Living by Your Values: Practitioner Guide

THE TALKING THERAPIES UK PRACTITIONER GUIDES



Living by Your Values: Practitioner Guide

Delivering the programme as guided self-help

A practitioner guide · 8 contacts · to accompany the workbook

TALKING THERAPIES UK

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First edition, 2026.

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

Revision 6. This printing was set on 9 November 2026 from the programme as it stood that day.

A note on clinical responsibility. This guide supports qualified practitioners delivering guided self-help within their competence, their supervision and their organisation’s policies. It does not replace clinical judgement, and its thresholds are guidance: where your service’s policy differs, follow your service’s policy.

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

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How to use this guide

This guide is for qualified practitioners who support clients through the Living by Your Values programme as guided self-help: a short supported contact after each of its 8 modules, with the client working through the programme or its workbook in between.

Part 1 says who the programme is for. Part 2 covers what every contact needs: your part in guided self-help, how to structure a contact, how to review each kind of worksheet, what to do when the work is not being done, how to adapt the programme, the check-ins and when to step up, and risk. Read Parts 1 and 2 before you begin with a client.

Part 3 has a chapter for each contact, to read before that contact: what the client has read in the module, a plan, how to review the week's worksheets with their answers. Part 4 covers ending the work, supervision, and the checklist.

The guide follows the programme as it stands on the platform, so its plans name the programme's own modules, teaching and worksheets, and it is set again whenever the programme changes.

What this guide covers

- Who the programme suits, how to assess for it, and when it is not enough on its own
- Your part in guided self-help, and how to structure each contact
- For each of the 8 contacts: what the client has read, a plan, and the worksheets with their answers
- Keeping the work going, adapting the programme, the check-ins and stepping up, and risk at every contact
- Ending well, supervision, and a checklist for delivering the programme as designed

PART 1

Before you start

Who the programme is for, and how to decide whether it suits a client.

In this part

- Chapter 1, Who the programme is for: who it suits, how to assess for it, and when it is not enough on its own

CHAPTER 1

Who the programme is for

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.

What the programme covers

1. What a Value Actually Is
2. A Short Biography of an Old Idea
3. The Values You Did Not Choose
4. The Trap of External Markers
5. Finding Yours
6. Turning Values into Action
7. Working with the Obstacles
8. A Life That Reflects You

Who it suits

- Adults whose difficulties are of mild to moderate severity on assessment, in the area the programme addresses.
- Clients who want to work on the difficulty themselves between contacts, and can set aside time each week to read and to complete the worksheets.

- Clients who can read and write in English, or who have the support to do so.

When it is not enough on its own

- Current risk to self or others, including thoughts of ending their life with any plan or intent: assess and manage the risk first, under your service's policy.
- Severe difficulties on assessment, including a PHQ-9 of 20 or more or a GAD-7 of 15 or more: offer high-intensity therapy, or deliver the programme only alongside it.
- Psychosis, mania, or drug or alcohol dependence that is not being treated.
- A previous course of guided self-help that did not help, where the reasons have not changed.

PART 2

Delivering it well

How guided self-help works and what your part in it is: structuring each contact, reviewing the worksheets, keeping the work going, adapting it, the check-ins, and risk.

In this part

- Chapter 2, Guided self-help and your part in it: what guided self-help is, what the research says about support, and what your role is and is not

CHAPTER 2

Guided self-help and your part in it

What guided self-help is

Guided self-help pairs a structured programme, which the client works through on their own, with brief, regular contact with a trained practitioner. The programme carries the teaching: it explains the difficulty, teaches the skills, and sets the practice for each week. Your task is to help the client use it. In Living by Your Values that means 8 contacts of about thirty minutes, one after each module, by telephone, video or in person, with the client reading the module and completing its worksheets in between.

This division of labour is what makes guided self-help efficient, and it is also where it most often goes wrong. A practitioner who re-teaches each module in full turns a thirty-minute contact into an under-powered therapy session and leaves no time for the client's own practice, which is where change happens. A practitioner who asks only "How did it go?" leaves the client alone with the hardest parts. The contact plans in Part 3 are built to avoid both: most of each contact is spent on what the client did, what they learned from doing it, and what they will do next.

What the research says about support

Self-help is not a lesser treatment when it is supported. Cuijpers and colleagues (2010) pooled the studies that had compared guided self-help directly with face-to-face psychotherapy for depression and anxiety disorders, and found no significant difference in effect between the two, at the end of treatment or at follow-up. Farrand and Woodford (2013) pooled randomised trials of written cognitive behavioural self-help, found it effective for anxiety and depression, and examined how the support offered alongside it relates to its effect.

Two practical conclusions follow for your contacts. The support needs to be regular and planned, booked in advance and kept, rather than offered when the client asks for it. And it needs to be about the client's use of the programme, rather than a parallel conversation about everything else in their week.

Your part, and its limits

Roth and Pilling (2008) set out the competences needed to deliver cognitive and behavioural therapies well, distinguishing the generic competences of any good therapeutic work (engaging the client, building and keeping a working alliance, ending well) from those specific to an approach. In guided self-help the generic competences carry most of the weight. Your part has five elements:

1. Engage the client and keep the alliance: warmth, interest in the client's own words and examples, and reliability, so that contacts happen when agreed and start and end on time.

2. Review the practice: look at what the client did, with their permission, and help them draw out what they learned from it.

3. Solve problems: when the practice did not happen or did not help, find out why, and agree a smaller and clearer next step.

4. Monitor outcome: score the check-ins with the client, compare them over time, and act on the stepping-up guidance in Chapter 7.

5. Keep the work safe: ask about risk at every contact, and know what you will do with the answer (Chapter 8).

What the role is not matters as much. It is not an assessment of the whole person, a formulation of their history, or open-ended therapy. When a client brings something that needs more than the programme can offer, such as a trauma history that is beginning to surface, a relationship in crisis, or a worsening of their difficulties, acknowledge it, record it, and decide with the client and your supervisor whether a different step of care is needed, rather than stretching the contacts to hold it.

The stance that helps

Clients who do well in guided self-help tend to describe a practitioner who was interested, who noticed the effort they had made, and who was clear about what came next. Specific recognition ("You filled in the diary on five days, including the Thursday you said was the worst of the week") does more than general reassurance. Curiosity about what got in the way ("What was happening on the two days the diary stayed empty?") does more than encouragement to try harder. And a clear, small plan at the end of each contact, written down by the client in their own words, does more than a long list of good intentions.

The stance in a cognitive behavioural programme

Cognitive behavioural work rests on collaborative empiricism: the client and the practitioner treat the client's beliefs and patterns as ideas to be tested rather than facts to be argued with. In brief contacts this means asking more than telling, and turning disagreement into an experiment ("What would you expect to happen if you tried it this week? How could we find out?"). Keep a light written

record of what the client has learned in their own words, so that each contact builds on the last.