

VALUES

Exercise 1

Create time and space and start writing out the answers to the following questions:

- What were your parents' values regarding money, careers, education, learning, relationships, hobbies and interests, independence, free-time, the world, culture, lifestyles?
- How did you learn this?
- What behaviours did they not tolerate?
- What values of theirs do you remember trying not to upset?
- Who inspires you/has inspired you in life?
- Why? What qualities do/did they have?
- What traits and behaviours do you admire in others?
- When I remain true to myself life is...
- What do I do most authentically?
- What do I do even though I don't want to...

Finish the sentence:

- The most memorable time when I didn't feel like me was...
- I crave...
- I feel weighed down when....
- Other than time or money, what I want more of is...

- I really don't like [this person] because ...
- If you could have more of any one quality instantly, what would it be?
- What are three things you cannot tolerate (e.g., cruelty to animals, credit card companies, deforestation, etc.)
- Which personality trait, attribute or quality do people compliment on you the most?
- How do you like to be treated?
- To connect with another person, what must they know about you?
- To understand you, others need to know...

What have you learned from the answers? About yourself and about the belief systems that might have been put upon you by others?

Exercise 2

Step 1: Identify Values

Look at the attached value sheet (feel free to add any words you feel are missing) and tick off/write down all the values that apply to you.

For ease of this exercise (and if you want to bring this into the therapy room), try to find your top 10, or even better, top 5 values.

Author and 'thought leader' Simon Sinek believes that most values can be combined, and you can easily find your top 3 that way (for example, valuing consideration, kindness and empathy, could be made into one value of, perhaps, 'human decency').

Having identified your top values, get to know them and yourself better by considering the next few steps and journal out any thought you might have about these things (if you have the time, energy and desire).

Step 2: Never Assume

We tend to assume that our reality is other people's reality. Even if you've identified a value like 'consideration', this might look different to someone else. Your way of being considerate might be to listen without interrupting if a friend is talking, and for someone else it's interrupting to give lots of helpful advice.

Just because you've identified a value, don't presume other people have the same understanding of that value (including your therapist! 😊)

Step 3: Value Discrepancies

We might have one set of values that we hold dear, another set we expect to be honoured by others and a third set we actually live by, so take time to look at your values to see if you apply the same values in all three arenas (what you value emotionally, what you value in and from others and how you actually behave. Lots of people value adventure and yet, never do anything particularly adventurous).

Step 4: Internal Discrepancies

We might say that we value kindness, love and consideration while we have an inner critic that tell us many, unkind, unloving and inconsiderate things. We might have to re-evaluate our values or make new decisions (see step 6)

Step 5: Values as Triggers

What triggers us is usually a violation of our value system.

Likewise, disagreements with others (from colleagues, politicians or our loved ones) can often be found in values that don't align.

If you find yourself getting frustrated with someone, consider if they live by a different set of values to you. If they don't, can you communicate these differences to deepen your shared understanding of each other and respect these differences or do you need to make some tough decisions about who you give time and energy to? Or, does it give you more peace to simply know that they're operating from a different value system than you?

Remember, that they might share the same values as you but have a different interpretation of that value.

Step 6: Living in Alignment

If stuck or unhappy, identifying values and then check if you're living a life in alignment with your values. This is often an easy way to identify dissatisfaction in life and can offer insights into a new, more satisfying direction.

Step 7: The Shadow Side of Values

This is a tricky one to identify sometimes and this step isn't too dissimilar to step 5 but whereas step 5 is identifying differences between you and others, this step is about identifying what's going on inside of you.

A 'shadow' refers to the unconscious aspects of our psyche (mind) or aspects of ourselves we don't allow/want to exist.

Often, we have negative feelings towards someone or towards an action because they're acting in a way we don't allow ourselves or because it's misaligning with an unconscious part of our minds.

As an example, I used to get really frustrated when I saw someone had left dog poo on the pavement. I identified that this is because I find such an act very disrespectful towards others using the pavement. And one of my values is respect. But that also means that I spend a lot of time and energy, worrying about whether my actions are respectful towards others or not. I'm not allowed to be disrespectful so I get very annoyed (triggered) when other people are disrespectful (step 5 – identifying different values in different people). However, this was about my 'shadow' side – I'm not allowing myself to ever consciously be disrespectful so when others allow themselves, it's about my shadow, not their actions. What's wonderful about identifying shadows is that we can't change others or undo their acts (which can make us feel powerless) but once we identify what it's really about, internally, we now have a choice in how to react.

Before my realisation, I'd spend the rest of my walk fuming over the dog poo, having arguments in my head and it'd ruin my mood. Now, when I see dog poo left on the pavement I get annoyed and then think "that person have different values than me. OR, they might just have run out of bags. Either way, that's

their choice and I'll focus on my choices" and I'm not frustrated (as much) any more.

Another shadow side is that a value might also have been created because we lacked this in life.

For example, we might value being a safe person because we grew up not feeling safe. So now we go out of our way to be a safe person to others in our lives. It's not a bad value to have, but it's more of a 'reaction' value than a consciously chosen value.

Step 8: The Dark Side of Values

We might have a value set that looks very honourable and virtues but is it serving you or hurting you?

For example, if you value consideration above all, what lengths do you go to, to be considerate? How much of the world's pain do you take on because the world doesn't align with your values (being impacted deeply by the news, for example). How much of your time and energy do you give this value, leaving you drained and unhappy? And then going back to step 4, do you practice these virtues values towards yourself? If not, what might need to change? How do you apply them to others and what wisdom might lie in that, that you can apply towards yourself?

Remember, values are what you do, not what you say...