

Walking the Middle Path



What are Dialectics?

- There is always more than one way to see a situation and more than one way to solve a problem.
- Everyone has unique qualities and different points of view.
- Change is the only constant.
- Two things that seem like (or are) opposites can both be true.
- Honour the truth of both sides of a conflict. This doesn't mean giving up your values or "selling out". Avoid seeing the world in "black and white" and "all or nothing" ways.



Some examples...

I am doing the best I can **AND** I need to do better, try harder, and be more motivated to change.
Not: I am doing the best I can and that's it - I haven't got anything else.

I can do this **AND** it's going to be hard. **Not:** I can't do this; it's too hard.

My mum is really strict **AND** she really cares about me. **Not:** my mum is really strict so she mustn't care about me.

I've got big problems **AND** I can try to solve them. **Not:** I've got big problems, so they can't be solved.

Thinking like this helps you create a 'middle path' by helping you:

- Expand your thoughts and ways of considering life situations.
- Move away from standoffs and conflicts.
- Be more flexible and approachable.
- Avoid assumptions and blaming.

When people get 'stuck' viewing a situation only one way, this is when conflict (in families for example) increases.

By using a dialectical approach (effectively looking for alternatives even when it may seem like there isn't one), it can help us to get 'unstuck'.

This approach considers our current viewpoint and an opposing viewpoint, allowing change to occur.

Hints for Thinking and Acting Dialectically



1. Use “both-and” thinking instead of “either/or” thinking. Avoid extreme words like *always*, *never*, *you make me*. Instead, be descriptive.

Example: Instead of saying, “Everyone always treats me unfairly,” say, “*Sometimes* I am treated fairly and at other times I am treated unfairly.”

2. Practise looking at situations from all sides and points of view. Be generous and dig deep. Find the truth in every side no matter how small by asking, “What is being left out?”

Example: “Why does my mum always want me home at 10pm?”. “Why does my daughter want to stay out until 2:00am?”

3. Remember: No one has the absolute truth. Be open to alternatives.

4. Use “*I feel...*” statements. Instead of “*you are...*”, “*you should...*” or, “*that’s just the way it is,*” statements.

Example: Say, “I feel angry when you say I can’t stay out later just because you said so,” instead of, “You never listen and you are always unfair to me.”

5. Accept that different opinions can be valid, even if you don’t agree.

Example: “I can see your point of view even though I do not agree with it.”

6. Check your assumptions. Do not assume that you know what others are thinking.

Example: “What did you mean when you said...?”

7. Do not expect others to know what you are thinking.

Example: “What I am trying to say is...”



Validation



VALIDATION communicates to another person that their feelings, thoughts and actions **make sense** and are understandable to you in a particular situation.

SELF VALIDATION involves perceiving your own feelings, thoughts and actions as making sense, accurate, and acceptable in a particular situation.

INVALIDATION communicates (intentionally or not, through words or actions) that another person's feelings, thoughts and actions in a particular situation make no sense, are "manipulative," or "stupid," or an "overreaction," or not worthy of your time, interest and respect.

AN IMPORTANT THING TO REMEMBER...

VALIDATION does not always mean **AGREEMENT**

Validation does not necessarily mean that you like or agree with what the other person is doing, saying or feeling. It means that you understand where they are coming from.

Why is it helpful to validate?

Validation can improve your relationships.

It can de-escalate conflict and intense emotions.

Validation can show that:

- We are listening.
- We are understanding what is being said/going on.
- We are being non-judgemental.
- We care about the relationship.
- We can disagree without there being a big conflict.



What should we validate?

Feelings, thoughts or behaviours in ourselves or others.

But it is important to remember...

Validate the valid, not the invalid. You can still validate a feeling *without* validating the behaviour. For example: validate someone feeling upset about a low grade even though you know they didn't study, but *don't validate* the lack of studying that led to the low grade.

Validation



1. Actively listen. Make eye contact and stay focused.

2. Be aware of your verbal and non-verbal reactions to avoid invalidation. (E.g. eye rolling, sucking teeth, sighing, walking away, making light of serious things or saying, for example, "That's stupid - don't be sad!")

3. Observe what the other person is feeling in the moment. Look for a word that describes that feeling so you can communicate to them that you understand this.

4. Reflect the feeling back (non-judgementally). For example: "It makes sense that you're angry." The goal of doing this is to show the other person that you *understand* how they feel.

5. Be tolerant! Look for how the feelings, thoughts or actions make sense given the other person's (or your own) history and current situation, even if you don't approve of the behaviour, emotion, or action itself.

6. Respond in a way that shows that you are taking the other person seriously (verbally or non-verbally). For example: "That sounds awful!"

AN IMPORTANT THING TO REMEMBER...

It is also important to validate yourself, using skills similar to those above for validating others.

For example, describing your own feelings non-judgementally. E.g., "It's ok that I'm a little nervous considering the situation."

