

A Life Worth Living: Values, Pleasure, Mastery, and Goals

The next step in Behavioral Activation is determining the behaviors on which to focus to improve our mood. While some behaviors, like exercise and meditation, can be used right away to improve mood directly, many of the behaviors that are likely to help us are those that align with the things that we enjoy or are important to us.

An exploration of “values,” “pleasure,” and “mastery” describe much of the “stuff” that makes life worth living. This process can help us come up with tangible goals to move us toward the things that are most important to us.

“Values” are what we find meaningful in life. They are the most important things to us. Everyone has different values, and for each of us they can change over time. They are like a compass, pointing us in the direction we want to go.




“Pleasure” involves activities, or “play” that we enjoy for the sake of the activity itself. Hobbies, games, spending time in nature, or spending time with a good friend.

“Mastery” involves activities, such as work or sports, that involve the development of skills; we are able to accomplish things and feel a sense of mastery over our environment. When enjoyed in moderation and diversified well with other activities, they can increase positive emotions and improve how we feel about ourselves. Also, we may feel more creative as we learn to master certain skills, adding to the possibilities of enjoyment.



Goals and objectives outline the steps we take to experience our lives more fully. They give us targets to help us experience more pleasure, mastery, and value-driven behavior.

To feel more consistently engaged and happy in the world, it is usually best to find a balance of goals centered on values, pleasure, and mastery. How that balance looks for you will be unique. On the following pages, we will help you understand how this balance might look for your own life. 

Values

As we mentioned earlier, “values” are what we find meaningful and important. These can be different for different people.

Values are important to explore, because much of our goal-directed activity comes from a foundation of what is valued. For example, one may value a healthy lifestyle, and a related goal may be to exercise daily. We may value family, and therefore choose to schedule in time with them. Or if we don't have a family, our activities could lead to getting married and starting one.

It is common to mistake certain wishes and feelings for values. **Values are not internal states, how people treat us, or specific things to achieve.**

Below are some of the common areas of life that people value and may lead to goal-directed activity.



On the next page is a list of values that are related to the categories below. Use them to start listing your own values on the following page.



Physical well-being

What kind of values do you have regarding your physical wellbeing? How do you want to look at yourself?

Family relationships

What kind of relationships do you want with your family? What kind of mother/father/ brother/sister/uncle/ aunt do you want to be? What is important to you about a good family?

Intimate relationships

What kind of partner do you want to be? What quality of relationship do you want to be part of? How do you want to spend time together?

Citizenship/Community

What kind of environment do you want to be a part of? How do you want to contribute to your community?



Mental/Emotional Health

What helps you maintain sound mental health? Why is this important to you? What issues would you like to address?

Spirituality

What kind of relationship do you want with God/nature/ the Earth/mankind? What does having a spiritual life mean to you? How can you exercise this?

Friendships/ social relations

What sort of friend do you want to be? How would you like to act towards your friends? How can these relationships be improved?

Hobbies/ Recreation

How would you like to enjoy yourself? What relaxes you? When are you most playful? Are there any special interests you would like to pursue?

Education/training/ personal growth

How would you like to grow? What kind of skills would you like to develop? What would you like to know more about?

Employment/career

What kind of work is valuable to you? What qualities do you want to bring as an employee? What kind of work relationships would you like to build?

Below is a list of general value categories, and some specific values that are common in each. See if any of them fit you, and use this page to fill out the values rating sheet on the next page.

Family relations

- Work on current relationships
- Spend time with family
- Take an active role in raising my children
- Maintain consistent healthy communication

Marriage/couples/intimate relationships

- Establish a sense of safety and trust
- Give and receive affection
- Spend quality time with my partner
- Show my partner how much I appreciate them

Friendships/Social Relationships

- End destructive relationships
- Reach out for new relationships
- Feel a sense of belonging
- Have and keep close friends
- Spend time with friends
- Have people to do things with

Mental/Emotional health

- Seek fun and things that give me pleasure
- Have free time
- Be independent and take care of myself
- Challenge my negative thinking
- Make my own decisions
- Engage in therapy
- Take my medications
- Stay active

Physical well-being

- Live in secure and safe surroundings
- Engage in regular exercise
- Have a steady income to meet physical needs
- Eat foods that are nourishing to my body
- Maintain a balance between rest and activity
- Get enough sleep

Citizenship/Community

- Contribute to the larger community
- Help people in need
- Improve society
- Be committed to a cause or group that has a larger purpose
- Make sacrifices for others

Spirituality

- Follow traditions and customs
- Live according to spiritual principles
- Practice my religion or faith
- Grow in understanding myself, my personal calling, and life's purpose
- Discern the will of God
- Find meaning in life
- Develop a personal philosophy of life
- Spend time in nature
- Focus on the greater good

Education/Training/Personal Growth

- Be involved in undertakings I believe personally are significant
- Try new and different things in life
- Learn new things
- Be daring and seek adventure
- Have an exciting life
- Learn to do challenging things that help me grow as a person

Employment

- Be powerful and able to influence others, have authority
- Make important decisions that affect the organization
- Be a leader
- Make a great deal of money
- Be respected by others
- Be seen by others as successful, be ambitious
- Become well-known, obtain recognition and status
- Be productive, work hard
- Achieve significant goals
- Enjoy the work I do
- Do what I'm told and follow the rules

Here are some other experiments to explore your own values:

1. Imagine that an important newscaster were doing a biographical story on your life. Think about how you'd want them to describe you. How would they describe the way you spent your time? How you related to others? What was most important to you? What are your strengths as a person? Write down a narrative of what they would say.
2. Imagine you could read the mind of a person that's important to you and with whom you've had a good relationship. They are thinking all kinds of thoughts about your qualities: what you stand for, what your strengths are, what you mean to him or her, and the role you play in his or her life.
3. Think about your heroes. They can be people directly in your life, or other people that you look up to, even fictional characters. What are their qualities? What do you admire about them?
4. Imagine you are writing your own autobiography. Imagine how you would like to live your life, barring all barriers, in the "best case scenario." What are the things that are most important to you in this scenario? What would you stand for? How would you spend your time?
5. Imagine that someone is performing the eulogy at your funeral. Looking back on your life, they would be commenting on your strengths, values, and achievements. How would you want them to describe your life?
6. If you are struggling to find a valued direction, commit to experimenting with some of the values on the previous pages for just one week. After choosing a value, plan to notice your reactions to making the effort to hold to this value. Make a list of behaviors that might fit with the value and choose one behavior to try. Notice your judgments that come up about choosing this behavior. Then make a plan to fulfill on the value-driven behavior. Just do the behavior without telling anyone about it and see what happens. Commit to following through on this behavior once per day for one week. Keep a diary of your reactions to behaving this way and others' reactions to you. At the end of the week, reflect on your experiment with someone else, like a therapist or group leader.

Values Rating Sheet

Based on your exploration of the previous pages, write a summary of your values. For example, "to live a healthy life and take care of my body" (physical well-being), or "to be a good friend to people who need me, and to enjoy time with people I love"(friendships).

Rate each domain for how important it is to you from 0-10 (0 = not important, 10 = extremely important).

Remember: values are not internal states, how people treat us, or specific things to achieve.

Physical well-being

Family relationships

Intimate Relationships

Citizenship/Community



Mental/Emotional Health

Spirituality

Other?

Friendships/social relations

Hobbies/Recreation

Education/training/
personal growth

Employment/career

Translating Values into Activities...

The next step is to translate our values into activities that help us fulfill on those goals.

Take a moment to think about the values that you identified on the previous page. What are some short term goals in each area? What are some long term goals? Use this page and the next to start to brainstorm. Write down your results on the upcoming page: "Values, Pleasure, and Mastery Master List."

VALUE

ACTIVITIES

Example:

Parenting
I want to be involved in my children's interests and learning. I'd like to build special memories with my kids and spend quality time with them.



I'm going to attend the next PTO meeting and maybe contact the teacher to be a classroom volunteer. I can plan a small vacation to take with the kids next summer.





VALUE

ACTIVITIES









Pleasure

Pleasure involves activities that we enjoy for the sake of the activity itself. There are many different kinds of pleasure. Those that are most sustainable involve “play” such as hobbies and other recreational activities. Social activities can also involve pleasure. Other types of pleasure, such as sensory experiences (food, drink, images, touch, etc.) can also be enjoyable if done in moderation.

Below are examples of enjoyable activities that are enjoyed by many. Circle the ones that apply to you, and add others that aren’t included below.



Hobbies, Interests, and other “play”

- Reading
- TV, movies, plays
- Dancing
- Playing or listening to music
- Board games or cards
- Arts and crafts, sewing, painting
- Cooking
- Walking, hiking, enjoying nature, fishing
- Sports (basketball, softball, swimming, etc.) or going as a spectator
- Martial arts (karate, etc.)
- Museums/zoo
- Video games
- Traveling, sightseeing, going to the beach, sunbathing
- Shopping
- Gardening/decorating
- Photography
- Comedy: TV, recordings, live
- Religion or spirituality

Social activities

- Spending time with family
- Enjoying own children and/or young relatives
- Enjoying close friends
- Hanging out with large groups of friends/acquaintances
- Parties, meeting new people
- Romance
- Pets
- Clubs: meeting people with similar interests
- Enjoying food and drink with others



Sensory experiences

- Pleasant smells, images, sounds, physical touch, tastes
- Taking a bath
- Listening to soothing music
- Mindful tasting

Other?

Mastery

Mastery involves activities, such as work or sports, that involve the development of skills; we are able to accomplish things and feel a sense of mastery over our environment. When enjoyed in moderation and diversified well with other activities, they can increase positive emotions and improve how we feel about ourselves.

Here are some examples of how people experience mastery to experience fulfillment in their lives. Circle the ones that apply to you, and add others that aren't included below.

Job or Meaningful Daytime Activity

Look for or attempt to develop some of these qualities in your occupation volunteer work, or other meaningful daytime activity:

- Enjoyment
- Creativity
- Feelings of competence (able to accomplish tasks satisfactorily)
- Potential for development of skills
- Ability to "move up" in the organization or take on more responsibility, if this is desired
- Social contact with coworkers, colleagues, others in the field



Other skill-based activities

- Sports
- Music practice and performance
- Home improvement/building
- Woodworking
- Visual art (painting, drawing, pottery, sewing, knitting)
- Learning about interests (history, politics, food, language, culture, etc.)
- Crafting, pottery, and other creative skills

Other?

Activities List: Pleasure and Mastery

Here are some examples of activities that tend to increase pleasure and mastery. You might think of more that are not listed. Circle the ones that you think could lead to enjoyment or mastery for yourself.

1. Soaking in the bathtub
2. Planning my career
3. Collecting things (coins, shells, etc.)
4. Going for a vacation
5. Recycling old items
6. Relaxing
7. Going on a date
8. Going to a movie
9. Jogging, walking
10. Listening to music
11. Thinking I have done a full day's work
12. Recalling past parties
13. Buying household gadgets
14. Lying in the sun
15. Planning a career change
16. Laughing
17. Thinking about my past trips
18. Listening to others
19. Reading magazines or newspapers
20. Hobbies (stamp collecting, model building, etc.)
21. Spending an evening with good friends
22. Planning a day's activities
23. Meeting new people
24. Remembering beautiful scenery
25. Saving money
26. Gambling
27. Going to the gym, doing aerobics
28. Eating
29. Thinking how it will be when I finish school
30. Getting out of debt/paying debts
31. Practicing karate, judo, yoga
32. Thinking about retirement
33. Repairing things around the house
34. Working on my car (bicycle)
35. Remembering the words and deeds of loving people
36. Wearing sexy clothes
37. Having quiet evenings
38. Taking care of my plants
39. Buying, selling stocks and shares
40. Going swimming
41. Doodling
42. Exercising
43. Collecting old things
44. Going to a party
45. Thinking about buying things
46. Playing golf
47. Playing soccer
48. Flying kites
49. Having discussions with friends
50. Having family get-togethers
51. Riding a motorbike
52. Sex
53. Playing squash
54. Going camping
55. Singing around the house
56. Arranging flowers
57. Going to church, praying (practicing religion)
58. Losing weight
59. Going to the beach
60. Thinking I'm an OK person
61. A day with nothing to do
62. Having class reunions
63. Going ice skating, roller skating/blading
64. Going sailing
65. Travelling abroad, interstate or within the state
66. Sketching, painting
67. Blowing bubbles
68. Doing embroidery, cross stitching
69. Sleeping
70. Driving
71. Entertaining
72. Going to clubs (garden, sewing, etc.)
73. Thinking about getting married
74. Going bird watching
75. Singing with groups
76. Flirting
77. Playing musical instruments
78. Doing arts and crafts
79. Making a gift for someone
80. Buying CDs, tapes, records
81. Watching boxing, wrestling
82. Planning parties
83. Cooking, baking
84. Going hiking, bush walking
85. Writing books (poems, articles)
86. Sewing
87. Buying clothes
88. Working
89. Going out to dinner
90. Discussing books
91. Sightseeing
92. Gardening
93. Going to the beauty salon
94. Early morning coffee and newspaper
95. Playing tennis
96. Kissing
97. Watching my children (play)
98. Thinking I have a lot going for me
99. Going to plays and concerts
100. Daydreaming
101. Planning to go to college or university

102. Going for a drive
103. Listening to a stereo
104. Refinishing furniture
105. Watching videos or DVDs
106. Making lists of tasks
107. Going bike riding
108. Walks on the riverfront/shoreline
109. Buying gifts
110. Travelling to national parks
111. Completing a task
112. Thinking about my achievements
113. Going to a sporting event
114. Eating gooey, fattening foods
115. Exchanging emails, chatting on the internet
116. Photography
117. Going fishing
118. Thinking about pleasant events
119. Staying on a diet
120. Star gazing
121. Flying a plane
122. Reading fiction
123. Acting
124. Being alone
125. Writing diary/journal entries or letters
126. Cleaning
127. Reading non-fiction
128. Taking children places
129. Dancing
130. Going on a picnic
131. Thinking "I did that pretty well" after doing something
132. Meditating/ Mindfulness exercises
133. Playing volleyball
134. Having lunch with a friend
135. Making a gratitude list
136. Thinking about having a family
137. Thoughts about happy moments in my childhood
138. Splurging
139. Playing cards
140. Having a political discussion
141. Solving riddles mentally
142. Playing tennis
143. Seeing and/or showing photos or slides
144. Knitting/crocheting/quilting
145. Doing crossword puzzles
146. Shooting pool/Playing billiards
147. Dressing up and looking nice
148. Reflecting on how I've improved
149. Buying things for myself
150. Talking on the phone
151. Going to museums, art galleries
152. Thinking religious thoughts
153. Surfing the internet
154. Lighting candles
155. Listening to the radio
156. Spending time in nature
157. Having coffee at a cafe
158. Getting/giving a massage
159. Saying "I love you"
160. Thinking about my good qualities
161. Buying books
162. Having a spa, or sauna
163. Going skiing
164. Going canoeing or white-water rafting
165. Going bowling
166. Doing woodworking
167. Fantasizing about the future
168. Doing ballet, jazz/tap dancing
169. Debating
170. Playing computer games
171. Having an aquarium
172. Erotica (sex books, movies)
173. Going horseback riding
174. Going rock climbing
175. Thinking about becoming active in the community
176. Doing something new
177. Making jigsaw puzzles
178. Thinking I'm a person who can cope
179. Playing with my pets
180. Having a barbecue
181. Rearranging the furniture in my house
182. Buying new furniture
183. Going window shopping
184. Saying yes to an opportunity

Values, Pleasure, and Mastery Activities List

Look back at the last 6 pages and write down the activities you came up with to form a master list of possible activities that fit with your life aims. We'll use these to start to get more active with Behavioral Activation.

Pleasure

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Mastery

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Valued Activities

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____