



## Values

Values are important to us; they guide us as we decide what matters most in our lives. They are unique to each individual, and they can change over time. Values are like a roadmap or a compass, guiding us, giving us direction, and helping us prioritize how we spend our time. They guide our daily decisions, and every decision is an opportunity to live, moment by moment, according to our values. They are our deepest longings.

Values are different from goals, desires, needs, ethics, morals, feelings, rules, beliefs, and codes of conduct. Kelly Wilson, one of the founders of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), which emphasizes the importance of values, states the following:<sup>1</sup>

- Values are here and now.
- Values never need to be justified.
- Values often need to be prioritized.
- Values are best held lightly.
- Values are freely chosen.

### Values: Exploration and Clarification

To help yourself or someone else develop a better sense of their values, try the following six exercises.

#### 1. The Sweet Spot Exercise (adapted from Wilson, 2008<sup>1</sup>)

Bring to mind a memory where you experienced some of the sweetness and richness of life. Re-experience this memory using all of your senses. Make it vivid. Make room for all the sensations, thoughts, and emotions that arise. Describe it as if it is happening in the present moment: "This is what I notice. This is what I see and hear." Then ask yourself the following questions:

What does this memory reveal about what matters to you?

---

---

---

What personal qualities were you showing?

---

---

---



How were you treating yourself, others, and the world around you?

---

---

---

What does this suggest about the way you'd like to behave or the things you'd like to do, moving forward?

---

---

---

The following exercises are other ways to explore your values:

## 2. The 90th Birthday Exercise

Imagine yourself at your 90<sup>th</sup> birthday party, surrounded by all the people your life has touched. As you connect with this image, spend a few minutes reflecting on what you would like people to say about you. There are no limits to what you can be remembered for. Imagine the guests at the party sharing a series of brief statements that would capture the essence of the life that you led. What would they say about the person you were and the life that you led? What is it you would want to be remembered for?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



### 3. Values Top Ten and Top Three Exercise

A value is a direction that you would like to move toward in your life. It is not a destination, but more of a direction you move toward. Values are important because working toward them brings meaning and satisfaction to your life.<sup>2</sup>

What stands out to you as some of your top priorities for your life? Only list the ones that **you** really want to work toward. You can use the “Common Personal Values” list on the following page, if you would like, for additional ideas.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_

After you have created your top-ten list, decide which ones are **most** important. Compress the list down to your “top three” values, and list them below:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## Common Personal Values

- Accomplishment, Accountability, Accuracy, Adventure, All for one & one for all
- Beauty
- Calm (quietude), Challenge, Change, Charity, Cleanliness, Collaboration, Commitment, Communication, Community, Competence, Competition, Concern for others, Connection, Content over form, Continuous improvement, Cooperation, Coordination, Creativity, Customer satisfaction
- Decisiveness, Delight in being, Democracy, Determination, Discipline, Discovery, Diversity, Dynamism
- Ease of use, Efficiency, Enjoyment, Equality, Excellence
- Fairness, Faith, Faithfulness, Family, Family feeling, Flair, Freedom/liberty Friendship, Fun
- Generosity, Gentleness, Global view, Goodness, Goodwill, Gratitude
- Happiness, Hard work, Harmony, Health, Honor, Human-centered
- Improvement, Independence, Individuality, Inner peace, Innovation, Integrity, Intelligence, Intensity
- Joy, Justice
- Kindness, Knowledge
- Leadership, Love (romance), Loyalty, Maximum use (of time and resources)
- Meaning, Merit, Money
- Oneness, Openness, Order, Others’ point of view
- Patriotism, Peace (non-violence), Perfection, Perseverance, Personal growth, Pleasure, Power, Practicality, Preservation, Privacy, Progress, Prosperity, Punctuality
- Quality of work
- Regularity, Reliability, Resourcefulness, Respect for others, Responsiveness, Results-oriented, Rule of law
- Safety, Satisfying others, Security, Self-Givingness, Self-Reliance, Self-Thinking, Sensitivity, Service (to others, society), Simplicity, Skill, Solving problems, Speed, Spirit, Spirituality, Stability, Standardization, Status, Strength, Success, Systemization
- Teamwork, Timeliness, Tolerance, Tradition, Tranquility, Trust, Truth
- Unity, Variety
- Wealth, Well-being, Wisdom



The following are domains or areas where you might hold important values. In each area below, write what matters to you and/or what you value in each area:

Family Relationships:

---

---

---

Health:

---

---

---

Community:

---

---

---

Friends/Social Relationships:

---

---

---

Couples/Romantic Relationships:

---

---

---

Work/Career:

---

---

---

Personal Growth/Personal Development:

---

---

---

Spirituality/Faith/Religion:

---

---

---

Recreation/Leisure Time:

---

---

---



---

**Goals:** Values come first, then goals. Goals are action items that we set for the future including short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals. Behaviors are what we do to accomplish our goals. Think about setting goals that are SMART.

SMART goals are:

Specific

Measurable

Action-Oriented

Realistic

Timed

#### 4. Identifying Obstacles to Living According to One's Values

It is common to have barriers that interfere with our ability to pursue our values. Some of them will be external (e.g., family commitments, work demands, lack of time, financial concerns), and some will be internal (e.g., stress, worries, self-doubt, lack of confidence). In the space below, write down your five most important values. Then, in the space next to it, write down the biggest barriers or difficulties that are getting in your way as you pursue them. Think about how you might continue to move in the direction of your values, even when obstacles and difficulties arise.

**Value**

**Barriers**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## 5. Committed Action Exercise: Taking It Deeper (adapted from Russ Harris, 2011<sup>3</sup>)

In this next section, there are some questions to help you explore your top value in more depth.

Part One:

What is one value that has high importance but you haven't expressed a lot?

---

---

What have you been doing that is taking you away from, or is inconsistent with, this value?

---

---

What and how has it cost you?

---

---

What obstacles and challenges have gotten in your way?

---

---

---

Part Two:

What do you want to do now in the direction of this value?

---

---

---

What will you commit to do and when will you do it?

---

---

---

What obstacles and challenges might arise?

---

---

---

How can you navigate through these challenges and obstacles to continue to take committed action toward this value?

---

---

---



## 6. Committed Action Exercise: Setting Goals for Your Top Three Values (adapted from Vowles & Sorrell, 2008<sup>2</sup>)

Take your top three values from Exercise 3, above, and identify a single goal that is consistent with each one. Next, come up with three specific behaviors you can engage in that will assist you in achieving each of your three goals.

1. Value

1. Goal:

a. Behavior:

---

b. Behavior:

---

c. Behavior:

---

2. Value

1. Goal:

a. Behavior:

---

b. Behavior:

---

c. Behavior:

---

3. Value

1. Goal:

a. Behavior:

---

b. Behavior:

---

c. Behavior:

---





## Author(s)

“Values” was adapted for the University of Wisconsin Integrative Health Program from the original written by Shilagh A. Mirgain, PhD and Janice Singles PsyD (2014, updated 2018).

*This tool was made possible through a collaborative effort between the University of Wisconsin Integrative Health Program, VA Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation, and Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation.*

## References

1. Wilson KG, DuFrene T. Mindfulness for Two: An Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Approach to Mindfulness in Psychotherapy. New Harbinger Publications; 2009.
2. Vowles KE, Sorrell JR. Life with chronic pain: an acceptance-based approach. Accessed March 15, 2014, [http://contextualscience.org/files/CP\\_Acceptance\\_Manual\\_09.2008.pdf](http://contextualscience.org/files/CP_Acceptance_Manual_09.2008.pdf)
3. Harris R. ACT Made Simple: An Easy-to-Read Primer on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. New Harbinger Publications; 2009.