

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE VALIDATION TRAINING INSTITUTE



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CLINICAL COLUMN
**"Dealing with
Aggression"**
Conclusion

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"I'll do my best to learn how to Validate Mom, but it won't be easy. What if I make mistakes? And with "Alzheimer's", will she remember from one minute to the next?" Jill's voice mixes anger with tears. Her husband, Phil, tightens his hold on her hand as they face the "VW" in the nursing home.

"She needs you, Jill. She'll overlook your mistakes, providing you don't keep making the same ones. Your mother's recent memory is gone, but her emotional memory is intact. She'll remember your voice-tone, your constant caring, your ability to read her needs and get into her world. She'll feel less alone each time you Validate her. Her need to lash out and hurt *you* to relieve her fury at being old and dependent will decrease."

Jill swallows and nods. "How do I start?"

"Most important, when your Mom hurts you, "Center". Acknowledge your hurt, put it in the top shelf of the closet of your mind, and close the door. Later, let it all out with Phil. Spill your anger and

After six sessions with the Validation Worker (VW), Jill, Agnes' daughter, gains insight into her own fears of being abandoned.

She is shocked at the ugliness of her behavior; behavior that reminds her of her 89 year old mother. Jill resolves never to become like her mother.

pain. He can take it." Phil nods. Jill learns how to breathe slowly and "Center" to rid herself of the hurt.

The VW continues: "Re-phrasing" is a good way to start when you're speechless. Once you've "centered", you can stop thinking of yourself and tune into your mother with *all your energy*. Look at her eyes: Are they narrow? Squinting? Her lower lip: Is it tight? Pulled down? Her fingers: Are they pointing? Accusing? Her voice: Is it harsh? Whining? Now, pick up your mother's rhythm. You are not mimicking her. You are listening so closely that you speak the way she speaks. Your empathy shows. Say what your mother says in your own words.

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Let her know that you really hear her and are on her side. If she complains, use the technique, "Polarity." Ask her "how bad? What is the worst thing that happened?" Let her tell you the extreme. Stay away from emotions. Don't ask her how she feels. She'll tell you anyway. She doesn't want to get in touch with her feelings. She doesn't want insight. She'll deny her panic. Let her express herself *her* way through blaming. Ask factual, open questions: "What happened?" Who did it? When did it happen?" Most important, don't argue. And don't lie. Don't agree with her if what she says is not true. But don't disagree. Imprint these three magic methods: "Listen," "re-phrase," and ask her the "extreme." Jill practices the three Validation techniques as the VW assumes the role of her mother. "I think I'm ready to try Validation with Mom." Jill's voice quivers, but she is eager to begin. Jill walks with new confidence into her mother's room.

"Well," Agnes spits, "look what the cat dragged in. You finally made time to visit your own mother, with your busy schedule. I'm not interested. You can get the hell out."

Jill notes her pain and tucks away the stab of hurt. She "Centers," for ten seconds, then looks at her mother's angry eyes, her tight lips, and listens to the harsh, whiny voice-tone. "You don't want me here because I haven't seen you for a week?" Jill re-phrases, picking up Agnes' staccato rhythm.

"You hit the nail on the head, you bitch. Where were you? Fiddling around with that no-good husband of yours. That's gratitude for all I've done for you. Just get out and leave me alone." Agnes turns her back on Jill.

"You worked hard for me, Mom. All your life. Now, you're angry because I can't be with you all the time." Jill re-phrases, but uses a feeling word. As the VW worker warned, Agnes denies her anger.

"I am *not* angry." Agnes shouts. "I have never raised my voice with you. Even when you put me in

this rat-hole with these old people. I don't belong here."

Jill remembers the warning, "Stay away from feelings." Her mother cannot be honest with herself. And she doesn't want to learn. Agnes holds tight to her life-long defenses: denial and blaming. Jill hopes that her mother will forgive the mistake. "Mom, you can't stand this place. And you can't stand me because I put you in here. What is the worst thing about living here?" Jill uses the "extreme."

"Everything. The crazy old people. The crabby nurses. This room." Agnes points to the bare, white walls, the tiny window, the pine dresser.

"Mom, you're used to having a big house, doing what you please, cooking and taking care of us. Now, you have to do what they tell you. And live in one room with people you don't want to be with." Jill's voice holds her mother's resentful tone. Agnes pauses, and looks at her daughter with open eyes for the first time. The two women become one for a moment.

"How is that no-good husband of yours, anyway. Why doesn't he come with you? Are you getting along?" Agnes, embarrassed by the moment of intimacy, turns from Jill.

Jill and Agnes talk simply, their emotions tucked safely away. For the next six months, Jill visited once each week accepting her mother's anger, which lessened. Agnes was able to visit Jill's home, and gradually made a friend in the nursing home. With Jill's faithful support and empathy, Agnes slowly became less aggressive.