



Discover Your Values:

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Life can feel more fulfilling and meaningful with less daily stress and more purposeful intention.

“Technically values are desired qualities of ongoing action. Poetically, they are our deepest desires of how we want to spend our brief time on this planet. Metaphorically, they’re like a compass: they give us direction and keep us on track.”

-- Steven Hayes

Research suggests that 95% of the population do not know what their values are. Values can be confusing and hard to define, however they are empowering when we know what they are because, no matter what, they are available to us at any moment.

Life during a global health crisis presents ongoing uncertainty and challenge and sometimes a sense of helplessness. What we can influence is what we stand for amidst adversity. In any moment of the day we can act on our values. We can wake up in the morning and find purpose and energy. Values are beyond right or wrong, they are how we act and move through the world. They provide a sense of grounding, wholeness, a light to guide us. Discovering our values help us get in touch with ourselves, our heart, and in essence, a felt sense of vitality and freedom.



What are Values?

If you are like most people, you might think of values as qualities like being kind or honest. Values are better defined by what is important to an individual in their life, unlike moral or ethical values. According to Steven Hayes, founder of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), values involve ongoing action; they are like directions we keep moving in. For example, if you want to be a loving supportive partner, that is a value as opposed to “marriage”.

Why are Values Important?

When we live out of sync with what we truly value, we live against our authentic self. On the contrary, connecting to our values provides emotional resilience and a way to be true to ourselves. We can keep moving forward toward growth and fulfillment. Living in accordance to our values also supports us with assertive communication and a way to live within our personal boundaries and protect our own wellness.

Life comes with both joy and suffering. Values provides safety, direction, and peace. People can lead unfulfilling lives because they unknowingly live under other people’s values. We are up against many conflicting value systems in our culture, community, friend groups, media, work place, and so on.

How can we Connect to our Values?

1. **Start by thinking about what matters most to you and why:**

Consider asking yourself how you like to spend your time, what realm of life do you cherish most? Where are you most organized in your life, How do you spend your money? Consider maybe 3 - 5 values and write them down. A helpful practice can also be to think of a mentor or personal hero. Think of someone who lifts you up and who makes you feel inspired. What values does this person represent? What is it about this person that you admire? And when you connect with why this person matters to you, you can better bring these qualities into your own life.

2. **Finding our values when faced with challenge or decisions:**

A study by researcher David Creswell found that college students experiencing high stress were better able to figure out a creative problem solving task under time pressure if they first wrote a few sentences about their most important values.

By doing this practice, they were able to solve as many problems as students in a low-stress group. . Learning a identifying values on paper or in a journal, can in turn, protect against harmful effects of stress. An example of living a value of education for example would be to increase actions of alignment such as going to class and engaging in the class material.

3. **Connect to Values in Relationships:**

When time is taken to consider values of those close to us, relationships can grow with compassion and understanding. Whether it be a colleague at work, a friend, or a family member, making sense of others values can bring a felt sense of connection; feeling seen, understood, and accepted. Clashes in values does not mean we cannot be in close relationship with others who share different values.

For example, parents can have different values than their child. It is natural for parents to make assumptions that children live in accordance with their values. While this might be true for some, children also carry their own set of values. The way a child is in the world might be different than a parent. A parent may be very social and wish for a child to have many friends for instance, while the child may value reading and quiet. Conversations about values can be rich and rewarding in any relationship because it allows us to share about who we truly are.

4. **Values Writing:**

Values can be influenced by significant events in our life history. Dr. Hayes suggests our values can come to light in the “bittersweet moments by thinking back to both the sweetest and most painful moments of your life”. These moments could direct you to what you care about most. Dr Hayes suggests “values writing is most powerful when it leads us to care more about transcending our own ego and self-story and helps us link our caring to the good of others”.

Dr. Hayes created a Values Living Questionnaire that asks a series of questions about what your values are and how much you have been living in accordance to them.

<https://stevenhayes.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/The-Valued-Living-Questionnaire.pdf>



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