

Clarify your life values

Values bring meaning into our lives. They are the things we care deeply about and the basis for the choices we make in life. Values are not things we achieve or possess, they are more like directions we take in life in order to be a good person and have a meaningful existence.

To realise our life values we choose and pursue specific goals in life. Sometimes we manage to achieve these goals, sometimes they are not achievable and we have to relinquish them. Indeed, values do not mean our life paths are always straight, there are many different paths that can lead us into a meaningful existence. What is important is that we choose to pursue goals that are consistent with our values in life, goals that bring us closer to the kind of person we want to be.

For instance, you may value being a loving person. When growing up, you may have had the goal to be protective towards your younger brother, later you may have decided to join a charity, and this may also be why you desire to have children. Whatever goals you set, whatever goals you manage to achieve, there is no end to this journey, there will always be more things you can do to be loving.

Most people think they are successful when they achieve their goals. A different way to look at it is to think of success as living by our values. But for that, we need to always be aware of what our life values are.

In this activity we will ask you to reflect about what your core values in life are.

Let's practice

One way to try to clarify your values is to think about your motivations to have (more) children. Below is a list of the main motivations that underlie people's desire for children¹. Tick the ones you think apply to you.

- ☐ Love and caring for a person
- ☐ Raising and educating a person
- ☐ Strengthen my partnership (if there is one)
- ☐ Fulfilling my partner's wish for children (if you have one)
- ☐ Creating my own family
- ☐ Achieving personal fulfilment and meaning in life
- ☐ Meeting my family's expectations
- ☐ Fulfilling a religious or moral obligation
- ☐ Being socially valued
- ☐ Continuing the family name, lineage or values
- ☐ Having a source of economic support
- ☐ Having support in old age
- ☐ Realising my maternal or paternal instinct
- ☐ Experiencing pregnancy and child birth
- ☐ Ensuring that my partner (if you have one) and I are recognized as a family
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ Other: _____

Your answers to the previous question should give you an indication of what your values regarding your family and intimate relationships and parenting are. Please consider the life domains presented belowⁱⁱ. For each domain write a value statement about the things you value and/or the type of person you want to be and rank them regarding how important they are to you.

For instance, if someone ticked the ‘Meeting my family’s expectations’ and ‘Fulfilling my partner’s wish for children’, their value statement for intimate and family relationships might be something like: *‘I want to take care of others and prioritise their needs over my own’*.

Keep a note of these value statement as you will be able to use them in another activity called ‘Develop value driven goals’. Meanwhile, you may choose to discuss them with the people that are close to you, for instance your partner or other family members. You may also reflect about how your life would look like if you fully lived by your value statements.

Domain	Value Statement	Importance
Intimate relationships / Marriage / Partnership		
Family relationships		
Parenting		
Friendship / Social relations		
Career / Employment		
Education / Training / Personal growth		
Recreation / Leisure		
Citizenship		
Spirituality / Mental wellbeing		
Health / Physical wellbeing		

ⁱ List of motivations adapted from Guedes, M., Pereira, M., Pires, R., Carvalho, P., & Canavarro, M. C. (2015). Childbearing Motivations Scale: Construction of a new measure and its preliminary psychometric properties. *Journal of Child and Family studies*, 24, 180-194.

ⁱⁱ Adapted from Hayes, S. C., & Smith, S. (2005). *Get out of your mind and into your life*: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.