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A Reference Tool for Validating Client Emotions Without Minimizing or Shutting Down Dialogue

HOLDING SPACE: QUICK PHRASES FOR EMOTIONAL VALIDATION IN CLINICAL WORK

WHY EMOTIONAL VALIDATION MATTERS:

VALIDATION DOESN'T MEAN AGREEMENT—IT MEANS ACKNOWLEDGING THAT A CLIENT'S EXPERIENCE IS REAL AND UNDERSTANDABLE BASED ON THEIR LENS. FOR CLIENTS WITH TRAUMA, ESPECIALLY WOMEN, THIS CAN BE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SHUTDOWN AND ENGAGEMENT.

INSTEAD OF SAYING...

- "YOU'RE OVERREACTING"
- "THAT'S NOT A BIG DEAL"
- "YOU'RE BEING TOO SENSITIVE"

CLINICAL USE TIPS:

- PAUSE BEFORE PROBLEM-SOLVING
- MATCH TONE, BODY LANGUAGE, AND PACING
- USE GROUNDING LANGUAGE LIKE:
- "I'M HERE," "TAKE YOUR TIME," "YOU DON'T NEED TO EXPLAIN EVERYTHING RIGHT NOW"

TRY...

- "WHAT YOU'RE FEELING MAKES SENSE."
- "GIVEN WHAT YOU'VE BEEN THROUGH, I HEAR WHY THIS FEELS INTENSE."
- "YOU'RE ALLOWED TO FEEL THAT."
- "LET'S SIT WITH THIS BEFORE WE TRY TO 'FIX' IT."
- "YOUR EMOTIONS ARE TELLING US SOMETHING IMPORTANT."

Prompt for Clinicians: How do I respond when I feel overwhelmed by someone else's emotion?

Use this guide to shift from invalidating responses to grounding language that affirms emotional experience—especially important when working with trauma survivors, dysregulated clients, or moments of emotional intensity.