

## CLINICAL COLUMN

by Naomi Feil

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### FREQUENTLY REPORTED MYTHS (OR) WHAT IS NOT VALIDATION

#### MYTH ONE:

*Received from Georgia:*

"We use the Therapeutic Lie that comes from Validation Therapy. It works great for a few minutes. It quiets people down. But, often, the old person makes up another story that isn't true. Does lying really help?"

*Response from Validation:*

No. Lying is not therapeutic. Lying is the opposite of Validating. It ends further communication. The old person shuts down emotions. Lying does not

take the old person seriously. Lying is disrespectful. Lying pats the old person on the back, discounting, erasing the old person's human need to return to the past to re-live or re-solve or re-stimulate or restore an unfinished issue or a wonderful, vivid, memory. Lying denies the need to grieve for loved ones. Lying obliterates the struggle to maintain identity. Lying deflates the old human being who now longs to express anger or fear that has been suppressed for a lifetime.

90-year-old Mrs. Jay slips out the door of the nursing home to find her mother. When her mother died, Mrs. Jay was working. She feels guilty and needs to restore her mother in order to express her grief. The worker who lies wants to soothe the old woman, to quiet her down: "Sweetie, your Momma is right around the corner, shopping. She'll be back in 5 minutes. Let's sing and have some yummy chocolate cookies you love." Sandra Jay swallows her longing to see her mother along with the chocolate cookies. Deep down, Mrs. Jay knows that her mother is dead. Mrs. Jay buried her mother. She saw her mother's

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eyes in the coffin. Sandra Jay can never forget that. But, the memory is buried. Sandra Jay feels relieved but uncomfortable when the worker lies. She does not quite trust this worker, but says nothing and eats cookies.

88-year-old Joe Hopkins packs his briefcase. He must be at the courthouse at 7 a.m. The well-meaning worker reassures him: "Honeybunch, it's Saturday. The courthouse is closed. Eat your breakfast. You can go to court later."

The old man nods and swallows. Long ago, he banished the truth: he will never practice law again. His life was the law. He never learned to retire. He suppressed the stabbing pain as he walked away from the courthouse for the last time. He will die an attorney; not an old man stuck in a wheelchair.

The Validation worker has learned to empathize with the old person's need to grieve; to restore the past in order to resolve it; or, to survive the bleak present. The Validation worker understands that Joe Hopkins' retirement was traumatic, that he clings to his role as an attorney to go on living.

Validation Principles are based on well-established Theoretical Assumptions: Human beings live on several levels of awareness, from conscious awareness to suppression and repression. When painful feelings are expressed to someone who listens with empathy, the feelings are relieved. The client trusts the worker. (Freud, Jung, Rogers.)

The Validation worker helps the older person express feelings, not obliterate them. The Validation worker never lies and never argues. The worker knows that Mr. Hopkins cannot bear to be old without his job, and walks with this old man to restore his identity. Together, they review his life as a lawyer, his best cases, and his worst ones. Mr. Hopkins feels strong. Using Validation techniques, "The Preferred Sense," "Polarity", and "Re-phrasing", the Validation worker builds trust.

Sandra Jay blurts her guilt and her love to the Validation worker. The old woman feels relieved.

Each time Mrs. Jay calls for her mother, Mrs. Jay is "Validated" – she is able to express her emotions to an empathic human being. In six weeks, Mrs. Jay does not call for her mother any more. Her grief and guilt have subsided. Joe Hopkins, his role established as the one who keeps law and order in the Validation Group, no longer packs his briefcase to go to court.

## MYTH TWO:

### *Received from New York:*

"We use Validation all the time. When they want to go home, we go right along with them. We agree with whatever they say. Then we distract them, and re-direct them."

### *Response from Validation:*

Webster defines re-direction: "To direct to a different place; to show the way; to command with authority." Re-direction is the direct opposite of Validation. Validation follows the old person, stepping into the old man's heart, feeling what the old woman feels. The Validation worker respects, not directs. Old people diagnosed with a "dementia" have wisdom. They know where they want to go. Though they have lost cognition, clock time, speech and recent memory, they are not mind-less. They have human needs to fulfill, human emotions to express, places to go, things to do. The Validation worker travels along.

"Get out of my way! My children are home alone. It's 4 o'clock. I have to go home. I think I left the fire on the stove." Frantic, 85 year old Mrs. Bart shrieks.

Calm, trained in re-direction and diversion, the worker soothes, taking Mrs. Bart's arm: "Sweetheart, I called your neighbor to see after the children. They're fine. Look at this new painting you made! It's beautiful. Now, come along with me to the art room. We need you to paint three more; just like this one to put on the wall."

“I’ll paint them tomorrow for you. Right now, I have to see after my four children. NOW!”  
“Sweetie, they’re fine. The bus broke down, and it’s too far to walk. Oh, look, the chocolate ice cream tray just arrived. Let’s have some. There’s your friend, Sally. She’s waiting for you.” The worker firmly takes Mrs. Bart’s arm, moving her towards Sally and the ice cream. Reluctantly, the old woman eats chocolate ice cream and stops talking.

45 years ago, Elsie Bart’s children came home from school and started a Boy Scout fire on the rug. Elsie was playing bridge with her friend next-door. The burn on her son’s finger healed, but not Mrs. Bart’s heart. Unexpressed, her guilt simmered, grew stronger through the years. Now, she hurts. Before she dies, this old woman struggles to heal herself. In “Time Confusion,” Elsie Bart sees the fire with her mind’s eye. The Validation Worker has learned these Validation Theoretical Assumptions: Human beings can see with their mind’s eye, using the visual areas of the temporal lobe of the brain. (Penfield) Suppressed and Repressed emotions can cause pain. (Rogers) Human beings struggle to die without pain. Without knowing what it was, the Validation Worker knows that something terrible happened years ago that haunts this woman in old age. The worker Validates Mrs. Bart, helping her express emotions, using these Validation Techniques: “Open questions,” “The preferred sense,” “Ambiguity,” “Polarity,” “Genuine, empathic eye-contact,” “Matching Emotions”. The Validation Worker matches Mrs. Bart’s movements, breathing, and voice tone, in order to feel Mrs. Bart’s fear. The old woman slows down. She whispers to the worker.

Her guilt and fears expressed, she admits softly, apologetically: “ That’s the last time I played bridge. He got a little burn on his finger, but I put ice on it, and the pain went away.”