Quick Reference Guide

Psychosocial Approaches: Validation

This Quick Reference Guide will give you some ideas of how to use validation or reflective listening approaches. Validation is a 3 step approach used in dementia care to communicate an understanding of the emotional state of people with dementia (Feil, 2012).

The steps involved in validation are:

- Respectfully acknowledging or validating the feelings the person is experiencing, e.g., "You sound upset/worried/angry…."
- Offering to help the person with their concern by providing emotional support and reassurance, e.g., "I would be worried too if I could not find my daughter."
- Gently redirecting the person's attention to something more pleasant by reminiscing, changing the topic of conversation, the activity and/or environment they are in.

Validation can help build the person's sense of trust and security, whilst reducing their anxiety. Your DBMAS behaviour consultant may make further suggestions based on an understanding of the person and their situation.

Mary does not always recognize her husband, Jim. She becomes quite scared when she sees him, thinking he is an intruder in her home.

✓ Try saying	✗ Avoid saying
"Mary, you seem scared."	"Stop it Mary."
"Mary you do not seem to recognize Jim. Let's look at the photos of your wedding to Jim."	"I already told you that I am/he is Jim."
"How did you meet Jim?" "What is your favorite memory of Jim?"	"Surely you haven't forgotten who you are married to."

Helen calls out & looks for her children, who are grown up & no longer live with her, becoming distressed when she cannot find them.

✓ Try saying	✗ Avoid saying
"You sound upset Helen."	"Stop it. Don't you remember, your children are grown up"
"I would be worried too, if I could not find my children."	
"You miss/love your children. You are such a good mother. Let's look at some of the pictures of the children."	"I don't think she would want you to behave like this"

Carlo accuses others of stealing his belongings. He forgets where he has put things and mistakenly believes that his things are stolen.

✓ Try saying	✗ Avoid saying
"I would be upset too, if I thought someone was stealing my things."	"No one is stealing anything. You just lose everything and blame it on others." "You don't have a …"
"Carlo are you worried about where your … (e.g. wallet) is?"	
"Are you worried about where your … (e.g. wedding ring) is? It is important to you."	"You have probably lost your keys in the house again."
"Can I help you look? Where shall we start?"	"Carlo, stop being paranoid."

Bill keeps looking for his car keys, rattling the front door & trying to leave. He is worried & insists he has to go to home or to work.

✓ Try saying	✗ Avoid saying
"You seem worried Bill. What is it you need to do at home?"	"You are not going anywhere."
"You like to keep busy. Can you come help me?"	"You're retired. Don't you remember?"
"Come and see if we can find some work over in the office for you to do" (e.g. set up a small space with suitable activities that are related to Bill's work)	"It's Saturday and you don't work on Saturdays."
"Where did you have your keys last? Let's look for your car keys in the lounge."	"You can't drive anymore."

Want more information?

Demonstration of validation by Naomi Feil with a woman with advanced dementia
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CrZXz10FcVM
Therapies and communication approaches Help Sheet, Alzheimer's Australia
How do I validate when I am a….? Examples of using validation

Feil, N (2012) *The Validation Breakthrough*. Health Professions Press: Baltimore.

We're here to help 24/7. Access our free service on 1800 699 799

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