

Know and Live Your Values Exercise



Knowing your values, what matters to you, and how you want your life to look and feel helps guide great decisions and healthy boundaries.

This set of exercises is designed to help you get clear on just that. Set aside some time and energy to gain maximum benefit.

“Who are you?”

Your answer to this question might be your name, your job or field of study, and perhaps some details about your family, nationality, background, ethnicity, or identity.

These are all relevant aspects of who we are. And yet, truly knowing who we are means going deeper than the external markers. It means getting clear on what drives us. What matters to us. The things that make life worth living for us.

Getting clear on your values is a key tool for increasing your self-knowledge. That’s what this exercise is all about.

Let's get started.

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What Are Values?

Values are the fundamental beliefs and ideas you have that guide your attitudes and actions. Values reflect your unique, individual spark and help you decide what in life is important to you, and what is not.

Your values are your guides along the path of life. Guided by your values, you can trust the steps you take forward.

When you consistently honor your values, you are more likely to feel fulfilled. When you don't, it becomes easier to disconnect from yourself and feel like you're faking it. You might find yourself pulled to escape into unhelpful habits or behaviors, rather than the growth, change and acceptance that leads to contentment.

Your values are entirely your own. Sure, they probably didn't come out of thin air: they might be influenced by your upbringing and education, your family, friends or role models, and the norms and traditions in the society in which you grew up.

Sometimes it helps to ask our friends for input as to what our values might be. Their objectivity and generosity can be valuable. And yet, ultimately the only person who can accurately define your values is you.

Becoming clear on your values helps you:

- Act with self-respect
- Get clear on what you want
- Ease decision making
- Balance competing interests
- Be better equipped to handle difficult situations

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- Create clearer boundaries
- Feel more empowered and authentic in your life
- Let go of what does not matter to you
- Increase self-awareness and self-confidence
- Find (and re-find) focus and motivation when working towards goals

Exercise: Learn your Values

Before we delve in to getting clear on your values, let's set the stage for great results.

1. Take time

These are your values, not the kind of food you are ordering for dinner, so honor their importance by taking some time. Block an hour or two and find a place that feels both inspiring and relaxing. Grab a notebook and a pen and put your phone on flight mode.

2. Commit to the process

The list of values you'll find below is long and might seem daunting — and that's exactly the point. Think about what each of these words represents to you, and whether it aligns with who you really are. It's easy to get overwhelmed and distracted. Persist.

3. Share the process with friends (optional)

It doesn't work for everyone, but many people benefit from doing this exercise together with a friend or in a small group. You might get together over coffee in person or online. You go through the inspirational questions, then each formulate your own list of values. Afterwards, you share your values in this safe, connected space. Often, discussing your values with others helps you articulate your values more clearly.

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4. Approach mindfully

This means two things: not overthinking, while also being discerning. For example, Hailey told me that she really wanted to put “environmentalism” on her list, because she loves the outdoors and believes in environmental activism. But when she checked in with whether this was a core value of hers, she realized it was not. “I like a lot of the values that didn’t end up on my list. But my core values reflect who I am and what matters to me. They feel deeply authentic, like they are part of my soul.”

Step 1: Get inspired

Reflecting on these questions will get you in the right zone to accurately identify your values. Writing down your answers helps a lot, so jot some notes.

1. Think of three or four **people you admire**. They can be famous or not, dead or alive. What are the **qualities** that you admire in those people? Write down a few for each person.
2. What are the **peak moments** in your life? What was it about these experiences that made them so meaningful for you?
3. Which activities make you feel like you are in **flow**, lost in the moment, where time becomes irrelevant? (They can be something you do regularly, or something you did once, maybe even long ago.)
4. Which conversation **topics** make your heart sing? What are the subjects of the online articles you always click on? What are the topics of the books or magazines you are drawn to?
5. What are your most important **possessions**? What do they mean to you?
6. What did you love to do as a little kid? What fascinated you? Which **talents, skills and abilities** have always come naturally to you?

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7. You're at a café and you overhear the person next to you describing their life. It sounds so incredible that you feel envious. What is that person saying: how are they describing their life? Which specific aspects of their life prick your ears most? What is it about their life that sounds most amazing to you?

Step 2: Select your values

Look at the list below. Write down each of the values that really matter to you. If any are missing, add them as well.

You might note that family, friends, and other relationships are not included on the list. These are basic human needs, so they will be important for pretty much everyone. In your list of values, you're focusing on aspects of life that are important to you beyond specific relationships.

Abundance	Education	Health (mental /	Nature	Spontaneity
Adventure	Efficiency	physical)	Nutrition	Sport
Advocacy	Empathy	Helping Others	Open-mindedness	Stability
Ambition	Empowerment	Honesty	Optimism	Standing out
Animals	Environmentalism	Humility	Originality	Status
Anti-racism	Equity	Humor	Passion	Sustainability
Art	Ethics	Impact	Peace	Tolerance
Authenticity	Excellence	Imagination	Personal Growth	Tradition
Autonomy	Excitement	Inclusivity	Playfulness	Transparency
Balance	Exercise	Independence	Politics	Travel
Beauty	Experience	Indigenous rights	Popularity	Trust
Being outdoors	Exploring	Innovation	Positivity	Uniqueness
Being the best	Fairness	Inspiration	Power	Variety
Challenge	Faith	Integrity	Practicality	Vision
Charity	Fame	Intelligence	Productivity	Volunteering
Communication	Fearlessness	Intuition	Professionalism	Wealth
Community	Feminism	Joy	Progress	Winning
Compassion	Financial stability	Justice	Purpose	Wisdom
Connection	Fitness	Kindness	Recognition	Wonder
Contentedness	Flexibility	Leadership	Reliability	Working alone
Contribution	Flow	Learning	Religion	Working with different
Courage	Food	LGBTQIA+ rights	Resilience	cultures
Creativity	Freedom	Logic	Respect	Working with others
Critical thinking	Fun	Love	Risk taking	Working with people in
Culture	Generosity	Loyalty	Security	need
Curiosity	Goodness	Making a difference	Self-awareness	
Dedication	Grace	Management	Self-improvement	
Design	Gratitude	Mindfulness	Service	
Determination	Growth	Money	Sharing knowledge	
Discipline	Happiness	Motivation	Simplicity	
Discovery	Having influence	Multiculturalism	Solitude	
Diversity	Health	Music	Spirituality	

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Great! Now you have your values shortlist.

Step 3: Cull

Scan your shortlist and remove any that are not essential. They might fall in the category 'nice to have', but not qualify as key. Don't spend too long on this — just weed out the obvious excess.

Step 4: Chunk

Look at your list, and you'll soon notice that some of the terms are related to one another. For example, for me, the values adventure, freedom and independence felt similar, as if they were buddies. Group your terms together, into three to five (no more than five!) key groups.

Step 5: Name Your Values

Now, give each of the groups a name that covers the theme — make the words you use imaginative, evocative, and personally inspiring to you. For example, I named the group I mentioned above Freedom because that felt like a neat summary of the vibe of those terms.

And that's it! That's your list of values! Yay!

Write the list down separately, in large print, and take a few moments to absorb your values.

Pop them on a post-it and stick it to your fridge or bathroom mirror, or save the list as your phone's screensaver so you get a frequent reminder of what your values are.

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Your most important relationship is with yourself.

Knowing your values is a great start to building your self-knowledge.

While there are aspects of who you are that will feel fairly fundamental and unchanging, as humans we can also go through intense periods of change. Times of uncertainty, sorrow or joy can prompt us to reassess what matters to us. There might be times where you strongly sense that one or more of your values have changed. This is totally okay. *Your values are yours.*

Remind yourself frequently of what your values are (I like to make sure I can always recite mine on demand). And check in with your values every six months or so. Do they still resonate for you? Is it time to revisit the list, and see if one or more of your values wants to be replaced? If they still feel right, that's great, too.

As humans we are constantly changing, which makes self-knowledge a life-long process. It's also one of the most interesting and rewarding processes I can imagine.

Knowing your values can give you a strong sense of what matters to you, and what does not. This is helpful, if not essential, for setting and keeping healthy boundaries, making decisions, and living authentically. It also enables you to protect that precious, unique spark of yours.

Sally Clarke