

Intro to Invalidation

DBT: Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills

Invalidation - having your emotions dismissed, thoughts judged, or knowledge corrected - can be very painful. While some invalidation can help us correct facts we have wrong, more painful or harmful invalidation can be damaging to our mental and emotional health. This worksheet reviews what invalidation is according to Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), provides examples of helpful and/or painful invalidation, tests your knowledge with a quiz, and provides brief education on traumatic invalidation.

What is invalidation?

Invalidation is **not verifying, acknowledging, or seeing the sense in someone's thoughts or behavior**, and can include **correcting** that person if they have the facts wrong.

Depending on the delivery, invalidation can be respectful or disrespectful, helpful or painful, judgmental or nonjudgmental, etc.

Here are a few examples of invalidation:

- *"Actually, that's incorrect. What really happened was..."*
- *"You're always so sensitive. Keep it to yourself. Don't cause drama."*
- *"Wait, you're still upset about that? Man up. Just move on."*
- *"I didn't say that. You're imagining things again. You're crazy."*

Why does invalidation matter?

- **Some invalidation is painful → we need to know how to recover**
 - When someone ignores, dismisses, or trivializes your experience, it's painful - especially if you are earnestly trying to get support or do your best.
 - Even receiving constructive, well-meaning criticism can sting, especially for people struggling with self-esteem or worried about the judgments of others.
 - Especially intense, long-standing, or malicious invalidation can damage someone's trust in their own DBT experiences or lead to emotional difficulties.
- **Some invalidation helps us → we need to know how to accept it**
 - When our misconceptions are genuinely corrected by someone else, we learn the truth of a situation. We can more accurately see if our emotions fit the facts (and act accordingly if they do not).
 - When we grapple with other people's knowledge, perspectives, or interpretations, we're more likely to experience personal growth.



Intro to Invalidation

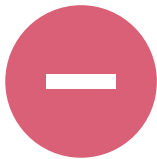
DBT: Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills

- **Some invalidation is both helpful and painful → we need to learn how to balance this**
 - If we *dismiss* helpful knowledge because of the pain of invalidation, we don't grow.
 - If we *ignore* the pain of invalidation and only focus on the knowledge, we don't recover.



Invalidation can be helpful when:

- It helps you correct any facts you have wrong
- Listening to other perspectives helps you grow as a person



Invalidation can be painful when:

- You're being ignored
- You're being misunderstood or misinterpreted
- You're being treated unfairly
- You're telling the truth but someone doesn't believe you
- You're being trivialized or denied (people reject what you're saying as not important)

What do helpful and/or painful invalidation look like?

Below are examples of helpful, painful, neither helpful nor painful, and both helpful and painful invalidation:

- + If you are doing a new procedure at work based on an email from your manager (but you actually misunderstood the directions), and your coworker corrects you with kindness and courtesy, this is helpful but not painful invalidation
- If someone mentions a rumor about you, and you deny it because it's really untrue, but they don't believe you and spread the rumor, this is painful but not helpful invalidation
- If you're talking about something that you find to be very trivial, and someone who cares about the topic corrects you politely, this is not painful and not helpful invalidation (assuming the topic is not important to you, your life, or your personal growth)
- +
- If you have the facts wrong about something that matters to someone else, and they become upset and correct you, talking over you and misinterpreting your views, this is both helpful and painful invalidation, as it helps you learn the facts and hear another perspective (and still hurts)



Intro to Invalidation

DBT: Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills

What do helpful and/or painful invalidation sound like?

Let's work through an example. Read the situation below, and before turning the page to see the answers, use the criteria above to decide whether each underlined part is helpful invalidation, unhelpful invalidation, both helpful and painful, or neither helpful nor painful.

In Jessie's family, people speak plainly. It's assumed that when people want something done, they ask for it directly. Asking for help with a task isn't seen as burdensome or annoying, just practical.

In James's family, people speak carefully and politely. Asking directly sounds inconsiderate and disrespectful, like a command. It's assumed that people will listen to hints or indirect asks and offer to help as a way to show that they care about what someone else wants and needs.

Jessie moved into James's apartment recently; they're still getting used to each other's living habits. Jessie likes to take her time on the weekend and do household tasks really thoroughly. James prefers to break things down across the week so he has more time on the weekends to relax.

James has tried to hint multiple times about getting chores done during the week. He let Jessie know he has plans with his friends over the weekend.

When James asks Jessie to help with cleaning the kitchen on Thursday evening, she gets up from the couch. After the dishes are done and the counter is clean, she says, "All good? We can clean out the fridge and mop the floors over the weekend. I'm pretty beat from work."

James: "I mean, if you're willing to do that alone, I guess that's fine. I'm not doing that this weekend," says James.

Jessie: "What? You're dumping the rest of the work on me?" Helpful Painful Neither Both

Jessie: "We said we'd split chores 50/50. You're breaking your promise." Helpful Painful Neither Both

James: "You haven't been listening. You never listen to me." Helpful Painful Neither Both

James: "I've been telling you we need to get everything done during the week because I have plans with my friends over the weekend."

Jessie: "I have been listening. It sounded like just a preference. Why is it so important? You can see your friends and we can do housework in the same weekend."

James: "We leave for the campsite after work tomorrow and don't get back until Sunday night. I'm not free over the weekend. Why else would I be trying to get everything done in advance?"

Jessie: "You never told me your plans specifically." Helpful Painful Neither Both

James: "I texted you about it from work on Monday!" Helpful Painful Neither Both

Jessie: "What? I don't have any texts about that. See?" Helpful Painful Neither Both



Intro to Invalidation

DBT: Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills

Answers:

Jessie: “What? You’re dumping the rest of the work on me?” To James, this is likely **painful** invalidation. He has been trying to make sure the work is split evenly, just rescheduled, and is being misunderstood.

Jessie: “We said we’d split chores 50/50. You’re breaking your promise.” To James, this is likely **painful** invalidation due to being misinterpreted.

James: “You haven’t been listening. You never listen to me.” To Jessie, this is likely **painful** invalidation. This generalization is likely incorrect and probably feels very unfair.

Jessie: “You never told me your plans specifically.” To James, this might be **both** helpful and painful invalidation. He learns the correct facts from Jessie’s perspective. He might also feel like he is being accused of lying if he is very upset in the moment.

James: “I texted you about it from work on Monday!” To Jessie, this is likely **helpful** invalidation. She learns the correct facts from James’s perspective.

Jessie: “What? I don’t have any texts about that. See?” To James, this is likely **helpful** invalidation. He learns the correct facts from Jessie’s perspective.

A final note on invalidation

The kind of invalidation in the example above might be unpleasant, but it’s pretty common, and can certainly be recovered from, which we discuss in our [recovering from invalidation handout](#). However, certain extreme invalidation can be traumatic. In fact, DBT conceptualizes that [borderline personality disorder](#) (BPD) occurs when someone who is genetically wired for high emotional sensitivity is raised in a very invalidating environment. Here’s what traumatic invalidation can look like:



In extreme cases, invalidation can be traumatic when:

- Someone very important to your development, identity, or wellbeing intensely or repeatedly invalidates very important things, like:
 - Significant experiences (like an assault or crime that happened to you)
 - Central characteristics of yourself as a person (like your identity)
 - Your reasonable perceptions of things that have happened to you
- It chips away at or destroys a person’s ability to trust themselves and their own perceptions of the world
- It leads to your exclusion from your family, society, culture, etc.
- It results in deep insecurity, confusion, and fear of future invalidation

If you’ve had these experiences, [DBT](#) might be a very helpful way to recover.

*This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.

Scan or [click here](#) to learn more
about DBT:



Additional Resources to Support Your Mental Health Journey

It can be hard to know where to begin looking for support in your mental health journey. Getting a referral from a primary care physician is a reliable first step. Also, sometimes family and friends have experienced similar issues and have professionals they would recommend. The experts at ChoosingTherapy.com are here to help as well, with resources we have reviewed and recommend. Our [strict editorial standards](#) ensure our reviews are fair, honest, thorough, and based on firsthand experience.

You Can Trust ChoosingTherapy.com



325+
Companies Reviewed



3,625+
Hours of Firsthand Experience



1,545+
Data Points Analyzed



[Best Online Therapy](#)

Online therapy is a convenient way to connect with a licensed therapist to address mental health issues, reduce unhealthy behaviors, develop effective coping skills, and get more satisfaction out of life. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.

[Best Online Psychiatry](#)

Online psychiatry providers enable patients to consult with licensed psychiatrists and other mental health professionals. They can evaluate, diagnose, and prescribe medication to help manage mental health issues. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.



[Best Mental Health Apps](#)

Apps can be great way to monitor mood, track sleep, journal, and practice healthy coping skills like mindfulness and meditation. There are apps specifically designed to help people reduce the symptoms of depression, anxiety, ADHD, chronic stress, and burnout.

[Therapist Directory](#)

When you're looking for a mental health provider with a very particular skill set, level of experience, or personality type, a therapist directory can be very helpful. Using the filters, you can refine your search until you find a therapist who feels like a perfect fit.





Tools for Self-Assessment and Psychoeducation

Figuring out the next step in your mental health journey can be overwhelming. Developed by psychologists, the tools at [ChoosingTherapy.com](https://www.ChoosingTherapy.com) can help. Our mental health self-assessment quizzes can help you explore common symptoms of mental health concerns, as well as find the best therapy style for you. Our mental health worksheets can guide you through therapy concepts and how to use them in your life.

[Learn More with Mental Health Quizzes](#)

Our collection of psychologist-developed mental health quizzes can help you learn if you are experiencing mild, moderate, or concerning levels of anxiety, depression, stress, burnout, and more. Each quiz also provides targeted resources based on your answers. These self-assessments are designed to offer insight, not diagnoses, and can be a helpful first step in recognizing symptoms and deciding whether to seek further support. If you have concerns about your mental health or your quiz results, we recommend you reach out to a licensed mental health professional.



[Free Mental Health Worksheets](#)

Search our collection of therapy worksheets by mental health topic, therapy modality, or demographic group. Our free, psychologist-developed worksheets make therapy exercises understandable and relevant to daily life. Find worksheets for help with ADHD, anxiety, depression, relationship difficulties, and other common mental health challenges.