Living by Your Values

THE TALKING THERAPIES UK SELF-HELP SERIES



Living by Your Values

An eight-module programme on understanding what values are, finding your own, and building a life that actually reflects them

A self-help workbook · 8 modules · about 8 weeks

TALKING THERAPIES UK

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First edition, 2026.

This workbook accompanies the Living by Your Values programme on the Talking Therapies UK self-help platform. Its text is drawn from the programme and is kept current with it: whenever the programme changes, the workbook is set again.

Revision 5. This printing was set on 9 November 2026 from the programme as it stood that day.

A note on using this workbook. It offers self-help based on established psychological approaches for difficulties of mild to moderate severity. It is not a substitute for assessment or treatment by a qualified professional and is not designed for use in a crisis. The examples in it are fictional; no real person appears in them. If you are worried about your safety, or your difficulties are getting worse, the page headed “When self-help is not enough” says where to turn.

Set in Poppins and Roboto, the Talking Therapies UK typefaces.

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How to use this workbook

There is a particular kind of moment that brings people to this programme. Someone has the job, perhaps, and the relationship, and the house with the correct number of bedrooms, and yet the whole arrangement has begun to feel like a coat borrowed from someone else's peg. It fits well enough across the shoulders. It simply does not seem to belong to them. What that person is circling, usually without quite the vocabulary to name it, is a question about values. Not values in the stiff sense the word has acquired in newspaper columns, but something far more intimate and far more useful: what do I actually care about, and does the life I am living bear any resemblance to it? What this programme is about. We are schooled at enormous length in how to acquire things, achieve things and measure things, and scarcely at all in how to decide which things are worth wanting in the first place. This programme puts a little of that missing education back. Across eight modules it sets out what a value actually is and cleanly separates it from the three impostors it is forever confused with, which are goals, feelings and rules; it looks honestly at where the idea came from in philosophy and what experimental psychology has actually found; it works through the delicate business of telling the values you genuinely hold from the ones that were installed in you so early you forgot they were ever installed rather than chosen; it examines why lives organised around external markers such as wealth, image and status reliably feel emptier than they look; it helps you move from a long list of admirable words to a living few that are recognisably yours; and it then turns to the considerably harder business of acting on them, including the obstacles that reliably get in the way and the particular role values play when life turns genuinely hard. The approach. The clinical spine of the programme is acceptance and commitment therapy, which has, more than any other modern approach, put the question of values at the centre of how people change, and which has gathered a substantial evidence base while doing so. People who live in closer contact with their values tend to score higher on what the research calls psychological flexibility, the capacity to keep acting on what matters even while difficult thoughts and feelings are present, and people who score higher on that capacity tend, across a large body of research, to fare better in their mental health, their relationships and their ability to weather adversity. The mechanism is not mysterious. A person who knows which way they are walking is less easily knocked off course by the weather, and a great deal of psychological distress is, at bottom, a kind of weather. Who this programme is for. It is deliberately transdiagnostic. Values work is relevant whether you are recovering from low mood or anxiety, navigating a life transition such as a career change, a relationship ending, retirement or new parenthood, consolidating gains after a course of therapy, or simply aware that you have been climbing with great competence towards markers of success that mean less than they were supposed to. You do not need a diagnosis to benefit from it, and it pairs naturally with any of the practice's condition-specific programmes, where values work appears briefly and this programme gives it the room it deserves. What this programme is not. It is not a personality quiz that prints out your values at the end like a horoscope with footnotes; values are discovered slowly, in the way you discover the shape of a dark room, by moving through it and bumping gently into the furniture, and the exercises here are built for exactly that kind of unhurried noticing. It is also not a substitute for individual therapy where the question of what you want from life is tangled up with significant clinical material that needs therapist-led work. Persistent low mood, trauma history, an

eating disorder, or any presentation where self-directed reflection tends to turn into self-attack are all better held with a therapist alongside, and the practice's team are available to discuss whether self-paced work is the right approach for your particular situation. If at any point in the programme you experience thoughts of harming yourself, please contact Samaritans on 116 123, text SHOUT to 85258, or your GP without delay. Values work can stir up real feeling, particularly in the modules on borrowed values and on what matters when life is hard, and noticing that something has been stirred is a reason to slow down and reach for support, never a sign that you are doing the work wrongly.

This workbook is the written form of the Living by Your Values programme on the Talking Therapies UK self-help platform. It follows the programme module by module: each part of the book is one module, and each chapter is one piece of the module's teaching, set in the order the programme presents it.

Read the chapters of a part in order, then turn to the worksheets that follow them. The worksheets are the part of the work that changes things, so give them the time they ask for and come back to them as the weeks go on. You may copy or print the worksheets for your own use, as often as you need.

Most people work through one module a week, which takes the whole programme about 8 weeks. Go at the pace that suits you: a module done properly is worth more than two done quickly.

The check-in questionnaires let you see how things are changing. Complete each one when you reach it, note the date and your total, and compare it with the last.

When self-help is not enough

- If you are in danger now, or have seriously harmed yourself, call 999 or go to your nearest accident and emergency department.
- If you need help urgently but it is not an emergency, call NHS 111 or contact your GP surgery.
- Samaritans are there day and night, every day of the year: call 116 123 free from any phone.
- If you would rather not talk, text SHOUT to 85258 for free, confidential support at any hour.
- If your difficulties are getting worse as you work through this book, or you find yourself thinking about ending your life, stop and speak to your GP or a mental health professional. A workbook can be a good start, and some difficulties need more help than a book can give.

What this workbook will help you to do

- By the end of this module you will:
- Be able to say precisely what a value is, and why a value is a direction rather than a destination
- Know the four-second test that separates a value from a goal, and the dead man test that catches goals a corpse could achieve
- Understand why building a life around chasing a feeling fails, and what feelings are useful for instead
- Recognise the texture of a borrowed rule, and the single question that separates a rule from a value
- Have caught sight of at least one of your own values walking past in an ordinary week

- Know the question Socrates was prepared to die for, and why Aristotle's answer is very nearly the thesis of this programme
- Understand the Stoic distinction between what is up to us and what is not, and why modern therapy descends from it
- Be able to explain the is/ought gap, and why no amount of science can choose your values for you
- Know the hidden map of human values, its two great oppositions, and what it predicts about your own inner tensions

PART 1

What a Value Actually Is

The question behind the question, a precise definition, and the three impostors values are forever confused with

CHAPTER 1

Welcome: the question behind the question

There is a particular kind of conversation that tends to happen late at night, or on a long drive, or in the strange quiet that follows some piece of bad news. Someone says, with a slight air of embarrassment, that they are not really sure what they are doing with themselves. They have the job, perhaps, and the relationship, and the house with the correct number of bedrooms, and yet the whole arrangement has begun to feel like a coat borrowed from someone else's peg. It fits well enough across the shoulders. It simply does not seem to belong to them.

What such a person is circling, usually without quite the vocabulary to name it, is a question about values. Not values in the stiff sense the word has acquired in newspaper columns and political speeches, but something far more intimate and far more useful: what do I actually care about, and does the life I am living bear any resemblance to it?

This programme exists because almost nobody has been taught how to answer that question. We are schooled at enormous length in how to acquire things, achieve things and measure things, and scarcely at all in how to decide which things are worth wanting in the first place. We leave education able to calculate compound interest and conjugate the occasional French verb, and entirely unequipped to say what would make a life our own. The eight modules ahead put a little of that missing education back.

The shape of the journey. The first module, this one, sets out what a value actually is and separates it cleanly from the things it is forever confused with. Module two steps back to look at where the idea came from, because the question of how to live has been argued over for two and a half thousand years and the argument is genuinely useful. Module three turns to the values you did not choose, the ones installed so early you forgot they were ever installed, and module four to the trap of measuring a life by external markers. Modules five and six are the practical heart: finding your own values rather than admiring other people's, and then giving them traction in the world through goals and plans. Module seven works with the obstacles that reliably get in the way, including what values are for when life turns genuinely hard. Module eight widens the lens a final time and helps you build a life, and a maintenance plan, that actually reflects you.

A note on pace. There is no right speed for this work, and there is no score to chase and no way to fail. The exercises reward unhurried attention, ideally with a notebook to hand and a willingness to return to them more than once, because what we care about tends to come into focus slowly, like a photograph in a developing tray. Some people take a module a week. Others sit with a single module for two or three. Both are sensible. The programme has been built to survive either kind of reader.

If you prefer to listen rather than read, the Listen button above each section will read it to you, and you can leave it switched on for the whole programme.

CHAPTER 2

A snapshot of your values, before we begin

Before the teaching starts in earnest, it is worth taking a quick, honest snapshot of where your values sit today. This is not a test, and there is nothing to pass or fail. It is simply a way of noticing which values you are living by at the moment, so that everything you read in the modules ahead has something of your own to attach itself to.

Two companion handouts go with this exercise. The first is the Schwartz Values Wheel, which lays out the ten values this programme works with, groups them into four families, and explains how values that sit opposite one another tend to pull in different directions. The second is a paper version of the questionnaire you are about to complete, in case you would like to work on it away from the screen or return to it later. Both are yours to keep.

When you are ready, work through the twenty statements below. Rate each one for how much it sounds like you as you are now, rather than as you feel you ought to be, and try to answer fairly quickly and honestly rather than dwelling on any single item. When you submit, you will see your values profile: the ten values ranked by how strongly they show up for you at present, and the four families they belong to.

WORKSHEET

What do you value? A short self-assessment

There are no right or wrong answers here, and this is a snapshot of now rather than a fixed verdict. Rate each statement for how much it sounds like you as you are at the moment.

1. Making my own decisions and choosing my own direction matters to me.

0	1	2	3	4	5

0 = Not me *5 = Very much me*

2. I like to be free to think things through for myself and form my own view.

0	1	2	3	4	5

0 = Not me *5 = Very much me*

3. I care that people I will never meet are treated fairly and with dignity.

0	1	2	3	4	5

0 = Not me *5 = Very much me*

4. Protecting the natural world and living sustainably feels important to me.

0	1	2	3	4	5

0 = Not me *5 = Very much me*

5. Doing things well and being recognised for my competence matters to me.

0	1	2	3	4	5

0 = Not me *5 = Very much me*

6. I set myself high standards and feel satisfied when I meet them.

0	1	2	3	4	5

0 = Not me *5 = Very much me*

7. Feeling safe, settled and free from upheaval is something I value.

0	1	2	3	4	5

0 = Not me *5 = Very much me*

8. I like my surroundings and my routines to be stable and predictable.

0	1	2	3	4	5

0 = Not me *5 = Very much me*

9. Being loyal and dependable towards the people close to me matters deeply.

0	1	2	3	4	5

0 = Not me *5 = Very much me*

10. I go out of my way to help the people in my life when they need me.

0	1	2	3	4	5

0 = Not me *5 = Very much me*

11. I look for excitement, variety and new experiences in my life.

0	1	2	3	4	5

0 = Not me *5 = Very much me*

12. A life with plenty of novelty and challenge appeals to me.

0	1	2	3	4	5

0 = Not me *5 = Very much me*

13. Behaving properly and not upsetting or offending others matters to me.

0	1	2	3	4	5

0 = Not me *5 = Very much me*

14. I try to hold back impulses that might disrupt things for other people.

0	1	2	3	4	5

0 = Not me *5 = Very much me*

15. Having influence, standing or resources that others respect matters to me.

0	1	2	3	4	5

0 = Not me *5 = Very much me*

16. I like to be in a position to direct things and lead the way.

0	1	2	3	4	5

0 = Not me *5 = Very much me*

17. Keeping the customs, faith or heritage I was raised with matters to me.

0	1	2	3	4	5

0 = Not me *5 = Very much me*

18. I value humility and doing things the way they have long been done.

0	1	2	3	4	5

0 = Not me *5 = Very much me*

19. Enjoying myself and seeking out pleasure is an important part of life.

0	1	2	3	4	5

0 = Not me *5 = Very much me*

20. I make room for the things that simply feel good and give me pleasure.

0	1	2	3	4	5

0 = Not me *5 = Very much me*