SelfImproveCoach

Practical Guides

for Personal Growth in Practice

What Matters to You?

Understand your values, everyday choices and what matters underneath.

READ / NOTICE / UNDERSTAND / CHOOSE



BEGIN HERE

Why some choices feel bigger

A cancelled plan, an unfair comment or a quiet act of kindness can stay with you. Sometimes it touches something you value.

Values are not just words for a job interview. They can help explain why a small event feels meaningful, why a decision pulls you in two directions, or why an outwardly successful choice does not feel like yours.

"OH, THAT MAKES SENSE"

You are upset that a friend changed plans without asking. The issue may be more than the new time: consideration, reliability or having a say may matter to you. There may also be a practical cost. Understanding the difference makes the situation easier to describe.

This guide explains values through ordinary life, clear tables and fictional examples. Read it like a small book. There is no score, daily task or need to write anything down.

FIND YOUR WAY

Start with the distinctions on page 3. Browse 61 values on pages 5–9. Explore relationships and difficult choices on pages 10–14, then see how an idea becomes an action on pages 15–17. Page 18 offers an optional place to keep an insight.

This is an educational guide for adults. You may read it yourself or discuss it with a therapist. Values do not require tolerating harm or ignoring basic needs. More context and sources appear on page 19.

01 / UNDERSTAND VALUES

Four ideas we often mix up

A useful distinction can turn a vague sense of pressure into a clearer question.

Idea	What it means	An everyday example
Value	A quality or direction that matters in how you act.	Connection: showing interest and making room for relationships.
Goal	Something specific you hope to achieve or complete.	Arrange a catch-up with a friend this month.
Need	Something important for health, safety or functioning.	Enough rest, food, safe housing or practical support.
Rule	An expectation about what you must or should do.	“A good friend always replies straight away.”

In this guide, values are understood mainly through Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: as qualities you can express repeatedly. A goal can be completed. A value can continue to guide different actions.

Some everyday words overlap. “Security” might describe safe housing you need, an outcome you want, or a wish to act carefully. Ask what the word means here rather than forcing it into one box.

WHY THIS IS USEFUL

If the difficulty is exhaustion, you may need recovery or support rather than another goal. If it is a rigid rule, a more flexible response may help. Knowing the difference changes the question you ask.

A QUESTION TO CARRY WITH YOU

Am I trying to express something important, achieve an outcome, meet a need or obey a rule?

01 / UNDERSTAND VALUES

Feelings can offer clues

A feeling can point towards something important. It does not prove that your first explanation is correct.

Everyday moment	A possible value clue	What else deserves attention?
You feel proud after listening without interrupting.	Care, patience or presence.	Perhaps you also had more time and energy than usual.
A colleague takes credit for your work and you feel angry.	Fairness, honesty or respect.	The facts, power differences and practical consequences matter too.
You feel flat after reaching an impressive target.	The target may not express a priority you chose.	Fatigue, disappointment or other difficulties may also explain it.
You envy someone making time for a hobby.	Creativity, playfulness or learning might matter.	You may also be noticing unequal time, money or opportunity.

Rather than concluding “I am too sensitive” or “This reveals my true value”, try a more curious response: what part of this mattered to me? A useful explanation should fit the circumstances, not just sound convincing.

AN IMPORTANT LIMIT

Values are one part of the picture. Feelings are also shaped by your body, history, expectations, relationships and present conditions. Sometimes an upsetting situation needs practical action, not more inward reflection.

02 / A VALUES WORD BANK

Values in everyday life 1 of 5

Adventure to Courage. Meanings are starting points; the examples show one possible expression.

Value	A plain meaning	What it might look like
Adventure	Explore unfamiliar experiences thoughtfully.	Try a new walking route at a comfortable pace.
Appreciation	Recognise effort, beauty or contribution.	Tell someone what you appreciated about their help.
Assertiveness	Express needs clearly and respectfully.	Ask for a quieter place to have a conversation.
Authenticity	Act in ways that reflect what you mean.	Give an honest preference rather than guessing the expected answer.
Balance	Make considered space for different priorities.	Leave recovery time between demanding commitments.
Care	Respond thoughtfully to needs.	Ask what would help before offering advice.
Community	Participate in a shared life.	Take part in a neighbourhood activity when you can.
Compassion	Meet suffering with kindness.	Respond gently when a friend is struggling.
Connection	Take an interest in relationships.	Send a message that shows you remember what matters to someone.
Consistency	Return to useful actions over time.	Resume a small routine after an interruption.
Cooperation	Work with others on a shared purpose.	Agree a fair way to divide a shared task.
Courage	Take a meaningful step with uncertainty.	Ask a question even when you feel a little nervous.

Browse for words that help you understand yourself. These 61 words include the full word bank from the longer SelfImproveCoach values workbook. They are not an exhaustive list, a ranking or a validated assessment. Similar values overlap; your own wording may fit better.

02 / A VALUES WORD BANK

Values in everyday life 2 of 5

Craftsmanship to Freedom. Meanings are starting points; the examples show one possible expression.

Value	A plain meaning	What it might look like
Craftsmanship	Give attention to how you make things.	Take care over a repair rather than rushing it.
Creativity	Make, imagine or try new approaches.	Find another way to celebrate within your budget.
Curiosity	Approach experience with interest.	Ask what someone means before deciding you disagree.
Dignity	Uphold the worth of each person.	Speak respectfully during a disagreement.
Discernment	Consider information before choosing.	Check a claim before passing it on.
Encouragement	Support effort without demanding perfection.	Notice a small attempt rather than only the finished result.
Environmental care	Act with concern for the natural world.	Repair or reuse something when that is practical.
Equality	Challenge unfair differences in treatment.	Ask whether everyone has the same opportunity to contribute.
Fairness	Consider rights, needs and opportunity.	Review a division of work that leaves one person overloaded.
Flexibility	Adjust when another response helps.	Change the plan when someone's needs change.
Forgiveness	Choose how you respond to past hurt.	Work towards letting go of retaliation, while keeping necessary limits.
Freedom	Support meaningful, realistic choice.	Offer options rather than deciding for someone else.

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02 / A VALUES WORD BANK

Values in everyday life 3 of 5

Friendship to Justice. Meanings are starting points; the examples show one possible expression.

Value	A plain meaning	What it might look like
Friendship	Nurture mutual companionship.	Make a little time for a shared interest.
Generosity	Offer what you can freely give.	Share a skill without offering more time than you have.
Gratitude	Notice and appreciate what supports you.	Thank someone for a specific act of care.
Growth	Develop in directions that matter to you.	Try a learning opportunity that fits your interests.
Honesty	Communicate truthfully and with care.	Say you cannot manage a task rather than promising and disappearing.
Hospitality	Help others feel welcome.	Explain how things work to someone joining a group.
Humility	Leave room to learn and be mistaken.	Change your view when new information deserves attention.
Humour	Make room for gentle playfulness.	Share a joke that does not depend on someone being humiliated.
Inclusion	Help people take part and belong.	Check whether the meeting format is accessible.
Independence	Make choices with appropriate support.	Ask for information, then decide what suits you.
Integrity	Act consistently with your principles.	Acknowledge a mistake even when it is awkward.
Justice	Work towards fair treatment and accountability.	Use an appropriate route to challenge unfair treatment.

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02 / A VALUES WORD BANK

Values in everyday life 4 of 5

Kindness to Reflection. Meanings are starting points; the examples show one possible expression.

Value	A plain meaning	What it might look like
Kindness	Offer warmth to yourself and others.	Respond to an ordinary mistake without an insult.
Learning	Develop understanding through experience.	Ask what helped after trying something new.
Loyalty	Show considered commitment.	Support a friend without covering up harmful behaviour.
Mindfulness	Attend to what is happening now.	Notice the conversation instead of checking your phone.
Openness	Be willing to hear and explore.	Listen to an unfamiliar perspective before replying.
Patience	Allow time without needless pressure.	Let someone finish explaining at their own pace.
Perseverance	Persist while the effort remains worthwhile.	Return to a useful skill, adapting the difficulty if needed.
Playfulness	Engage with enjoyment and imagination.	Make room for an enjoyable activity without needing to excel.
Presence	Give attention to this moment.	Put a device aside for a short catch-up.
Privacy	Protect personal space and information.	Ask before sharing someone's news.
Reciprocity	Allow mutual giving and receiving.	Accept help as well as offering it.
Reflection	Take time to consider experience.	Pause to understand a disagreement before responding.

Browse for words that help you understand yourself. These 61 words include the full word bank from the longer SelfImproveCoach values workbook. They are not an exhaustive list, a ranking or a validated assessment. Similar values overlap; your own wording may fit better.

02 / A VALUES WORD BANK

Values in everyday life 5 of 5

Reliability to Wisdom. Meanings are starting points; the examples show one possible expression.

Value	A plain meaning	What it might look like
Reliability	Keep realistic agreements.	Tell someone promptly when an agreement needs to change.
Respect	Treat people with dignity.	Disagree with a view without belittling the person.
Responsibility	Own the choices that are yours.	Put right your part in a mistake without taking all the blame.
Self-care	Respond to your needs with consideration.	Arrange food, rest or support before adding another demand.
Self-respect	Take your own dignity seriously.	Name a limit when a request is unreasonable.
Service	Contribute in ways that are useful.	Offer a practical task that matches what is needed.
Spirituality	Explore meaning, faith or connection.	Make space for a practice that is meaningful to you.
Stewardship	Care responsibly for what you look after.	Maintain a shared space or resource thoughtfully.
Sustainability	Consider longer-term effects.	Choose a pace you can support beyond an enthusiastic first week.
Thoughtfulness	Consider how your actions may affect others.	Check the timing before raising a sensitive subject.
Trustworthiness	Handle commitments and information with care.	Keep a confidence and be clear about any necessary limits.
Understanding	Seek context before judging.	Ask what got in the way before assuming someone did not care.
Wisdom	Use experience and perspective thoughtfully.	Consider advice alongside the facts of this situation.

Browse for words that help you understand yourself. These 61 words include the full word bank from the longer SelfImproveCoach values workbook. They are not an exhaustive list, a ranking or a validated assessment. Similar values overlap; your own wording may fit better.

03 / SEE YOURSELF MORE CLEARLY

One value, several expressions

The same value can look different in different lives, and on different days.

If this matters...	One way to express it	Another way
Connection	Meet a friend in person.	Send a brief message when travel or energy is limited.
Learning	Attend a class.	Ask a useful question or read a few pages.
Care	Offer practical help.	Ask what is wanted, or avoid making a promise you cannot keep.
Courage	Speak in a group.	Ask for support before taking a difficult step.
Independence	Make a decision yourself.	Use an adjustment or advice that enables your own choice.

This helps explain why copying someone else's routine can feel wrong even when you admire what it represents. Their way of expressing a value may depend on resources or circumstances you do not share.

A USEFUL REFRAME

"I cannot do it that way" does not always mean "I cannot honour what matters." It may mean finding another expression, asking for access or recognising a real limit.

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Is there a quality you care about that you have tied to just one way of showing it?

03 / SEE YOURSELF MORE CLEARLY

Why similar people still disagree

Sometimes the disagreement is about priorities. Sometimes it is about what a value looks like.

A FICTIONAL CONVERSATION

Maya thinks planning a weekend together shows care. Jo thinks leaving the weekend open shows consideration for a busy week. Both may value the relationship, but each recognises care through a different action.

If neither explains the meaning underneath, Maya may hear “You do not want to see me”, while Jo hears “You do not respect my need for rest”. Naming the meaning can create a more specific conversation.

Instead of assuming…	A question that opens things up
“You do not care about our time.”	“What would make time together feel good for both of us?”
“You just want your own way.”	“What matters most to you about this option?”
“If we shared values, we would agree.”	“Are we expressing a similar value differently, or facing a real difference?”

Understanding a value does not settle every disagreement. People can have incompatible preferences, unmet needs or genuinely different priorities. Respectful explanation helps you see what needs negotiating; it cannot guarantee agreement.

A THOUGHT TO TRY

What meaning might each person be giving to the same situation?

03 / SEE YOURSELF MORE CLEARLY

Being torn does not mean being lost

Two worthwhile things can compete for the same time, money or energy.

You can value family and independence, generosity and self-care, or adventure and reliability. A hard choice may reflect several important priorities rather than a lack of direction.

A FICTIONAL EXAMPLE

Amir is asked to help family move house on his only recovery day. Helping matters, and so does protecting his health. He may offer a short task, help arrange another person, contribute differently or decline this time.

What the choice can reveal	What it does not automatically mean
You cannot give every priority equal space today.	One value is fake or unimportant.
There is a cost whichever option you choose.	You have failed to find the perfect answer.
Your capacity has changed.	You no longer care about what mattered before.
A smaller offer would be more realistic.	You are selfish or unreliable.

Sometimes there is no neat middle option. The task is to recognise the trade-off and choose as thoughtfully as you can with the facts available. Disappointment can remain even after a considered decision.

A GENTLER QUESTION

What am I trying to honour on each side of this choice?

03 / SEE YOURSELF MORE CLEARLY

When a value turns into a “should”

A caring intention can become a rule that leaves no room for real life.

What matters	The rigid rule	A more flexible expression
Reliability	“I must never change a plan.”	Make realistic agreements and communicate promptly when circumstances change.
Kindness	“I must never upset anyone.”	Respond with care while recognising that disappointment is sometimes unavoidable.
Learning	“I should always be improving.”	Allow useful learning alongside rest, enjoyment and periods of consolidation.
Loyalty	“I must support everything they do.”	Show commitment without excusing harmful behaviour.

This distinction may explain why something you genuinely care about has started to feel heavy. The value may still fit; the rule about how you must express it may need more flexibility.

Rules can come from family, culture, work, past experience or your own attempts to prevent difficulty. That does not make them automatically harmful. Ask whether the rule fits this situation and whether it allows a proportionate response.

A USEFUL QUESTION

Could I keep the value while changing the rule?

03 / SEE YOURSELF MORE CLEARLY

Why approval can feel so important

Wanting acceptance is understandable. It can become difficult when another person's approval is your only guide.

You may want to be helpful, keep a relationship steady or avoid a conflict. Sometimes saying yes does express care. At other times it mainly helps you escape an uncomfortable feeling for a moment.

DOES THIS SOUND FAMILIAR?

You agree to an extra task, feel relieved that nobody is disappointed, then spend the evening resentful. The same "yes" could involve generosity, fear of rejection, a real work obligation, or several things at once. Context matters.

Ask yourself quietly...	Why the question helps
"Would this still feel worthwhile without praise?"	It can help separate personal meaning from chasing reassurance.
"What am I actually able to offer?"	It brings capacity and practical responsibility into the decision.
"What happens if I decline?"	It distinguishes an uncomfortable prediction from a real risk or consequence.

You do not need to prove that your motives are perfectly pure. It is enough to notice a pattern and consider whether another response would fit better. In a coercive or unsafe situation, safety and support take priority over practising assertiveness.

04 / USE THE IDEA

Values do not cancel your needs

A value is not a reason to deny your body, limits or circumstances.

A common misunderstanding	A more useful distinction
“If I value generosity, I should give more.”	Generosity involves what you can freely offer; it does not require unlimited availability.
“Independence means doing everything alone.”	Appropriate support can make independent choice possible.
“Perseverance means never stopping.”	It can include changing the method; stopping may also be appropriate.
“Forgiveness means letting someone back in.”	How you respond to past hurt is separate from whether contact is safe or wanted.
“Self-care means I should feel relaxed.”	Care may involve a difficult appointment, practical help or a necessary limit.

A values-based question is not simply “What would the best version of me do?” That can become another demanding ideal. A more grounded question is: what quality matters here, and what response is workable with my needs and circumstances?

A PAUSE WORTH KEEPING

What does this situation need from me, and what do I need in order to respond?

04 / USE THE IDEA

A small choice can tell a bigger story

You do not have to redesign your life to use this understanding.

Start with a choice already in front of you: how to answer a message, respond to an error, spend a spare half-hour or handle an extra request. Values can help you choose the quality of your response.

A FICTIONAL EXAMPLE

Nina notices she has been half-listening while checking her phone. Presence matters to her. She decides to put the phone aside for the first ten minutes of a catch-up. The action is specific; “be a better friend” was much harder to use.

A broad wish	A quality underneath	One possible action
“Be more confident.”	Courage or authenticity.	State one preference rather than waiting for everyone else.
“Have a better relationship.”	Connection or honesty.	Ask for a short conversation about one specific concern.
“Stop wasting my evenings.”	Rest, creativity or learning may matter.	Choose a restful or meaningful activity that fits tonight’s capacity.

Confidence, happiness and a partner’s response are outcomes you may hope for. You can influence them, but you cannot command them. An action can express a value even when it feels awkward or the outcome is uncertain.

A LIGHT INVITATION

What is one small way to bring a quality you care about into an ordinary moment?

04 / USE THE IDEA

Why knowing is not always doing

Understanding a value does not automatically make action easy.

Time, energy, access and support affect what is possible. So do habits and uncomfortable thoughts. If you know connection matters but keep postponing a message, that does not prove the value is false.

What gets in the way	A response that may fit
"I have left it too long; they will think badly of me."	Notice the prediction and consider a brief, honest message.
"A visit is more than I can manage."	Consider a shorter call, another time or a request for an adjustment.
"I keep forgetting when the day gets busy."	Connect the small action with a familiar moment or reminder.
"This would leave me without rest."	Change or postpone the plan; the limit deserves attention.
"The other person does not respond."	Review the facts and your options rather than treating their response as yours to control.

USE UNDERSTANDING, NOT SELF-PRESSURE

A useful next step might be doing something smaller, finding information, asking for help or deciding not to add another demand. The point is a more considered choice, not doing more at any cost.

If you like an if–then prompt: "If I notice I am delaying because the message feels too big, I can send a brief hello." Treat this as an option, not an obligation.

TAKE WITH YOU

What might make more sense now?

You can leave with one useful idea. You do not need a completed workbook.

Something you may recognise	An understanding to keep
"I get upset about small things."	A small event may touch something important, alongside other causes.
"I never seem to know what I want."	Several priorities or expectations may be competing.
"I care, but I cannot keep doing this."	A value can remain important while the current way of expressing it becomes unworkable.
"We care about the same things but still argue."	You may mean different things by a value or have different needs and circumstances.
"I understand myself better, but nothing feels fixed."	Understanding can inform a next choice without immediately changing a feeling or situation.

Optional: one idea I would like to remember

Optional: a question or small choice I want to come back to

You can also keep a note on your phone, talk it through or simply leave it here. This is the printable edition. If typing into the optional notes, use a PDF reader that supports forms, save your copy and reopen it to check your text. Keep personal notes private.

SOURCES / ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Where the ideas come from

An educational introduction, with original explanations, examples and values tables.

ACT is the main practical lens: values as qualities of action and flexible, purposeful responses. Schwartz's values research adds context on competing priorities; it uses a different theoretical definition and classification. Our 61-word bank is not Schwartz's measurement tool or a validated assessment.

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Online sources checked 17 November 2026. These sources inform the discussion; they do not establish that this guide has been clinically tested. No external organisation has authored, approved or endorsed it. This guide is not a diagnostic tool or a complete treatment programme.

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