

# Validation

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE VALIDATION TRAINING INSTITUTE



## CLINICAL COLUMN "Dealing with Aggression" Part Two

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*Jill, her husband, Phil, and the Validation Worker (VW) are meeting for the sixth time at the Validation Therapy Office in the nursing home.*



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"I'm stuck with a mean mother who insults me every time I try to be nice to her. My sister isn't so dumb, she and her rich husband have moved as far away as they can get!" Jill's eyes narrowed, accusing Phil.

"Sweetie," Phil piped in his whiny tone of apology, "Think of all the nice things your mother did for you."

"Name one?" Jill demanded, her voice flat and angry.

Her question hung in the air, filling the small office.

"She had you." the VW's answer was followed by a deeper question. "Does that mean you owe her?"

Jill had to decide if she wanted to spend the time and energy to learn how to Validate her mother.

"It's easy for Phil. His mother died when she was 60. Maybe cancer is a blessing." Jill was avoiding the question. Phil lowered his head to hide his hurt. "I loved my mother. I'd give anything to have her back."

Jill's lower lip tightened. "Last week, I bought my mother the pearl necklace she'd always wanted, that Dad never bought her. For months, she bugged me about that necklace. I went to six stores. I spent one whole week finding a necklace with a rhinestone clasp and twelve perfectly matching pearls. She threw the necklace on the floor and told me I might as well take the pearls now and not wait until she was dead."

The little group sat silent. Today was the sixth family meeting. Each time, Jill burst out, furious. Each time, accounts of her mother's cruelty worsened.

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"Did your mother ever love you?" The VW asked.

The office clock ticked heavy moments of pain. Finally, Jill answered. "No."

Phil started to apologize: "Sweetie, she helped you each time we moved. She watched the kids."

"Because she felt important, bossing us. She was always too busy with herself. She couldn't care about anyone else, except maybe Dad. And that was only because she needed him. She's scared to be alone."

"Aren't you?" Phil's honest brown eyes searched. "You called me at 4:00 o'clock in the morning last week, in Toledo. And you knew I had to make that important presentation at 8:00. Why did you wake me?"

"I had terrible stomach pains. The emergency room phone was busy. I couldn't drive myself to the hospital."

"Your pains went away pretty quickly. How come?" Phil's laconic smile couldn't mask anger. Jill's mouth opened to answer, then closed in shock. Her forehead furrowed. "That's what my mother does. Are you saying that I'm like my mother?"

"Are you?" The VW cut in before Phil could object.

Jill faced Phil, touching his hand. "I was terribly thoughtless. I used you because..." Jill's voice cracked. "Because I'm afraid to be alone." Phil stared at the floor.

"Jill, are you like your mother?" The VW persisted.

"Oh God! Please, don't let me be like her. She is so hurtful. She is a lonely old woman. If I learn how to Validate her, will I learn how to avoid being like her when I get old?"

"Yes." The VW answered quickly. "Validating means feeling what your mother feels. You've got to be honest with yourself before you can step into her shoes. To do that, you have to first know how you feel. Self-awareness will motivate you to behave differently from your Mom. You'll learn how to shelve your emotions so that you can take in hers...You'll learn empathy.

When she spits out her anger and misery to you, and you feel her anger and misery too, she'll feel relief. She'll begin to trust you because you feel what she feels. She won't be so alone."

"Will her relief be permanent? Jill was skeptical. "Will she remember the next time we're together?"

"No. You'll have to Validate her until she dies." The VW answered her first question. Validation can't cure an old person. It's too late for your mother to make a permanent change, but not for you. Today you gained insight. Your emotions and your intellect clicked. You suddenly realized why you acted as you did with your husband. You can change, because you want to know yourself. Your mother doesn't."

*Next NEWSLETTER, Part Three: What Jill's mother remembers. Difficulties and Dividends in Validating a family member. Teaching Jill the Validation Techniques.*