



How can you validate your partner without agreeing with them?

Cut out the card along the dashed line (6 by about 4 inches). Say one line, then stop and listen. Use your own words when they come.

Validating without agreeing

1. Validate the feeling, not the facts: "I can see why that hurt."
2. Use "if I thought..., I'd feel that too" when you see it differently.
3. Reflect the worst part and check: "Did I get that right?"
4. Swap "but" for "and." Ask before you pivot to your side.
5. Don't fake agreement. "I'm still listening" is honest.

All the lines, and when to use them

I see it differently, and I also get why you're hurt. Both of those are true for me right now. (Early in a disagreement, when you want to signal that your view and their feeling can both stay on the table.)

If I thought I'd been left out of the planning on purpose, I'd be angry too. (You disagree with the facts but their reaction fits the facts as they saw them. The "if I thought" frame validates the logic without signing on to the conclusion.)

You felt brushed off when I said I'd "think about it." That's not what I meant, but I can hear how it sounded. (The hurt came from your words and your intent was different. Name the impact before you explain the intent, not after.)

Before I say anything about my side, can I check I've got it? The worst part was hearing about it from my brother first. (You want your partner to know you were listening before you disagree. Reflecting the sharpest detail is the fastest way to show it.)

It makes sense you're worried about the money. I'm less worried, and I'd like to tell you why, if you're up for it. (You are ready to bring in your view. Asking permission to pivot makes it a turn in the conversation rather than a rebuttal.)

Part of what you said I agree with completely: I should have called. The part about me not caring, I don't agree with. (Their complaint mixes a fair point with an unfair conclusion. Splitting it out lets you take the fair part fully instead of defending against the whole thing.)

I'm honestly not on the same page yet. I'm still listening, and I'm not trying to talk you out of how you feel. (You cannot find anything to agree with and do not want to fake it. Saying you are still listening keeps the door open without pretending.)

I'm missing something here. Can you tell me more about what it was like for you? (Their reaction does not make sense to you yet. Curiosity is a form of validation when you cannot honestly offer the other kind.)

Phrases to avoid

"I understand, but...": The "but" erases the understanding. Your partner hears only what comes after it.

"That's not what happened.": Correcting the facts first tells them their experience is wrong before you have shown you heard it. Facts can come later.

"I validate your feelings.": It sounds like a therapy worksheet. Real validation names the specific feeling and the reason it makes sense.

"Okay, fine, you're right." when you don't think so: Fake agreement ends the conversation, but it usually comes back later as resentment, and your partner can often tell.

"I can see why you'd think that, if you didn't know the whole story.": It is validation with a sneer attached. It implies they are uninformed and makes you the one who knows better.

If you are afraid of your partner, scripts are not the answer: call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or text START to 88788. In danger, call 911.