PARENTING SKILLS MODULE

(Parents of Adolescents version):

TREATMENT MANUAL

for use in

Family Skill Training / DBT Parenting Program

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Program Description and Overview

Parenting Domains

Physical Development
Intellectual Development
Social Development
Emotional Development
Self-Development

Blocking Dysfunctional Development

Parenting Strategies

1) Reactive: Block or Decreasing Dysfunctional Development
   Proactive: Foster Healthy Development

2) Positive Influence vs. Coercive Control

Transactional Model

Validation

Reduced Arousal
Accurate Expression
**Program Description and Overview**

**Dialectical Dilemmas**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forcing Autonomy</th>
<th>Fostering Dependence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authoritarian Control</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathologizing Normal Behaviors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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(Adapted from Miller, 2000)

**PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION**

- What specific difficulties do you have? What situations?
- How do these difficulties fit into the dialectical dilemmas?
- Describe these difficulties in a non-judgmental way.
- What/who are your sources of support? Other resources?
- What other stressors do you have?
- Who else is involved in your life day-to-day?

Construct a parenting “diary card”
HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

Describe accurately and non-judgmentally, two times in the past week where you and your adolescent were involved in a disagreement.

Date/Time/Situation______________________________________________________

Describe:

• Prompting event ________________________________________________

• Your emotional reaction (what and how much) __________________________

• What you said/did _________________________________________________

• What your adolescent said/did _______________________________________

• What was the outcome _____________________________________________

• Ideas about how to improve the outcome ______________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

Date/Time/Situation______________________________________________________

Describe:

• Prompting event ________________________________________________

• Your emotional reaction (what and how much) __________________________

• What you said/did _________________________________________________

• What your adolescent said/did _______________________________________

• What was the outcome _____________________________________________

• Ideas about how to improve the outcome ______________________________

_______________________________________________________________________
BALANCE IN RELATIONSHIPS

RELATIONAL MINDFULNESS

WHAT?
• Observe: just notice your adolescent
• Describe: Put words on noticing
• Participate: Involve yourself in the experience or activity with your family member

HOW?
• Non-judgmentally: let go of “shoulds” and right/wrong
• One-mindfully: only pay attention to your adolescent
• Effectively: Remember that this is someone you love

Using Relational Mindfulness

BEING TOGETHER WHEN YOU ARE TOGETHER

There are 3 ways to be together:

1. Passively together
   Both people are physically present (e.g. same room or place) but are not interacting with each other and are not focusing attention on each other. For example, a parent could be washing dishes in the kitchen at the same time their adolescent is doing homework at the kitchen table. Or, it could be two younger siblings in the living room playing different games quietly to themselves.

2. Actively together
   Both people are doing some activity together, such as a parent and their adolescent working on a school project together. Or, it could be two parents going to see a movie together. Attention is focused primarily on these activities, but there is some awareness of each other.

3. Interactively together
   Regardless of other activities, attention and awareness is focused on each other. There may be a lot of talking, or very little, but there is enough communication for both or all to know that you are doing something together. Communication between family members at dinner is an example of this.
Relational Mindfulness, continued

Options for your attention/mental orientation:

- **Observe/notice** – take the observer role
  *This is especially helpful if involvement/participation is very painful, leads you to react in a problematic way, or you are avoiding something important. You can notice yourself or another.*

- **Describe** – this can also be from the “observer” role
  *Again, this is very helpful to avoid/let go of judgments. Try describing as you would if you were a novelist or radio announcer, capturing details without commentary or opinions (or judgments). Again, you can describe your own thoughts, sensations, reactions, behaviors, etc., or the OBSERVABLE things another person is doing.*

- **Participate** – let go of observing, describing, or anything except actively immersing yourself into the moment, into the activity
  *This is where you let go of being self-conscious, self-evaluating, let go of the chatter in your mind and move toward just experiencing the moment, situation, etc.*

- **Make Judgments**: right/wrong or good/bad or should/shouldn’t
  *Making judgments is problematic, especially concerning someone you love. This might take the form of bitter complaints, expectations that the other person should change, etc., and is very often accompanied by strong anger, sarcasm, and/or contempt.*

- **Numb out**
  *This is where you stop acting effectively and instead go into a daze, or maybe even fool yourself into thinking you are just coping. Instead, you really are just avoiding something important.*

- **Hyperactivity**: run around doing many things
  *This is another way to numb out, but looks like you’re being very productive (or, at least very active because of all the energy you’re putting out).*
DECREASING REACTIVITY, BEING EFFECTIVE

DECREASE YOUR EMOTIONAL REACTIVITY

- Use Relational Mindfulness to sort out emotions, opinions, needs, wants, and to interrupt your negative reactions, anger, and toxic responses
- Be mindful of your role as parent and your goals (e.g. parenting domains)
- Be mindful of appropriate & effective timing of discussions
- Reduce your vulnerability to negative emotions and negative transactions: When tired, hungry, sick, or upset, remember that emotional reactivity is high
- Increase mindfulness of pleasant things that your family member does for you, you do for your family member, or you do together

Letting Go of Anger
Finding Other Emotions to Decrease Reactivity

Anger as a primary emotion: normative and justified in the situation, and effective to experience or express

VERSUS

Anger as a secondary emotion: non-normative or not justified in the situation, or problematic/ineffective to experience or express
Primary and Secondary Conditioned Emotional Reactions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary or Effective</th>
<th>Secondary or Problematic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sadness, disappointment</td>
<td>Anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilt or shame</td>
<td>Anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jealousy</td>
<td>Anger</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Judgments (about another person) also lead to anger

Our goal is to manage our own wanting, thinking and feeling for the purposes of helping our adolescents sort out their own wanting, thinking and feeling. Doing this is validating, by definition, so we will focus a lot on this.

Practice

Situation:
________________________________________________________________________

Initial Reaction:
________________________________________________________________________

Use Relational Mindfulness: What was your PRIMARY emotion (other than anger)?
________________________________________________________________________
HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

A) Practicing Relational Mindfulness

In the following week, practice being relationally mindful of your adolescent on two different occasions.

Time 1. Date/time/situation
__________________________________________________

Engage in an activity with your adolescent where you two can be “actively together”. Describe how it went below.

Time 2. Date/time/situation
__________________________________________________

Engage in an activity with your adolescent where you two can be “interactively together”. Describe how it went below.

B) Interrupting Rising Negativity

*Rehearsal after an incident (imaginal):* Note a situation in which your negative emotion was increasing rapidly, maybe turning into anger. Try to re-create the situation and use the steps below to decrease your emotional response.

1) Notice your rising emotion
2) Don’t blame the child
3) Just describe the situation
4) Now describe your sensations, emotions, thoughts, and so on
5) Remember that this is your child, recall lovable things about him or her
6) Slow your breathing
7) Check in again regarding your emotion. If it is still high, or still going up, repeat the above steps. If it’s gone down, notice what you did to make the situation more constructive.

Describe what happened:
Actual practice: Now try to use the steps in a real situation – taking a moment of “time out” if you need to review the steps.

How did this go?:

C) Letting go of anger

List a time in the past week where you became angry with your adolescent. Determine if the primary emotion was truly anger or if it was another emotion. Describe the situation below.

- Situation

- How did anger effect the situation

- What was the primary emotion
SETTING EFFECTIVE LIMITS

In order to be understood, or for another person to respond in the way you want, you first must be able to identify accurately what you want (or feel, think, etc.) and tell the other person in a way he or she can understand.

THERE ARE TWO TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

1. Getting Objectives Met (change)

2. Communication to enhance the relationship (acceptance)

Use positive reinforcement of desired behaviors first for a long time in order to minimize the problem behavior and build your relationship. This occurs most effectively in the context of a respectful, mindful relationship.

Positive “control” versus Negative “control”

ACCURATE EXPRESSION: SAYING WHAT YOU WANT

Know which type of communication you want to use:

• use mindfulness to identify what you really feel, think, and want

Is the time right?

• use mindfulness of the other person to figure out whether she or he is able to validate or work on this with you RIGHT NOW

• if not, WAIT

• if the timing is right, tell the other person what your goal is, get agreement on the goal, and proceed
### HOW TO GET YOUR OBJECTIVES MET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal: Sorting out feelings</th>
<th>Strategy: Describe (to self) emotions, wants, opinions non-judgmentally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Getting the child to adhere to limits</td>
<td>Express (to child) emotions, wants, and opinions clearly and non-judgmentally; give reasons as to why this is a limit; use contingencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting clear limits effectively; (change)</td>
<td>Assert the limit clearly and make sure child understands the limit; validate self for setting a limit that is appropriate for your child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting the other person (acceptance)</td>
<td>Validate at multiple levels; work together on solution; follow through with support, coaching, positive influence, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making repairs/forgiving when a limit is not met</td>
<td>Describe situation, emotions; be willing to negotiate; limit vs. rule</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### REMEMBER, THE PURPOSE OF LIMITS IS NOT TO PUNISH CHILDREN. LIMITS ARE USED TO GUIDE DESIRED BEHAVIOR.

### Goals and Competing Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our needs/desires</td>
<td>Their needs/desires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logic</td>
<td>Emotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our goals</td>
<td>Their goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our values</td>
<td>Their values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our problems</td>
<td>Their problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our happiness</td>
<td>Their happiness</td>
</tr>
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</table>

In parenting, the parent must be aware of both his/her and the child’s goals. 
**BOTH** sets are equally important to a parent.
Prior to attempting to change the other person, it is essential to first try to balance competing goals. Or find ways to make them not compete.

HOW DO THESE RELATE HERE?
Dialectical Dilemmas

Forcing Autonomy ———— Fostering Dependence

Authoritarian Control

Pathologizing Normal Behaviors

(Adapted from Miller, 2000)
HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

1. A. Use mindfulness to identify and describe one particular limit that is important to you.

Describe the limit _______________________________________________________

Why is it important to you ______________________________________________

What does your adolescent say and feel about this limit _______________________

______________________________________________________________________

What role did the adolescent play in creating this limit ________________________

B. Use mindfulness to identify and describe another particular limit that is important to you.

Describe the limit _______________________________________________________

Why is it important to you ______________________________________________

What does your adolescent say and feel about this limit _______________________

______________________________________________________________________

What role did the adolescent play in creating this limit ________________________

2. Use the dialectical dilemmas this week when attempting to balance competing goals with your adolescent.

What was your goal/objective _____________________________________________

What was your adolescent’s goal/objective __________________________________

What dialectical dilemma is applicable _____________________________________

How was the issue resolved ______________________________________________

Was balance achieved ____________________________________________________
What Validation Is, Why It Is Important

WHAT IS VALIDATION?
IDENTIFYING AND COMMUNICATING YOUR UNDERSTANDING IN A CLEAR WAY

- Communicate what you understand about the situation
- Legitimize the “facts” (the child’s thoughts, wants, etc.)
- Explain your own feelings after expressing understanding
- Acknowledge the situation, the other’s opinions, feelings, etc.
- Respect emotions, desires, reactions and goals

WHY IS VALIDATION IMPORTANT?

Validation:
- Is the core of communication (along with accurate expression)
- Reduces negative emotional arousal and conflict
- Helps your child to learn to manage their own emotional arousal
- Maintains fairness and decreases anger
- Facilitates the emotional and self development of your child
- Is the key to getting through “rough” spots in your relationship
- Makes problem-solving, closeness, & other kinds of support possible

Invalidation is toxic to relationships and to individuals

REMEMBER:

VALIDATING IS NOT NECESSARILY AGREEING.
VALIDATING DOESN’T MEAN YOU LIKE IT.
ONLY VALIDATE THE VALID.
What, When, & How to Validate

TARGETS: What should I validate?

- Feelings or emotions
- Legitimacy in wanting something
- Beliefs, opinions, or thoughts about something
- True values about something
- How difficult a task is
- How hard a person is trying to accomplish something
- Things a person does that are effective for herself or himself
- Things a person does for another

FACTORS TO REMEMBER

- Notice if the timing is right
- Try to take turns: when it’s your turn to listen, listen mindfully and don’t think about what you’re going to say next
- Use an effective voice tone
- Keep eye contact natural and respectful
- Be aware of “personal space” (stay close enough, but don’t invade)
- Don’t hesitate to ask if the other person actually feels “validated”
- Practice non-blaming, non-black & white thinking (validating the other does not mean your perspective isn’t also valid)
- When providing difficult feedback or disagreeing, do so only when the other person is ready and willing to discuss this; always validate first and remind the other of your goals and caring
- Remember that one effective, step forward is better than ten backwards
 HOW DO I VALIDATE ANOTHER PERSON?

ANY WAY you can search for understanding and communicate that understanding.

Different ways to validate verbally, in a conversation:

1) pay attention, listen actively  
   use good eye contact & body posture to communicate that  
   you are listening non-judgmentally; use relationship mindfulness

2) reflect her or his feelings descriptively (non-judgmentally)  
   let yourself feel a little bit of what she or he is feeling,  
   and let yourself show it (voice tone, facial expression, posture)  
   “O.K., so you feel angry when I yell at you.”

3) summarize her or his or my perspective descriptively, for understanding  
   (and not to disagree, criticize, or judge, not to change her or his mind  
   or goals, nor to get her or him to do something differently)  
   clarify what it is that you hear, that you understand; ask questions  
   “Gotcha. Yelling makes you not want to come home and spend time with  
   the family. What else does yelling do? I imagine that you might even feel  
   scared at times too when I yell?”

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  
   describe HOW what the other person is saying (feeling, thinking,  
   their actions, etc.) DOES make sense in terms of her or his life  
   experiences and life struggles  
   “Since you told me your feelings on this, I can totally see why you haven’t  
   been coming home for dinner and why you want to stay out with your  
   friends past your curfew.”

5) be mindful of the other person & 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)  
   “You know, I bet anyone would feel scared and angry if they were on the  
   receiving end of my yelling.”
6) practice willingness, be genuine; treat the other as an equal, not as fragile or incompetent
   if the other person has strong emotions, help her or him manage them (don’t change the subject); if they’re acting ineffectively, tell them in a supportive, caring (but clear) way
   “If I were you, I know I would feel scared. Obviously yelling doesn’t work AND I still want you home for dinner and curfew. So what can we do about this? How do you want to resolve this situation?

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)
   “You know I feel really happy that you could tell me that you were feeling this way. It makes me scared to think about how I effect you and don’t even know it. I also feel a little guilty about yelling at you. I usually do after I yell and just never told you before.

Also, you can validate without talking:

- Respond in a way (action, not just words) that takes her or him seriously
  if hungry, get him or her something to eat; if wanting company, join her or him or go do something with her or him; if wanting some “alone” time, allow it

- Provide nurturance and support
  think: “How would I like someone to treat me in this situation?”
  ask: “What would you like me to do? What would help?”

- Balance competing goals
  balance the importance of your relationship with your self-respect (and any particular objectives you have)
  remember: just because you can do something doesn’t mean that you have to; and just because it’s not your job doesn’t mean that you can’t
  What would work? What is important?
HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

Practicing Validation

They key to noticing the benefits of validation is through practicing them. Throughout the next week, try validating your child at least twice on all seven levels of validation. For each level, write out what you said and what your child’s response was.

**Level 1**

What you did __________________________________________________________
What was your child’s response ____________________________________________
What you did __________________________________________________________
What was your child’s response ____________________________________________

**Level 2**

What you said __________________________________________________________
What was your child’s response ____________________________________________
What you said __________________________________________________________
What was your child’s response ____________________________________________

**Level 3**

What you said __________________________________________________________
What was your child’s response ____________________________________________
What you said __________________________________________________________
What was your child’s response ____________________________________________
Level 4
What you said ____________________________________________
What was your child’s response __________________________________________
What you said ____________________________________________
What was your child’s response __________________________________________

Level 5
What you said ____________________________________________
What was your child’s response __________________________________________
What you said ____________________________________________
What was your child’s response __________________________________________

Level 6
What you said ____________________________________________
What was your child’s response __________________________________________
What you said ____________________________________________
What was your child’s response __________________________________________

Level 7
What you said ____________________________________________
What was your child’s response __________________________________________
What you said ____________________________________________
What was your child’s response __________________________________________
How to Validate in Difficult Situations

GETTING YOURSELF TO VALIDATE

- Take the other person’s perspective (relational mindfulness)
- Remember the foundation: this is your family member, your own nest
- Empathy = understanding and the other person; what it’s like to be the other person
- Reality acceptance (what “is” versus what “should be”)
- Effective assumptions promote effective behavior: when in doubt, identify assumptions, remember goals, and proceed from wise mind

THE MANY WAYS TO INVALIDATE THE VALID

(or, 101 ways to corrode your relationship and help the other person, and yourself, to 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)
- Minimize feelings or their legitimacy
- Make your child think that their actions are abnormal when they are not
- Be critical or judgmental, believing that misbehavior is intentional, “they should have known better”, put the worst possible “spin” on the behavior
- Let miscommunication stand unrepaired
- Be willful (focus on being right or respected instead of effective)
- Insist on your solution to the problem instead of solving the problem
- Up the ante: escalate conflict
- Try to win an argument by being more hostile or attacking
- Don’t pay attention to another’s pain or suffering
- Enforce rules because you can, not because they are useful
- Engage in crazy-making behavior (e.g., “gaslighting,” be patronizing, insist she or he feels or thinks something even though they say they don’t – even if you are “well-intended”)
- Don’t validate enough
- Never express your own feelings or emotions
- Treat the person as though she or he is fragile, that they can’t handle certain responsibilities
HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

A) Validating in tough situations

One of the hardest things about validation is using it when it is most needed. Below is an activity that is designed to help you validate when it is difficult (e.g. an argument).

1) Actual practice: Try to use the steps below in a real situation – taking a moment of “time out” if you need to review the steps.

   a) Notice your rising emotion
   b) Don’t blame the child
   c) Just describe the situation
   d) Now describe your sensations, emotions, thoughts, and so on
   e) Remember that this is your child, recall lovable things about him or her
   f) Slow your breathing
   g) Check in again regarding your emotion. If it is still high, or still going up, repeat the above steps. If it’s gone down, notice what you did to make the situation more constructive.

Describe what you child wants, feels, thinks, etc.:

2) Validating your child: After managing your rising emotion, and describing non-judgmentally what your child wants, thinks and feels, pick a level of validation that is appropriate for the situation. Remember, if validation does not work the first time, try, try again.

   What level of validation did you use? ______________________________
   What did you say to validate? ______________________________
   How did your child respond? ______________________________

B) Noticing Invalidation

Another difficult thing to do during an argument, besides validating, is to NOT invalidate your child. Notice a time in the past week where you and your child were arguing and you invalidated your child.

   What did you say to invalidate ______________________________
   What was your child’s immediate response ______________________________
   What was your reaction to your invalidation ______________________________
Validating Yourself as a Parent

TRUE ACCEPTANCE

STEP 1: TOLERANCE

- Stop trying to get the other person to change her or his behavior
- Must tolerate your own disappointment
  - let go of judgments
  - let go of anger
- The other person’s behavior may still bother you and you may still be miserable

STEP 2: BE MINDFUL OF NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES

- The focus turns from tolerating disappointment and anger to noticing the full range of effects of your previous “don’t accept” position

  The consequences of disappointment & anger include:
  - being more vulnerable to further conflict
  - more emotional distance
  - 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
**STEP 3: LET GO OF SUFFERING & ENGAGE YOUR LIFE NOW**

- **Recontextualize other’s behavior:** mindfully, non-judgmentally bring into focus as context all the things that you like or love or value or appreciate about the other person
- **Understand the “meaning” of the other person’s behavior (the one you don’t like):**
  - given her or his life experiences
  - given your relationship experiences (including right now)
  - related emotions, beliefs, desires, etc.
- **Appreciate the she or he is exactly as she or he should be; enjoy this aspect of the other person**
- **Participate in the relationship fully:** This is someone you love, part of your life
- **Be committed, even passionate about making the relationship work**
  Validate, validate, validate (and self-validate, self-validate, self-validate)

**STEP 4: KNOW THAT YOU HAVE YOUR CHILD’S BEST INTERESTS IN MIND**

- **Validate yourself for making the effort to improve your relationship with your child**
- **Truly accept that you have set limits with your child so that they can develop into the best adults they possibly can**
- **You are the most significant contributor to your child’s emotional and self development. Using the validation skills you have learned will aid you in the process of healthy child development**

“When you understand, you cannot help but love. You cannot get angry. To develop understanding, you have to practice looking ... with eyes of compassion. When you understand, you love. And when you love you naturally act in way that can relieve the suffering of people.”

- Thich Nhat Hanh