



Your Values Compass: Living by What Matters Most

An explainer, values card sort, and values-based action plan · Created by Simar Gill Lowther, MACP, RP (CRPO)

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At a glance

- Values are what you want to stand for. They are directions, not destinations.
- Unlike goals, values can never be "finished." You can act on them at any moment.
- Acting on your values, even in small ways, is linked with greater wellbeing and resilience.

Values vs. goals

Values	Goals
A direction, like heading west	A destination, like reaching a town
Ongoing: "Being a caring parent"	Finishable: "Attend every school concert"
Can be acted on today, in any situation	May depend on circumstances
Chosen by you	Sometimes set by others

Why values matter when life is hard

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) teaches that we can't always control our feelings, but we can choose how we act. Values give that choice direction. When anxiety says "avoid," values ask, "What matters here?" They help you move toward a meaningful life even while pain is present.

What the research says

ACT, which centres on clarifying values and committed action, is an evidence-based approach for anxiety, depression, chronic pain, and stress (Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson, 2012).

A meta-analysis of randomized trials found ACT to be effective across a range of conditions (A-Tjak et al., 2015).

Tool: My Values Card Sort and Compass

Step 1: Sort your values

Read the list below. Mark each value: V (very important), S (somewhat important), or N (not important to me right now). Add your own.

Value	V / S / N	Value	V / S / N
Family		Loyalty	
Honesty		Respect	
Kindness		Fun	
Faith or spirituality		Peace	
Health		Growth	
Learning		Service	
Adventure		Security	
Creativity		Connection	
Independence		Achievement	
Community		Compassion	
Courage		Freedom	
Fairness		Tradition	

Step 2: My top five values

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Step 3: My values compass

Life area	What I value here	How I'm living it now (0-10)	One small step this week
Relationships			
Work or study			
Health			
Personal growth			
Community or faith			
Fun and rest			

Strategies to try

- **Use values as a decision guide.** Ask, "Which choice moves me toward the person I want to be?"
- **Expect discomfort.** Living by values often means doing hard things. That's normal.
- **Act in small ways.** Valuing connection could be as simple as sending one text today.
- **Revisit regularly.** Values can shift with life stages. Check in every few months.

Strategies you may not have heard of

These less common, evidence-informed techniques go beyond the usual advice. Try one at a time and notice what works for you.

- **Find your "sweet spot."** Recall a moment when you felt truly alive or at peace. What values were present in that moment?
- **Look for values in pain.** Ask, "What does this pain tell me I care about?" Loneliness may point to connection; frustration may point to fairness.
- **Write your 80th birthday speech.** Imagine a loved one speaking at your 80th birthday. What would you hope they say about how you lived?
- **Tag your day.** Each morning, choose one value and one small action that expresses it.

Journal prompts

Take your time with these. Write freely; there are no right answers.

At the end of my life, what do I hope people say I stood for?

Where is there a gap between my values and how I'm living?

Which of my values came from family or culture, and which feel truly mine?

What is one value I've neglected that I want to reconnect with?

When to reach out for support

If you feel stuck, directionless, or caught between your values and others' expectations, ACT-informed therapy can help you clarify what matters and take meaningful steps.

Insightful Journey Inc. offers therapy in person in Oshawa and virtually across Ontario, in English, Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu. Direct billing available.

[Book a free consultation](#) · 647-982-2527 (call, text, or WhatsApp)

In crisis? Call or text 9-8-8, or call 911.

This resource is for education and self-reflection. It is not a diagnostic tool and is not a substitute for professional assessment or care.

References

A-Tjak, J. G. L., et al. (2015). A meta-analysis of the efficacy of acceptance and commitment therapy for clinically relevant mental and physical health problems. *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, 84(1), 30–36.

Hayes, S. C., Strosahl, K. D., & Wilson, K. G. (2012). *Acceptance and commitment therapy: The process and practice of mindful change* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.

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