

Feelings are meant to be felt.

- "Stop being so angry!"
- "Don't be sad."
- "This is nothing to be afraid of, right?"

These are well-known phrases for most of us. Responses with the intention to tune down or make us stop feeling what we feel. The thing is that all feelings come for a reason. They come to tell us something, to make us meet a need we have. In fact it can be quite smart to pay attention to our feelings.

It doesn't have to take a long time either. In fact, emotions often take the longest time to pass through our system if they are not welcome. The wise thing to do is to notice our feeling. Ask ourselves why it appears, what it is trying to tell us, and whether it comes with a need we can try to meet. By doing this we will have come a long way.

Example:

Thinking: "Okay, this feeling appears again. I feel a pinch around my heart, and a pressure in my chest. What is this supposed to tell me? I think it's connected to what I said to Sofie earlier. I was unreasonable, and far too strict, and I saw that she was upset. I guess this is my guilty conscience. Does it come with a need I can meet? Yes, it probably does. A need to make amends. To tell Sofie that I'm sorry, so that she doesn't have to feel hurt. Ok, I can handle this..."

Feelings exist to help us. What a superpower! But for the feeling to act as power and not steal power, we must listen to it and allow it to come. Listen to it. Feel it. Validating, or confirming the feeling, is an effective and helpful tool when you are facing someone's feelings. Well, it is helpful if it is experienced as genuine. To validate is to express that it is allowed, it is wise, and it makes sense to feel what you feel in various situations. When you validate, try to replace the word "but" with "because". You can validate the feeling without accepting the action that was taken while having the feeling. Feeling angry can be healthy and necessary, hitting someone is not.

When children are afraid it is easy to respond by saying that this is nothing to be afraid of, and take action to help them mastering their challenge. This way we do not meet their feeling. Validation will be more like this:

"I am noticing that you are afraid Sofie. I understand that because this is the first time you are going to do this! I think it's completely normal to feel nervous or scared."

"It's no wonder you got angry, Sofie. I understand that very well because this feels so unjust for you".

"I can see that you're upset. Of course you are. I would also be upset if that happened to me."

Can you hear what the adult is doing so nicely here? The words he is using are one thing; he expresses that he understands and that it is okay to feel what the child feels. However the way he does this is essential. If these words were uttered without empathy, he would not be believed. If he had adopted the feeling and felt as strongly as the child, then it could be difficult for the child. However the adult recognizes the feeling in his body and tunes in to it with just the right intensity, and thus the child will experience that he really means it, and that he is both stronger and can provide support.

This doesn't mean that we should remain in the feeling over a long period of time. We tune into the child and the child's feeling and show that we understand. Afterwards it might be helpful to do something else for a while, or continue to guiding the child and help the child so that you can find good solutions together.