

WELLNESSMONTHLY

Defining and Living by Your Value System | August 2022



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Defining and Living by Your Value System

Have you thought lately about the personal core values that help guide your thoughts, actions and beliefs?

It's important to be aware of your value system because it affects your overall sense of well-being. When your values are compromised, you may feel anxious or angry, have an upset stomach or trouble sleeping, or lose confidence in yourself. When you uphold your values, you may experience improved self-esteem, have a more relaxed attitude and find it easier to make hard choices.

Values and Wellness

When you are evaluating your core values, it's helpful to weigh them in the context of the eight dimensions of wellness – the same model used by [Wellness Solutions](#), a WorkCare company, to support the physical and mental health needs of public safety personnel. The eight dimensions are emotional, financial, intellectual, occupational, social, physical, environmental and spiritual.

Your value system is intertwined with the eight dimensions. If all eight are not connected with your core values in some way, then you may want to re-evaluate what is truly important to you. The emphasis you place on one dimension or another will change over time as you grow older and your needs change, but your core values should provide a consistent foundation for life transitions.

The way you were raised usually has a strong influence on the development of your core values. In some cases, adverse childhood experiences affect the development of values and have a lasting ripple effect on quality of life.

For instance, if your parents or caregivers emphasized the importance of being truthful, as an adult you may feel uncomfortable when you tell a lie or when misled by someone you trust. If lies were used as a way to cope and considered acceptable during your upbringing, always telling the truth might not be viewed as a core value. If your family had a religious or spiritual practice, continuing that practice as you navigate through life may be one of your core values. Without such a practice in childhood, you may decide later to have or not have it as a core value.

Often, when one seeks a partner in love or business, mutually agreed upon core values are a strong indicator for a successful relationship. When values are not aligned, it can lead to disagreements about critical issues that are difficult to resolve and can cause relationships to unravel.

Defining Your Values

If you are unclear about your core values, you may want to ask a therapist, spiritual leader or another person who you trust for guidance. There are also online resources to help you choose values that truly resonate with you. Here are a few suggestions:

- [Dare to Lead](#) – list of values by Brene Brown.
- [Life Values Inventory](#) – clarifying your personal truth
- [6 Ways to Discover and Choose Your Core Values](#) – *Psychology Today* blog post
- [Values Institute](#) – What are the benefits of identifying core values?

Another option is to think about values you observe in others and would like to emulate, such as “I admire my sibling’s generosity,” “I appreciate my grandmother’s unconditional love,” “I can always count on my friend’s honesty and loyalty” or “I like the way they are so patient, compassionate and kind.”

Honoring Your Values

When your value system is threatened by others or your own behavior, there are ways you can get back on track. Here are some ideas:

1. **Take a pause to evaluate the situation, then take appropriate corrective action.** Example: You want to object to a racist or sexist comment someone makes at work but don’t feel it would be appropriate in the moment. You might privately express your concern to the person who made the comment or know what you will do and say the next time a similar situation occurs.
2. **Be prepared to explain your reasons.** Example: You are committed to having a strong work ethic but also want to spend quality time with your family. Once you feel you can clearly articulate why work-life balance is a core value, you share your thoughts with your supervisor, friends and family members so they understand your requests for scheduling flexibility

and why you may not be immediately available outside of agreed upon times and places.

3. **Evaluate your career options.** Example: Having a sustainable lifestyle is a core value for you, so you look for a job with a company that emphasize sustainability as a corporate value. Similarly, diversity, inclusion and equity are essential to you, so you focus on applying to companies that provide strong evidence of DEI in hiring.
4. **Don’t be too hard on yourself.** Example: One of your core values involves making a commitment to nurturing your talent, such as in art, writing, music, dance or athletics. You feel let down when you don’t devote the amount of time needed to get the results you desire. You decide to block out time to pursue your talent and make shifts in your priorities. Alternatively, you acknowledge that while developing your talent is important to you, it is not a core value and it will be more enjoyable to cultivate this attribute with less intensity.
5. **Base boundaries on core values:** Example: You have a core value to stay fit and maintain your health so you can enjoy good quality of life. When you start to gain weight, you decide to change your diet, but your friends keep tempting you with unhealthy food choices. You ask your friends to respect your new nutritional boundaries and invite them to help you reinforce your core value to stay healthy.

In essence, your core values represent your authentic self. When you are comfortable with yourself, you’ll attract people who appreciate your value system and discourage others who may be tempted to cast you in a negative light.