

## Validation Techniques: Using open questions

by Steve Klotz, Certified Validation Teacher, Validation Director, Country Meadows Retirement Communities, Hershey, PA

The Validation method teaches us that disoriented elders need to express emotions and be heard and accepted by others whom they trust. How can we help those individuals who are still verbal express their emotions and feel like they are heard and respected?

After you have centered, observed the elder and calibrated yourself to them, respectfully approached and found the closest distance comfortable for that elder, then you can make good use of open questions.

Open questions are those which cannot be answered with a “yes” or “no.” Questions that begin with Who, What, Where, When and How are open questions. At the beginning, they can originate from your observations of the individual just prior to a visit as well as from your knowledge of background information about the individual.

Examples of good open questions that explore possible emotions and take you into the disoriented elder’s present world may include:

**WHO:** Who have you been thinking about lately? Who comes to mind when you get up in the morning or lay down for sleep at night? Who was in your family? Who were people who you worked with? Who was your best friend growing up?

**WHAT:** What is on your mind today? What things bring joy to you? What things bring sadness? What type of work did you do? What was it like to grow up in your family? What was your hometown like? What did your husband/wife look like the first time you met? What was that person/place/experience like for you? What did you think of that?

**WHERE:** Where did you grow up? Where did you live throughout your life? Where would you like to be living now? Where did you work? Where did you vacation? Where did you go to get away from everything? Where did you get together with your friends?

**WHEN:** When did you move here? When did you start working? When did you retire? When did you begin to feel like the years were quickly passing by? When did you last see your father or mother? When did you know you wanted to be a ?

**HOW:** How did you get here? How did you deal with moving out on your own? How did you deal with losing your parents/retirement/ life challenges? How did you learn to do your work and to take care of yourself? How easy was it to make friends throughout your life?

When you ask a question, look carefully at the elder’s face, eyes, mouth and overall body language. Listen carefully to what they say, not so much for the details, but for the emotions that might be connected to the words. Don’t pre-plan a string of questions in advance; follow the lead of the old person, pursuing what seems to interest and elicit the most emotion from them.

If an answer surprises you or evokes emotion in you, re-center yourself and remind yourself that you are being non-judgmental and respectful toward this person.

In this way, open questions can be used to enter the disoriented elder’s world of the present and the past and allow them to express emotions in an accepting and supportive setting which results in building trust between you.

## Validation Glossary

by Maureen Sirianni, CVGP, Country Meadows of South Hills, Bridgeville, PA

**Calibration** – Using observations to determine or measure a disoriented elderly person’s mood. Does this person appear to be experiencing frustration, serenity, anger or joy? How can his/her body language and facial expressions guide me into their world as I take on his/her emotions?

**Empathy** – To experience the emotions of a disoriented elderly person at the same energy level. To connect with that person without judgment. To be present with his/her in a moment’s experience.

**Opposites** – To imagine “what if?” Considering the reverse outcome or situation. *What would you say to your mother if she were here with you now? What if you can’t get back home? Is there a time when you don’t cry?*



## Validation Viewpoint: Family relationships

by Steve Klotz, Certified Validation Teacher, Validation Director, Country Meadows Retirement Communities, Hershey, PA

When I introduce Validation to caregiving family members and professionals, I ask them, “When you are 85 or 90 years old, how do you want to be treated?” The most common responses are:

- With respect
- Like an adult, not a child
- With skill and competence
- Not hurried or like I’m an unwanted chore
- Like I’m family

What does it mean to be treated like family, whether care is provided by a relative or a professional caregiver? What makes family-type care so special, so desirable? And is it always what it should be?

Family members are typically the most invested in the lives and care of their elder relative. But they also make the hardest sacrifices, face the hardest losses and perform the hardest roles in caring for their loved ones with dementia. The Validation method offers excellent help and support for family members who provide care in this very challenging chapter of life.

Recently, the daughter-in-law of an older man with dementia told me, “We always tried to re-orient Dad to the current time and place. We would try to convince him about how confused he was and his need for assistance, even if we had to argue with him. Then we went to a Validation workshop and learned to accept Dad where he is at each day and even each moment. We realized that we could explore his life as a younger person – and we learned so much about him! We tried to help him let his feelings out instead of suppressing them and we were all so much happier. Dad was much more prepared for his next steps with dementia – and so were we.”

Consult learning resources such as the books and videos available through the Validation Training Institute ([www.vfvalidation.org](http://www.vfvalidation.org)). Participate in Validation training. We’d love to join you in this journey and show you what Validation has to offer.

## Validation key to successful family relationships

by Carmen Bowman, CVGP, Longmont, Colorado

The Validation method holds the key for successful relationships between family members. Yet, it may be the most difficult and unfamiliar way for family members to interact with a disoriented family member, especially a parent.

We are familiar with our strong dad or loving, all-together mom. It is hard to accept our parents any other way. The roles we grew up with become reversed as the parent changes. We experience frustration and stress when our parents act differently. It is difficult to take on the role of caregiver to our parents. We often react with “Don’t you remember, I’m your daughter” or “I just told you that, Dad.”

The greatest gift we can give a disoriented family member and ourselves is Validation. Why? Validation decreases stress for everyone. It provides a means for us to help the disoriented person in our family. Understanding and using Validation techniques also can lead to unknown treasures.

One of the most profound things I learned at the first International Validation Symposium was the amount of unknown information which family members learn about the disoriented person often for the first time as a result of using Validation techniques. I remember family members saying they couldn’t wait to visit with their mother and see

if she expressed anything “new.” One caveat to remember is that Validation should not be used simply to push an individual into expressing emotions or thoughts. In addition, both pleasant and unpleasant memories may be revealed by the disoriented family member. In either case, disoriented old people need to be validated.

Validation allows family members to:

- set aside traditional family roles
- center and allow anything difficult to “bounce off” of them
- provide a warm, loving and accepting atmosphere for which their family member yearns
- match the elder’s emotion
- use exquisite listening, empathize, accept and validate.