

# Validation Ladder Cheat Sheet

## Empathy Skills – supervalidating, but tricky to pull off

1. **Disclose** - Disclosure, or self-disclosure, entails sharing personal details about yourself that relate to another person's experience or reaction.\* As a validation skill, Disclosure demonstrates that you conceptually and emotionally "get it," that you're able to connect with another person's experience, having gone through something similar yourself. At the top of the Validation Ladder, Disclosure brings you face-to-face with the other person, showing them that you see yourself in them and allowing them to see themselves in you. Although not always high risk, self-disclosure often exposes our vulnerabilities, opening us up to potential judgment, rejection, and betrayal. I argue that it's the simple act of taking those risks that allows others to see how much we care.
2. **Emote** - Emoting means openly expressing your feelings—specifically, the feelings you have in response to what someone has shared with you.\*\* You don't need to exaggerate your emotions; on the contrary, Emoting is all about authenticity. It's dropping whatever facade you're maintaining and allowing yourself to have an unfiltered, genuine response to another person.
3. **Take Action** – Taking Action means directly intervening on another person's behalf. Rather than offering solutions, or talking someone through how they might solve a particular problem, Taking Action has you step in to solve it for them. It's the "put your money where your mouth is" skill, and in some scenarios, it's the only way to show that "you're there, you get it, and you care."

## Understanding Skills - somewhere in the middle between the top and bottom

4. **Propose** – Proposing means stating what you think another person is thinking, feeling, or wanting to do based on what they've said and what you know about the situation. Proposing is often described as "mind-reading," but it's more about reading between the lines.
5. **Equalize** - Equalizing communicates that a person's response is reasonable or justified in terms of the current situation and normal biological functioning.\* It's the "anyone in your shoes would do the same" skill.
6. **Contextualize** – Contextualizing acknowledges that a person's reaction makes sense in some context – their physiology, history, etc – even if it's problematic or ineffective otherwise. You must first determine the chain of cause and effect that led to someone's reaction and then communicate it.

## The Mindfulness Skills – subtle forms of validation that are accessible

7. **Attend** - Attending means paying attention and listening without judgment in a way that shows interest and cultivates understanding. Attending conveys that you are “there”—physically, emotionally, and mentally—and that the other person worthy of your attention, a subtle but powerful message.
8. **Copy** – simply mimic or reflect a person’s words or behaviors. It just needs to demonstrate that you’re paying attention to someone without them. Two main options – Copy their words and copy their ways.
  - Try:
    - Big Four Nonverbal Behaviors – eye contact, proximity, gesturing, nodding
    - Copy and Attend combo: “That was the best restaurant I’ve been to in years.” You respond, “The best in years?” matching their smile (Copying). “What did you order?” (Attending question).