

**Values**

Exercise



15 min



Client



No



Valued Living During Challenging Times

Living in line with one's values—also known as *valued living*—has been proposed by theorists in the positive psychology movement as the key to sustainable happiness (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). Indeed, Williams, Ciarrochi, and Heaven (2015) conducted a longitudinal study of valued living in emerging adults in Australia and found that increased success at enacting values (i.e., valued living) was associated with increased positive affect and satisfaction with life.

However, it is an all-too-common occurrence that challenging life events interfere with valued living because a person's focus becomes so much on dealing with the problem and regaining a sense of control that he or she loses track of what matters most in life. The individual's life becomes characterized by an excessive focus on controlling the negative rather than living the positive. Ceary and Donahue (2019) examined the relationship between valued living and resilience to stressful life events in college students and found a strong correlation between resilience and valued living. The authors suggested that by engaging in the behavior that is in line with one's values, people may cultivate a path towards resilience from stress. This tool helps people learn to live in alignment with personal values during stressful life events.

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Goal

The goal of this tool is first to help clients identify whether they have lost touch with personal values in the context of a current challenging life event and second to re-align with those values through valued action.



Advice

- Clients need to realize that it is very common for people to lose touch with their values during stressful times, and people with a strong inner critic commonly interpret their inability to live in line with their values as a weakness. Thus, the practitioner is advised to focus on the fact that it is never too late to reconnect with personal values. The goal of this exercise is to remind clients of their values, not to blame them for losing connection with them.
- Clients need to understand that living in line with personal values does not always mean “fixing” a problem. In some cases, there is nothing the client can do to change what has happened. For example, a client diagnosed with an incurable disease may argue that to live in line with the value “health,” a miracle is required. In these cases, clients are advised to focus on the question: What kind of person do I want to be under these conditions? This question directs attention to values that can be influenced by personal actions, such as emotion regulation, kindness, gratitude, etc.
- It is important to emphasize to clients that reconnecting with their values does not need to look exactly like it did before. People can do different things to live in line with the same value, and this is the beauty of this tool, as it encourages clients to be dynamic and creative.



References

- Ceary, C. D., Donahue, J. J., & Shaffer, K. (2019). The strength of pursuing your values: Valued living as a path to resilience among college students. *Stress and Health*, 35, 532-541.
- Lyubomirsky, S., Sheldon, K.M., & Schkade, D. (2005). Pursuing happiness: The architecture of sustainable change. *Review of General Psychology*, 9, 111-131.
- Williams, K. E., Ciarrochi, J., & Heaven, P. C. (2015). Relationships between valued action and well-being across the transition from high school to early adulthood. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 10, 127-140.



Valued Living During Challenging Times

Your values are things that truly matter to you deep in your heart. They point to what kind of person you want to be in this world and how you want to spend your time. All too commonly, we lose touch with our values when things go wrong in life, which is counter-productive when our values can help us be resilient. This exercise helps you reconnect with your values in light of a current personal challenge.

Step 1: Describe the challenging life event

Take a moment to consider a challenging event that you are currently facing. For example, maybe you lost your job. Briefly describe this challenging event in the space below.

Step 2: Identify values with which you lost touch

Values are things that are important to you, and it may be the case that this challenging event in your life (identified in the previous step) is making it difficult for you to live in line with your values. For example, if you have become ill, you may have lost touch with your best friend because you have been focusing most of your time on getting better and understanding your illness. In this example, your illness has caused you to lose touch with your value of “friendship.” Consider three values with which you have lost touch because of your current problematic situation. A list of possible values is provided in Appendix A.

1. *Value:*

What it means to me:

Why it is important to me:



2. Value:

What it means to me:

Why it is important to me:

3. Value:

What it means to me:

Why it is important to me:

Step 3: Reconnecting with my values

The values that you came up with in the previous step tell you something about your ideal self; the person you would like to be. While this challenging life event may be getting in the way of you being your ideal self, you can take action to reconnect with your values as much as possible, given the current circumstances. That is, your current circumstances do not need to prevent you from living in line with your values.

Concerning the values you listed in Step 2, consider the actions you can take *right now*. What can you do now to reconnect with these values? What actions will allow you to be - as much as possible - the person you want to be under the current circumstances? Hint, living in line with your values can look different from how you have lived by them in the past. For example, if you have lost your job and one of your core values is to provide for your family, one action that you could take to reconnect with this value could be taking over the responsibility of the household cooking for your family. Or, if your illness prevents you from physically meeting your friends, you may still connect with them using video calls.



For each value, come up with as many possible valued actions as you can, no matter how small:

Value 1:

Actions:

Value 2:

Actions:

Value 3:

Actions:

An example of a completed exercise is provided in Appendix B.

Step 4: Taking action to re-connect

For as long as you are facing this challenging life event, remind yourself to stay connected to your values. From time to time, ask yourself: What can I do *now* to be the person I want to be under these conditions? Consider the actions you listed in Step 3 and start with the action that is most feasible or most attractive at this moment.

Appendix A: Examples of common values

| | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Acceptance | Efficiency | Inner Harmony | Quality |
| Achievement | Elegance | Inspiration | Radiance |
| Advancement & Promotion | Entertainment | Integrity | Recognition |
| Adventure | Enlightenment | Intellect | Relationships |
| Affection | Equality | Involvement | Religion |
| Altruism | Ethics | Knowledge | Reputation |
| Arts | Excellence | Leadership | Responsibility |
| Awareness | Excitement | Learning | Risk Safety & Security |
| Beauty | Experiment | Loyalty | Self-Respect |
| Challenge | Expertise | Magnificence | Sensibility |
| Change | Exhilaration | Making a Difference | Sensuality |
| Community | Fairness | Mastery | Serenity |
| Compassion | Fame | Meaningful Work | Service |
| Competence | Family | Ministering | Sexuality |
| Competition | Fast Pace | Money | Sophistication |
| Completion | Freedom | Morality | Spark |
| Connectedness | Friendship | Mystery | Speculation |
| Cooperation | Fun | Nature | Spirituality |
| Collaboration | Grace | Openness | Stability |
| Country | Growth | Originality | Status |
| Creativity | Happiness | Order | Success |
| Decisiveness | Harmony | Passion | Teaching |
| Democracy | Health | Peace | Tenderness |
| Design | Helping Others | Personal Development | Thrill |
| Discovery | Helping Society | Personal Expression | Unity |
| Diversity | Honesty | Planning | Variety |
| Environmental Awareness | Humor | Play | Wealth |
| Economic Security | Imagination | Pleasure | Winning |
| Education | Improvement | Power | Wisdom |
| Effectiveness | Independence | Privacy | |
| | Influencing Others | Purity | |



Appendix B: Example of a completed form

Step 1: Describe the challenging life event

I recently lost my job.

Step 2: Identify core values

1. Value: care

What it means to me: to take care of important others, such as my son and wife

Why it is important to me: because I want the people I love to be safe and happy

2. Value: financial independence

What it means to me: to be able to buy the things I want and need without relying on others

Why it is important to me: I do not want to be financially dependent on others because it greatly reduces my feelings of freedom and creates a sense of indebtedness.

3. Value: learning

What it means to me: to develop myself

Why it is important to me: I am eager to learn new things, as this allows me to feel young and alive.

4. Value: inner peace

What it means to me: to feel balanced and at ease

Why it is important to me: I feel happiest and strongest when I experience a sense of emotional stability. It allows me to make wise choices and genuinely connect with others.

Step 3: Consider actions for valued living

Value: Care

- I will actively search for a new job so that I will be able to provide for my family as soon as possible again.
- I will try to manage my emotions as well as possible so that my kids and wife will not be affected by my stress.

Value: Financial independence

- I will explore options to cut our expenses so that we can remain financially independent for as long as possible during unemployment.



Value: Learning

- I will talk to others who have also faced unemployment to learn how they dealt with it.
- I will search for vacancies in related fields, and I will invest time to re-educate myself to find a job in a related field if necessary.
- I will keep reading and developing myself, even if it is not at work.

Value: Inner peace

- I will take enough time to rest to prevent becoming overwhelmed by the stress of my unemployment.
- I will meditate to stay connected to my feelings and needs.