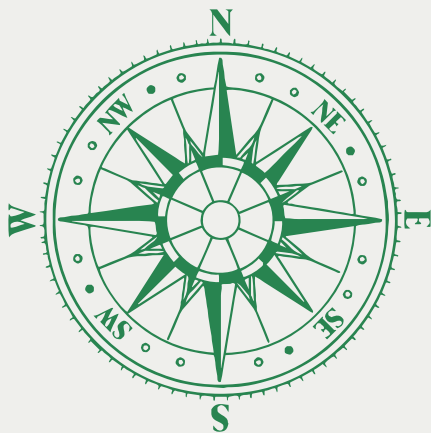


Living By Your Core Values

A Practical Guide



A guided workbook to help you define your
values for greater clarity and purpose in
your life.



Welcome!

Disclaimer: This ebook is intended for educational and self-reflective purposes only. It is not a substitute for professional mental health treatment, nor does it constitute therapy or a therapeutic relationship with Dr. Olson-Madden. If you are experiencing significant distress, please consult with a licensed mental health professional.

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Introduction

The Gift of Living By Your Values

Alongside the practice of self-compassion, one of the greatest gifts we can give ourselves is learning to honor our core values.

When we live in alignment with our values, life feels more steady, authentic, and purposeful. Alignment allows our actions to reflect who we truly are, creating a deep sense of congruence and clarity.

The challenge is that many people aren't entirely sure what a "core value" really is, why it matters, or how to begin identifying and living by them. That's exactly what we'll explore together in this guide.

So take a few moments for yourself, and let's begin uncovering what matters most to you.



Most of us want to live a life that feels meaningful, authentic, and aligned. Yet it's easy to get caught up in the daily grind—checking tasks off the to-do list, meeting obligations, and moving from one responsibility to the next—without pausing to ask: Am I living in alignment with what matters most to me?

This is where values come in. Values are the compass that guide us toward a life of purpose. They help us make decisions, stay steady through challenges, and act in ways that reflect who we truly are.



What Are Core Values?

In Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), values are described as freely chosen, ongoing patterns of action. They represent qualities of living and being—not fleeting goals or temporary desires.

Values are like a guidepost:

- They don't represent a single destination.
- They point you in a direction you can follow for a lifetime.
- Even when you "arrive" somewhere, your values continue to guide you.

What Values Are NOT

- Not Goals: A goal might be 'earn a promotion,' but the underlying value could be 'growth' or 'contribution.'
- Not Feelings: You might feel joy or pride when you live in alignment with values, but the feelings themselves are not the value.
- Not Rules or 'Shoulds': Values are not imposed expectations or external demands. They come from within.
- Not Success or Failure: Living your values is about direction, not perfection.

How To Identify and Clarify Your Core Values

There are many ways to uncover your core values. I'll walk you through two of the most practical and effective methods here.

Choosing from a List or Card Sort

One of the most common ways to identify values is to start with a comprehensive list. Simply read through the words and notice which ones stand out to you. Some people describe it as certain words "lighting up" on the page—there's a sense of recognition or resonance.

As you review, circle the words that feel important or meaningful to **you**. Keep in mind: it's common for people to choose values they think they "should" have, rather than the ones that truly fit for them personally. There's no judgment here and there are NO RIGHT OR WRONG VALUES. This is because values are freely chosen.

You'll find a values list included later in this guide to help get you started. Use it as a tool, and add what resonates. There are many useful resources on the Web for more inspiration. If none of the words capture your value exactly, feel free to create your own phrase that gets closer to the essence of what you mean.

There are many exercises to narrow down your values among: choosing qualities based on domains or areas of life; top three or top ten you want to be prioritizing; choosing those you feel most disconnected with.

How To Identify and Clarify Your Core Values

Looking At Your Experiences

Another powerful way to identify your values is through reflection on your own experiences. This method helps reveal what truly matters to you based on how you've lived—not just what you think sounds good.

Experience A: "A High Point"

- Recall a recent time when you felt fully alive, engaged, and joyful. Maybe it was a meaningful conversation, an accomplishment, a trip, or a moment of connection. Revisit it in as much detail as you can. Then ask yourself: What made that experience so meaningful? What qualities were present that mattered most or that gave you sense of vitality? Those qualities are clues to your core values.

Experience B: "A Low Point"

- Now think of a recent experience that left you feeling frustrated, unfulfilled, or out of alignment. Again, revisit the details. What was missing from that situation that made you realize you weren't thriving? Often, the absence of a value is just as telling as its presence.

Together, these dialectics highlight the contrast between when you are living in alignment with your values and when you are not. This contrast can be incredibly clarifying.

Core Values List

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|-----------------|---------------|
| Abundance | Consciousness |
| Acceptance | Conservation |
| Accomplishment | Consistency |
| Adventure | Contentment |
| Altruism | Contribution |
| Ambition | Control |
| Appreciation | Cooperation |
| Approachability | Courage |
| Assertiveness | Courtesy |
| Attentiveness | Craftiness |
| Authenticity | Creativity |
| Autonomy | Curiosity |
| Awareness | Dignity |
| Awe | Discipline |
| Balance | Discovery |
| Beauty | Diversity |
| Belonging | Drive |
| Benevolence | Duty |
| Bravery | Eagerness |
| Calmness | Ease |
| Care | Efficiency |
| Certainty | Education |
| Challenge | Empathy |
| Change | Encouragement |
| Charity | Endurance |
| Cheerfulness | Enjoyment |
| Cleverness | Equality |
| Comfort | Ethics |
| Commitment | Excellence |
| Community | Expertise |
| Compassion | Fairness |
| Confidence | Faith |
| Conformity | Fame |
| Connection | Fearlessness |



Core Values List

Financial Independence

Flexibility
Forgiveness
Fortitude
Freedom
Friendliness
Friendship
Fun
Generosity
Grace
Gratitude
Growth
Guidance
Harmony
Heart
Helpfulness
Honesty
Honor
Hope
Humility
Humor
Imagination
Impact
Impartiality
Independence
Individuality
Industry
Influence
Ingenuity
Inquisitiveness
Innovation
Insightfulness
Inspiration
Integrity
Intellect
Intimacy

Intuition/Intuitiveness

Involvement
Joy
Justice
Kindness
Knowledge
Leadership
Learning
Legacy
Leisure
Liberty
Love
Loyalty
Mastery
Meaning
Mindfulness
Nature
Non-conformity
Nonviolence
Obedience
Open-mindedness
Openness
Order
Partnership
Passion
Patience
Peace
Perseverance
Persistence
Philanthropy
Playfulness
Pleasantness
Poise
Popularity
Power
Presence



Core Values List

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Pragmatism | Silliness |
| Presence | Simplicity |
| Pride | Sincerity |
| Privacy | Skillfulness |
| Professionalism | Sociability |
| Prosperity | Solidarity |
| Prudence | Sophistication |
| Purity | Spirit |
| Purpose | Spirituality |
| Quality | Spontaneity |
| Rationality | Stability |
| Realism | Status |
| Reasonableness | Stillness |
| Recognition | Strength |
| Reflective | Structure |
| Reliability | Success |
| Relationships | Support |
| Resilience | Sustainability |
| Resourcefulness | Sympathy |
| Respect | Teaching |
| Responsibility | Teamwork |
| Restraint | Temperance |
| Reverence | Thankfulness |
| Sacrifice | Thoroughness |
| Safety | Thoughtfulness |
| Security | Tolerance |
| Self-control | Tranquility |
| Selflessness | Transcendence |
| Self-reliance | Trust |
| Self-respect | Trustworthiness |
| Sensitivity | Truth |
| Sensuality | Understanding |
| Service | Uniqueness |
| Sexuality | Unity |
| Sharing | Usefulness |
| Silence | Valor |



Variety
Virtue
Vision
Vitality
Vivacity
Vulnerability
Warmth
Warm-heartedness
Willfulness
Willingness
Wisdom
Wealth
Well-being
Wisdom
Wittiness
Wonder
Worthiness
Youthfulness
Zeal

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Exercices for *Living Your Values*

The Card Sort (ACT-Inspired):
Underline values words from the list (or use cards) and list them:

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Sort them into three piles: **V**ery Important, **S**omewhat Important, and **N**ot Important and list. From your 'Very Important' pile, narrow it down to your Top10 values. These become your compass.

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Select 3 Core Values that you would like to prioritize OR that are most important to you right now:

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Small Steps
TOWARD VALUES

Pick one value that matters
deeply. Write down one small,
concrete action you can take
this week to live that value.

List your top values. Circle one to take action on this week:

Possible Actions:

Give yourself examples of when or how you can take action
on this value:

Future Self

LETTER

Imagine your life 10–20 years from now. Picture yourself living in alignment with your deepest values—showing up in ways that feel true, meaningful, and fulfilling. Now, write a letter from that future self to the present you.

In your letter, include:

Encouragement: What wisdom would your future self share about the path you're on right now?

Guidance: What choices or actions would they suggest you keep making (or stop making) to live by your values more fully?

Gratitude: What might your future self thank you for—efforts you've made, risks you've taken, or ways you've stayed true to yourself?

Reassurance: How would your future self remind you that even small steps matter, and that it's never too late to realign with what matters most?



Envisioning *Your Ideal Day*

Picture a day where you live fully aligned with your values. From morning to evening, what would you be doing?

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Who would you be with? What qualities would guide your actions?

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What does this tell you about what gives you vitality, meaning and purpose?

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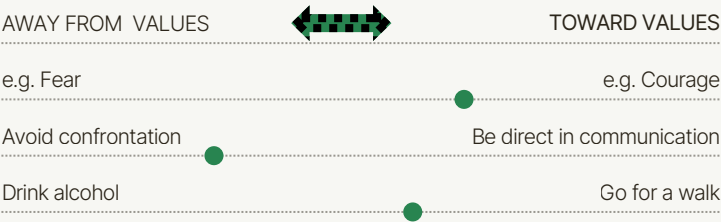
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The Choice Point

THINK OF A RECENT CHALLENGE. AT THAT MOMENT, DID YOU MOVE TOWARD YOUR VALUES (WITH ALIGNED ACTION) OR AWAY FROM THEM (WITH AVOIDANCE, FEAR, OR SHORT-TERM RELIEF)? LIST THE WAYS IN WHICH YOUR AWAY MOVES SHOWED UP AS WELL AS HOW YOU CHOSE TOWARDS MOVES.



AWAY MOVES (AVOIDANCE)

TOWARDS MOVES (VALUES)

WHEN YOU HAVE MOVED AWAY FROM YOUR VALUES IN A SITUATION, REFLECT ON HOW YOU MIGHT CHOOSE DIFFERENTLY NEXT TIME.

Journal Prompts for Exploring Your Core Values

Looking Back at Fulfillment

Think of a recent moment when you felt deeply satisfied or proud of yourself. What qualities or values were you living out in that moment?

Admired Qualities in Others

Write about someone you admire—whether it’s a friend, mentor, or public figure. What values do they seem to embody that resonate with you?

The “Non-Negotiables”

What are 2–3 things you absolutely need in order to feel like yourself in your daily life (e.g., honesty, creativity, freedom)?

The Ripple Effect

If you were to live more fully in alignment with one of your top values, how might it positively impact your relationships, work, or well-being?

The Missing Piece

Reflect on a time when life felt “off” or unfulfilling. Which value(s) do you think were missing in that experience?



Journal Prompts for Exploring Your Core Values

The Legacy Question

If someone gave a speech about you 20 years from now, what would you want them to say about how you lived your life and what you stood for? Consider the perspective of someone who has known you for a very long time as well as someone who may be new to your life.

Daily Alignment

Looking at your week, where do you already see your values showing up? Where do you feel a gap between what you value and how you're spending your time?

Values in Conflict

Sometimes two values can seem at odds (e.g., independence vs. connection). Write about a situation where you felt this tension and how you handled it.

Tiny Actions, Big Meaning

Choose one value that feels important right now. What's one small action you could take this week that would help you embody it more fully?

Compassionate Reflection

If you notice you've drifted away from your values, how can you remind yourself to return gently, without judgment?



Notes

Bringing it All Together

Values are not about perfection—they are about direction. The process of clarifying and living your values is ongoing, and there will always be moments when you drift off course. That doesn't mean you've failed; it simply means you're human. Each day offers another chance to realign with what matters most.

With practice, your values can become an inner compass to guide difficult choices, keep you steady in times of stress, and remind you of who you want to be even when life feels uncertain. They can strengthen your resilience, bring clarity to your priorities, and help you create a life that feels more authentic and fulfilling.

Most importantly, your values give you a way to live intentionally—to show up in the world as the best version of yourself, not because you're striving for perfection, but because you're choosing to live in a way that reflects what truly matters to you.



About the Author



Dr. Jennifer Olson-Madden is a licensed psychologist and expert in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), dedicated to helping clients achieve purposeful and successful outcomes through inspired and committed action. With over 15 years of licensure in Denver, CO, and more than two decades of experience in anxiety and chronic stress. She not only practices ACT professionally but also integrates its principles into her own life daily. For more resources, check out her series of blogs on www.drolsonmadden.com.

