for thinking the way they do, *they will be interpreted as agreeing* with the other party. NOT TRUE! In really trying to understand the other person, to validate their legitimate reasons for feeling the way they do, is to RESPECT them, and to GIVE EQUAL VALUE to their opinions and thoughts. You do not have to “lose”, or give up your own thoughts, feelings, or opinions on the matter. There is room for both of you in the eyes of God. He holds you both with great value.

So what does this look like? In the first example above, it could be:

“I don’t want you to nag me about picking up my room all the time” says Eddie to his mom.