

# Seven Values “Greatest Hits”:

## Our Favorite Values Exercises

### from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

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## Table of Contents

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Values Sweet Spot .....	2
Values Card Sort Instructions .....	5
Write Your Own Commandments .....	8
Tombstone exercise .....	9
Eulogy exercise.....	11
Trying on a Value .....	14
The Coin.....	16
Appendix A: Values card sort cards .....	18

**Acknowledgements:** These are our seven favorite values exercises based on work with hundreds of clients and use in workshops and trainings. Most of these exercises originated from others. Rather, what we have tried to do is take some of our favorite ACT values exercises and write some scripts for how they might be used in therapy. It is our sincere intention to give credit to the original sources here but if there is something in this handout that we have inadvertently not given proper credit to, please let us know so we can correct that error or omission.

# Values Sweet Spot

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Adapted from Wilson, K.G. & Sandoz, E. K. (2010). Mindfulness, values, and the therapeutic relationship in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. In S. Hick & T. Bein (Eds.) *Mindfulness and the therapeutic relationship*. New York: Guilford Press.

1. **Choose valued domain to focus on:** Before you begin this eye's closed exercise, you'll want to have the client choose one domain of their life that they would like to focus on. You might suggest a few domains such as work/education, relationships, leisure, personal growth/health and have them find one they would like to focus on. A domain in which the client has lost touch with their values is often a good place to focus for this exercise.
2. **Provide explanation and get permission:** Provide some brief explanation of what a "sweet spot" is. Your explanation might look something like this:

*"Would you be willing to do an eyes-closed exercise with me for a bit?"*

*You've already talked about wanting to make some changes in X (work/education, relationships, leisure, health, etc.). We're going to focus on that particular area of your life for this exercise. And in this exercise I'm going to have you come into contact more fully with what you'd really value in that domain in your life. Does that sound like something you'd be willing to try?"*

*Great, so I'm going to lead you through an exercise where I'll ask you to identify a sweet spot in that domain in your life. A sweet spot is a little hard to describe with words. It's more of a felt thing. It's that place, that moment in time where you get that heartfelt sense of "Ah, this is it." There is something very complete and precious in that moment. You might feel very alive in that moment. It's a moment that is complete, nothing needs to be added to or taken away from it. Sometimes people find that there is a strong emotional tenderness that you experience when you come into contact with your sweet spot even though it's hard to describe why that moment is so special. And a sweet spot can be a very simple sort of thing. Let me give you an example*

**[give example from your own life in detail, noting the different sensory aspects of the scene such as:** *So in my life, in that area of "health/personal growth" domain I see myself on a cold, foggy morning, it's dark outside, my dog Grace and I are at the corner of 15<sup>th</sup> and Highland about ¾ of our way through our morning exercise, I am look down at her and she's looking up at me, wagging her tail. It's dark except the warm glow from the street light she's standing under. That moment needs nothing. I don't need anyone else, it doesn't need to be anything else in that moment. It is complete. For me, that moment is about being committed, which is what I value in the area of health.]*

*Your sweet spot doesn't have to be like mine. There is no right or wrong here. It can be very simple, but think about something specific, a specific instance of something sweet. It could be a specific scene of you out gardening, the feeling of dirt on your hands, the smell of the earth, the sound of the birds on a warm summer morning in your garden, or it could be that*

*moment at the end of your yoga practice while you are resting in shavasana or when you're watching your kids as they play and they are so completely involved in what they are doing they don't see you, but you're just absorbing the moment of watching them play.*

*I would invite you to just encounter that sweet spot to the best of your ability. Again, there is no right or wrong experience here. Just see what comes up for you. Any questions?"*

3. **Lead client through eyes-closed exercise:** The below script is just a general guide. The main things to remember are to go slow, linger, help the client actually feel what it is like for them in that sweet spot. This part of the exercise can last anywhere from 5-10 minutes or even longer.

*"So if you're willing, I'd like you to allow yourself to sit comfortably, maybe with your feet on the ground. Just gently, gently let your eyes close. [lead them through a fairly extensive centering exercise]*

*Now I'd like you to imagine that in front of you there is a file cabinet. There are four drawers in this file cabinet. One drawer is labeled Work/Education, another is labeled "Relationships", "Leisure" and finally "Personal Growth/Health." [use whatever domains a relevant to your client] First just notice what it feels like to stand in front of this file cabinet and choose which drawer you will open. Do you feel a longing to open one drawer? A resistance to opening another? Just notice what shows up for you.*

*Now I'd like you to imagine that you open the drawer for that domain that you've chosen to work on. Feel the weight to the drawer in your hand. Hear it open. Notice what your heart is doing right now, what sensations are going through your body, what thoughts your mind is giving you.*

*And then you reach in to that drawer and in the drawer is a picture. It's a picture of you during that sweet spot in that domain of your life. Slowly reach into the drawer and pull out that picture of you in that moment that represents your sweet spot. Take in that whole scene. Notice what is happening there. Look at your face in that scene. Notice any expressions that person in the scene is making.*

*Now see if it's possible to go from looking at that picture, to now being in that scene. You are transported into being in that body of the you that was there in that scene. Look down at your hands and notice what they look like at that age. Look out from behind those eyes and notice what you see. Notice the smells around you. Notice what the air feels like. Now turn inward and notice what you feel in that body that is in the scene. What emotions are there? Really see if you can savor what it is like to be you in this scene. And now, really experience how you are in that moment. Notice the quality of your actions. As you are standing in that place, notice what is important to you right at that moment, that moment that doesn't need anything else in order to be complete. In that moment, you don't need to be anything else in order to be complete.*

*And now I'm going to ask you to gently bring you awareness back to your body right now in this moment. Keeping your eyes closed, just see if you can be present with what you are experiencing right now. Most people find this exercise brings up a whole range of feelings, sometimes pleasant – maybe warm and loving, sometimes quite painful. And for others they don't have any strong feelings at all, it's just a more subtle sense. Just take a minute or to*

*here with your eyes closed to you are feeling...and consider what those feelings tell you...about what truly matters to you. What sort of person you want to be in that domain of your life. What you want your life to stand for in that domain of your life. What, if you were free to choose, you would actually choose to important in that domain. What did you notice about what kind of a person you are when you are at the most perfect sweet spot? Just notice.”*

4. **Debrief:** After asking the client to open their eyes, but still maintaining a quiet mindfulness, allow your client to share what came up for them. Don't focus on trying to name a value or come to some answer. Your job is simply to be present and see if you can notice hints of that sweet spot emerging. Your instructions to the client might include some of the following:

*Now, as best as you can, I want you to see if you could bring that picture to life here in the room so I can share it with you. I want hear, feel, and see that sweet moment. I want to know who you are in that moment. What are the qualities that make up that sweet spot? Just notice the color and nuance of it. It doesn't even need to make sense. You don't need to explain it or have me necessarily understand it. Just give voice to what you would so deeply care about.*

5. **Conclude:** You can wrap up by talking about how values are found in places like that sweet spot. There is a palpable quality to them. Values aren't something that are just named, they are a quality of action, a way of being in the world. So if the client is present, they might be able to notice qualities of that sweet spot in various aspects of their life and if they do, it might indicate that they are headed in a valued direction.

# Values Card Sort Instructions

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Adapted from Veage, S., Ciarrochi, J., & Heaven, P. (2014). Value congruence, importance and success in the workplace: Links with well-being and burnout amongst mental health practitioners, *Journal of Contextual Behavioral Science*, 3(4), 258-264. And many others.

There are many different variations of how to use values card sorts with clients. However, regardless of how you are doing it, a key component is that you want to help the client contact a sense of freely choosing. It can be helpful to begin with some discussion of the distinction between values and goal or morals. You may also want to add things like “Imagine what you might choose if no one would ever know what you chose” or “Imagine you are at the Dollar Store and all of these things are exactly equal in terms of their worth or value. Which of these would you buy if they were all worth exactly the same?”

In Appendix A you will find a set of values cards you can modify and print out. The cards are formatted so that they will fit the template for “Avery 8371” or equivalent blank business cards. This is often a really helpful exercise for clients who have a very hard time even beginning to state what they value, prefer, want, or find important in their lives as it’s much easier to choose between pre-printed cards, rather than verbally generating statements.

## Instructions

*“I want to get a better sense of what might be really important to you if you were totally free to choose. We’ll call these your “values”. Values are your heart’s deepest desires for the sort of person you want to be and the ways you want to behave in your time on this planet; in other words, what you want your life to stand for.*

*Would you be interested in doing an exercise that might help you explore this a bit more?*

*Ok, I’m going to ask you to sort these cards into different categories based on how important you would want them to be in your life. This isn’t want is important right now or what others say you “should” value, it’s what you would want to make important in your life if you were totally free to choose.*

*Sometimes things feel important to us because they help solve our problems (e.g., we hope that they will reduce our suffering). Other times things feel important to us because, like tools, they help us get the things we want. However, tools are usually a means to an end and not ends in and of themselves. While these ways of solving problems feel important to us, we want to home in on what you find meaningful and satisfying in and of itself. So, you might pretend, just for the moment, that all your suffering has ended and that you have no more problems. What would you still find meaningful and worthwhile? What would you still seek, even if there were no problems and no obstacles? That’s what I want you to keep in mind when you’re choosing these cards. Any questions?”*

Once you have oriented the client to the idea of values as being freely chosen, you can start with the card sort. We suggest trying several different rounds with a client. Below are a suggested common sequence of three rounds. Below are some different variations you try as well.

### Round One

1. Sort all the value cards into the three categories (“Very important”, “Important” and “Not very important”) based on what they would choose to value if no one were to find out, allowing for as many cards as they want in each of the categories.
2. As they are going through the task, periodically remind them to focus on what they would choose if there were no right or wrong and no one would know.
3. Debrief: Ask for any observations the client noticed. Questions could include:
  - What was it like for you as you tried to sort these cards?*
  - What did you notice thinking or feeling as you were doing it?*
  - Was it easy for you to know what you would choose to make important in your life?*
  - Did you feel pulled to put down what you thought were “right” answers rather than answers that were freely chosen? Who determined what those “right” answers were?*
  - How did you go about your sorting? How did you know to put a card in the “Not very important” pile versus the “Important” pile? How did you know to put a card in the “Very important” pile rather than the “Important” pile?*

### Round Two

1. Take only those cards the client put into the “Very important” category. Discard the cards in the other two piles.
2. Ask the client to now select only 10 cards they would choose to make most important.
3. Debrief: Ask for any observations the client noticed. Questions could include:
  - What was it like for you as you tried to choose just 10 among all these values that were all very important to you?*
  - What did you notice thinking or feeling as you were doing it?*
  - Was it easier or harder for you than round one?*
  - How did it feel for you to discard the ones you decided not to include?*

### Round Three

1. Set the client’s top 10 cards out in front of them.
2. Ask them to choose their top three.
  - “Now, if you could only choose 3 to focus on being in your life, assuming there were no “right” or “wrong” answers and that you were completely free to choose, which 3 would you choose? Remember, these values aren’t just the things you’d like to accomplish, have, or what you’d enjoy the most. Rather, values are those ways of being in the world that you would most want to dedicate your life to.”*
3. Debrief: Ask for any observations the client noticed. Questions could include:
  - How did you choose your top 3?*
  - Do these three have anything in common?*
  - As you look at these three cards, would you say that living in the service of these would be a life well lived?*
  - What price would you be willing to pay if you knew that you could live a life in which you could really live out those values, where being that person was possible? What if that price was being willing to have unpleasant thoughts, feelings, and sensations? What would you be willing to think or feel if having those thoughts or feelings meant you could really live a life that was consistent with those top 3 values?*

*What have you been valuing in your life? In terms of how you dedicate your time, energy, or resources, how much does your current behavior reflect your top 3 values? If someone observed your life today, would they be able to know what your top 3 values are?*

### Variations

You may try one of these variations after you have already done the “Round One” from above. Then help the client explore any similarities or discrepancies between what they would choose to value in “Round One” and how they sorted the cards in the variations below.

- Sort the cards based on what they have been taught by others/society to value or what they feel they “*should*.” Sort the cards based on what they have been valuing with their actions over the past week.
- Sort the cards based on what they might have said 10 years ago.
- Sort the cards based on what they might say in 25 years when they are a bit older and wiser.
- Ask them to sort the cards based on how someone they really admire would sort them (e.g. If you were X, how do you think you would sort these? What does X really seem to stand for?).
- Do this as a couples activity. The couple can sort the cards in terms of what they would want their relationship to stand for.
- Take the cards from “Round One” and ask them to chunk them into ones that seem to go together to come up with possibly overarching values.

**Conclusion:** This exercise is designed to help you begin to explore the question “In a world in which you were completely free to choose, what would you want your life to stand for?” You may consider talking with these things with your spouse, partner, friend, therapist or even your child.

# Write Your Own Commandments

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This exercise can be helpful for clients that tend exhibit more pliance-based behavior or for clients who have difficulty identifying freely chosen values outside of moral right/wrong, should/shouldn't. Before using this exercise, be sure to consider any cultural or religious variables present for your client that may counterindicate using a biblical reference.

## Instructions

*“Most cultures and societies choose a set of guiding rules or principles that they feel the members of that community should live by. Things like the 10 commandments, the Bill of Rights in our constitution, these are some examples of those sorts of guiding rules. And these sorts of rules can be very useful because they can help us all get along in a communal society.”*

*Let's imagine that you were going to write your own set of commandments. But these commandments are a little different in that they aren't rules about what **not** to do, like Thou Shalt Not Kill. Rather, they are declarations for what you **would** choose to make important in your life, what your life would stand for if you were free to choose. So instead of rules that start with “Thou shalt” or “Thou shalt not”, these commandments would be closer to “I choose to stand for...” and you could choose to stand for anything, “Love” “Justice” “Equality” “Adventure”. Anything you want. You get to be the dictator of your own commandments.”*

*So take a few moments and write out your ten personal commandments.*

**[Give client time to fill out their commandments. You can create a form similar to the following]:**

1. *I choose to stand for* \_\_\_\_\_
2. *I choose to stand for* \_\_\_\_\_
3. *I choose to stand for* \_\_\_\_\_
4. *I choose to stand for* \_\_\_\_\_
5. *I choose to stand for* \_\_\_\_\_
6. *I choose to stand for* \_\_\_\_\_
7. *I choose to stand for* \_\_\_\_\_
8. *I choose to stand for* \_\_\_\_\_
9. *I choose to stand for* \_\_\_\_\_
10. *I choose to stand for* \_\_\_\_\_

## Debrief

*“Now looking at these, would people reading your commandments know what you stood for? Would they know what kind of person you are by reading these declarations? Would you be proud to be a part of this community of one who chose to stand for these values?”*



# Tombstone exercise

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This exercise is a briefer variation of the Deserted Island and Eulogy exercises. It can be done very briefly in session, or can be given as a homework assignment. The task is essentially to have the client write out two different epitaphs for their own tombstone, one ideal and one reflecting their current behavior. The goal is to highlight any discrepancy between chosen values and lived values.

## Instructions

*You know when people die, what is left behind isn't so much what they had, but more what they stood for. That's what a tombstone is, right? The epitaph on a person's tombstone sums up that person's life, what they put their life in the service of. It's a way of summing up, when you get to the end of everything, what your life has been about.*

### **[Draw a picture of a tombstone on an index card]**

*So let's just imagine that one day this tombstone will be on your grave. It will sum up everything you want the world to remember of what your life stood for. Nothing has been written yet on it.*

*Now let's imagine that you get to the end of a full and meaningful life, a life that you would say was well lived. What inscription would you ideally want written on your tombstone to reflect what your well lived life stood for? What is it that you'd really want to be remembered for when you get to the end of everything?*

### **[Give the client plenty of time to think about this and then write what they say on the tombstone]**

*So summing up a life well lived, a life which stood for something, it would say... "Here lies X, she..." How does it feel to see this?*

### **[Client might note feeling sadness, excitement, hope, despair, etc. when contacting the value]**

*Now let's try something else. [Turn the card over and draw another tombstone on the back]. Let's say you died today and your tombstone was an accurate reflection of what your life has stood for, what you have been importanting in your life with your actions. How you spend your time and efforts. What would the tombstone say?*

### **[Give the client plenty of time to think about this and then write what they say on the tombstone]**

*So right now, your life has stood more for X and your tombstone that would sum up what your life is currently standing for would be*

*"Here lies X, she..." What is it like for you to see this?*

## Debrief

Here you can explore with your client what barriers they perceive are in the way of living the life they would want reflected on their tombstone. Often, this can lead to a discussion of helping clients notice avoidance or “away” behaviors versus living a life “towards” their values.

# Eulogy exercise

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This can be a useful exercise to give as homework. It is essentially an extended variation of the Tombstone exercise. It can be especially helpful when working with folks around relationship values and how they would want to be to the important people in their life.

## Instructions

*If you're willing, I'd like us to do an eye's closed exercise that might help us take a look at this issue of values a bit more. People have all sorts of different experiences with this exercise and we're not looking for one particular "right" answer. Some people find something interesting or surprising comes up in the exercise and others sometimes feel like it simply helps them get in touch with something that they've known all along. So let's just see what happens for you.*

*If you're willing, you can gently close your eyes or if you prefer, you can just rest your gaze at a spot on the ground.*

**[Lead them through a few brief centering tasks, e.g. notice five senses, notice your breath, etc.]**

*Now what I'd like you to imagine is that you have reached the end of your life. It's been a long and very meaningful life. It's been a life well lived. Although you're sad to reach the end of the journey, as you look back on the life you have lived, you feel a sense of pride and appreciation that your life has meant something important. Just take a moment to imagine feeling good about the life you have lived once you have reached the end of it. Notice what that feels like.*

*And through some twist of fate you have died, but you are able to attend your own funeral in spirit. You are watching and listening to the eulogies offered by the people who are there to remember you. Your friends, your children, your partner, colleagues **[list specific people who might be there for the client- you can even include people who would no longer be around if you want]** are all there. See if you can just picture in your mind's eye what it's like being there in that situation and see if you can get yourself into that room emotionally. Notice what smells might be in that room, all the different sounds, notice what the lighting looks like. **[pause]***

*Now, as they do during funerals, some people stand up to give a eulogy. I want you to imagine who you would want the first person to be to stand up to speak for what your life, this really well lived life, has been about. Imagine a specific person. It could even be a person who has already died or maybe even a person you haven't met yet. Just imagine who you might want to get up to speak about your life. What would you want that person to say about what you have meant to them, what they feel you have stood for in your life? Imagine that person actually saying those things you'd most like them to say. Really be bold here! Let that person say exactly what you would most want them to say about you if you had totally free choice about what that would be. See if you can actually hear those words coming out of her/his mouth.*

**[Pause and allow time for the client to imagine what they would want that person to say]**

*Now imagine that another person stands up. Maybe it's your child or a friend or colleague **[list some specific people from your client's life]**. What would you like that person to remember of what you have meant in their life. Again, don't hold back. If you could have them say anything, what would it be? Even if you have not actually lived up to what you would want, let them say it as you would most want it to be. See if you can actually*

hear them saying what you would most want them to say. Notice what it feels like to have those things said about the life you have lived and what you have meant to this person. **[pause and allow time for the client to imagine this, eyes still closed].**

Finally, a last person stands up. Maybe this is your father, or your partner, or maybe it's someone from your community. **[again, list some specific people from your client's life].** This last person agrees with everything that the other two speakers have said before but they add something to it. What would you want this person to talk about in their eulogy of what your life has meant. Dream big here. Remember, this was a well lived life you have lived. An honorable life. What would this person say in describing your honorable life? Have it be said as you would most want it. Really see if you can experience what it is like having them say those things. What would you want them to say? **[pause]**

### Optional additional variation

So now I'd like you to imagine a slightly different scenario. We're still at your funeral, but this time, I want you to imagine that you died today, not necessarily at the end of a long, well-lived life. And one thing about this funeral, is that everyone is completely honest. They aren't just saying a bunch of nice things just out of respect. They are really trying to accurately remember you.

Now I want you to imagine that first person you pictured standing up. If that person were being completely honest about what they think your life has stood for up until this moment, what you have put most of your resources towards, what would they say? What would they say about what you have importanted by your actions up until now? **[pause]**

The second person stands up. Again, they are looking at your life until this point and trying to describe accurately describe what your actions and deeds until this point have been in the service of. What would they say if you died today?

Finally, the last person stands up and again, you hear them speak to what your life has really been about up until today.

Notice what it is like hearing these things?

**Then the therapist helps the client to reorient back to the session and open their eyes.**

### Debrief

During the debrief, begin by asking the client what they noticed and experienced during the exercise. Questions you might ask include:

- Who did you want to stand up?
- What were some of the words they used to describe you and the life you have lived?
- What did it feel like to hear those things said about you and your life?
- Did you notice any difference between what you would want them to say really mattered to you in your life and what you are spending your time importaning or struggling with?
- What is getting in the way of being the person you want to be right now in this moment?

### Homework variation

Ask the client to spend some time writing out what they would want certain important people in their life to say about them during the funeral. You might choose their children, friend, partner, colleagues. This can be done as a way to explore their values in relationships that may not even exist yet. For example, asking what they might want their children or spouse to say about them even if they don't have kids or a spouse yet (assuming you know that these might be relevant to the person) and then talking about how they might be able to take a step towards those values even now.

# Trying on a Value

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Adapted from Dahl, J., Lundgren, T., Plumb, J., & Stewart, I. (2009). *The art and science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

This exercise can be very helpful for client who report that they don't know what they value or "don't have" any values. It can also be helpful for more perfectionistic clients who are having difficulty taking action for fear of choosing the "wrong" value.

## Instructions

1. **Choose a valued domain:** Help the client identify one domain in their life where they would choose to make some change. Domains can include:
  - a. Intimate relationships
  - b. Family
  - c. Friends
  - d. Work
  - e. Community
  - f. Spirituality
  - g. Health
  - h. Some other valued domain
2. **Identify 5-10 possible values they might choose to important:**
  - a. Option 1: Have the client go through a values card sort exercise to come up with 5-10 possible values
  - b. Options 2: Have the client simply circle 5-10 values on a list of values which they think sound possibly interesting to them.
  - c. Option 3: If they feel they can't choose any values from a list or none sound at all interesting, have them randomly pick 5-10 from the list.
3. **Notice Reactions.** Have the client notice feelings or thoughts that come up when they had to select 5-10 values. They may have had judgments about whether or not they "did it right" or if the values they chose were "good" or "bad". If they struggled, was it because they had difficulty narrowing down the values to only 5-10 or because they had difficulty selecting any at all that they might choose to care about?
4. **Choose a Value.** Have the client choose one value they would like to "try on" for at least a week. If they can't choose one value, write each potential value on a piece of paper and have the client draw one value at random.
5. **Notice Reactions.** Have the client notice feelings or thoughts that come up when they were asked to choose just one value. Did they have judgments about whether they picked the "best" value or about whether or not they felt they really care about this value. Just notice all thoughts for what they are. Remind the client that their mind's job is to create thoughts. Help them let their mind do that and notice that they could still choose to try on the value.
6. **List values-consistent behaviors.** Work with the client to make a list a few behaviors that one might say are related to the chosen value. Guide the client to focus on values-consistent behaviors within their one chosen domain. If the client is having difficulty identifying specific behaviors consistent with the identified value, the therapist might ask a question like "Do you know anyone who you would say embodies this value? What might they do on a typically day?" or "If you were an actor whose role was to play someone who would be described as X, what things might you do?"

7. **Choose a Behavior.** After generating a list of potential values-consistent behaviors, have the client choose one behavior or set of behaviors they are willing to commit to between now and next session.
8. **Notice Reactions.** Ask the client to notice anything that comes up about committing to engaging in the behavior. Did they have judgments about whether or not it would be a “good” behavior or a “useful” behavior? Did they have thoughts about whether or not they think they will enjoy it, or about whether or not they think they will actually follow through with their commitment.
9. **Make a Plan.** Have the client write down how they will go about enacting this value including anything they feel they need to plan or do in order to engage in the valued action (e.g., call another person, clean the house, make an appointment, etc.). Have the client note any barriers that would prevent them from following through with the commitment and help them identify an alternative plan for those instances.
10. **Just Behave.** Encourage the client that even if this value involves other people, *do not tell others what they doing*. Have them see if they can simply notice what happens if they just enact this value without telling others it is an ‘experiment’.
11. **Re-Commit.** Every day. At the end of each day, have the client ask themselves if they are willing to commit to enacting the value. Notice anything that shows up as do so.
12. **Keep a Daily Diary of Their Reactions.** Things to encourage the client to notice are other’s reactions to them as they are enacting the value, any thoughts feelings or body sensations that occur before, during and after the behavior, and how they feel doing it for the second (or fifth, or tenth, or hundredth) time. Watch for evaluations that indicate whether this activity, value, or valued direction was ‘good’ or ‘bad’ or judgments about others, or themselves in relation to living this value. Ask them if they would be willing to simply notice those thoughts and hold them lightly as they continue to engage in the valued action.

# The Coin

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For more information on this exercise, you can also see our blog post entitled: [Pain and values: Two sides of the same coin.](#)

## Materials needed

An index card

## Instructions

**Step 1: Choose a domain to focus on:** Help the client identify some activity or relationship in their life that they used to value, but from which they find themselves pulling away from. Maybe it's a relationship they say they care about but in which they have been less engaged. Or maybe it's an activity they report is important to them but they aren't taking much action on.

## Step 2: Guide client through noticing suffering and values

*What if it's the case that our values and our suffering are like two sides of the same coin? We suffer because we care, we feel vulnerable because there's something that matters to us. This is where the cost of moving away from suffering is. When we move away from suffering, we are also often moving away from our values. And when we find ourselves distancing from those things that we once valued, maybe that's because we are trying to avoid the pain we feel associated with those things we cherish.*

*Rather than moving away from things that are painful or uncomfortable, what I'm suggesting is that part of what we are doing here is learning to notice your own discomfort, your own suffering, because in there you will find your values.*

**[Take the note card and draw a picture of a coin on both sides of it then give it to the client.]**

*So first I'd like you to name your coin. At the top of the front of the card, write down what you value in that relationship or area of living. Who do you really want to be in that relationship? What are some descriptors of how you would like to be in that area of your life? Now turn the card over.*

*Now remember what we talked about in terms of values, they aren't really things, they are more like qualities of action? So, I'd like you to take a few moments to consider a couple actions, things that you could do with your whole body, your hands and feet, to move in that direction of that value you just named.*

**[Guide them to imagine themselves taking one of these actions.]**

*Notice any thoughts of feelings that come up as you think about taking those actions. Are there things that show up in your mind, your body, your emotions? Do you notice any memories that come up when you look at this value?*

*Now turn the card over. On the other side of the card right "Suffering" at the top.*



*On this side of the card, write down what difficult thoughts and feelings might show up for you when you start taking action toward that value. Write down the difficulty memories or sensations that occur when you come into contact with this value.*

**[Have the person again sit quietly with the card. Have them read over what's on the front and back. Spend a little bit of time getting in touch with what this value means to you. Spend a little bit of time noticing the suffering that comes along for the ride.]**

*What if that's the choice, by buying into what that says and then having to have it go away (ask them to look at the back), that you don't get to have the value? (have them look at the front) What if that's the choice that you have?"*

*Notice what happens if you throw away all that lousy suffering, you throw away both sides. **[you can have them see what it's like to literally throw the card away from them, thus getting rid of the suffering, and noticing that the value goes with it]** When we move away from suffering it often means you're moving away from the caring for your values that's connected to it.*

**[Have them sit with the card, be with it. Ask them to look at the card]**

*Can you put it next to your heart? As it is, not as what it says it is? What would you have to do to carry that gently, lovingly, like you might carry something fragile?*

*It's your values that dignified the difficult feelings and suffering.*

### **Step 3: Optional homework**

*1. If you are willing, carry the card with you, and periodically pull it out and remind yourself of the value you picked as most important to move toward right now. Also, read over the suffering side and notice that you are carrying it.*

*2) Second, notice what it's like if you take any of the actions that are on that card. Notice what it is like if you don't take any of the action the card.*

# Appendix A: Values card sort cards

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The cards on the following pages are formatted so that they will fit the template for “Avery 8371” or equivalent blank business cards.

## Boldness

Being willing to undertake things that involve risk or danger

## Autonomy

To be self-determined and independent

## Hard work

To work hard and well at my life tasks

## Challenge

To take on difficult tasks and problems

## Self-Control

To be disciplined in my own actions

## Virtue

To live a morally pure and excellent life

## Honest

To be honest and truthful

## Dependability

To be reliable and trustworthy

## Adventure

To have new and exciting experiences

## Creativity

To have new and original ideas

## Openness

To be open to new experiences, ideas, and options

## Growth

To keep changing and growing

## Beauty

To create and/or appreciate beauty around me

## Ecology

To live in harmony with the environment

## Health

To be physically well and healthy

## Humor

To see the humorous side of myself and the world

## Knowledge

To learn and contribute  
valuable knowledge

## Curiosity

To be curious and discover  
new things

## Passion

To have deep feelings about  
ideas, activities, and people

## Rationality

To be guided by reason and  
logic

## Simplicity

To live life simply, with  
minimal needs

## Spirituality

To grow and mature  
spiritually

## Tradition

To follow respected patterns  
of the past

## Commitment

To make enduring, meaningful  
commitments

## Responsibility

To make and carry out responsible decisions and meeting my obligations

## Fun

To play and have fun

## Leisure

To take time to relax and enjoy

## Non-Conformity

To question and challenge authority and norms

## Genuineness

To act in a manner that is true to who I am

## Connection

To have close, supportive relationships with others

## Romance

To have intense, exciting love in my life

## Intimacy

To share my innermost experiences with others; to fully know and be known by others close to me

# Respect

Being respectful to others

# Generosity

To give what I have to others

# Compassion

To feel and act on concern for others

# Peace

To work to promote peace in the world

# Justice

To promote fair and equal treatment for all

# Helpfulness

To be helpful to others

# Contribution

Having a sense of accomplishment and to make a lasting contribution in the world

# Problem Solving

Figuring things out, solving problems

## Piety

Acting consistently with my religious faith and beliefs

## Competition

Competing with others

## Community

Being a part of and contributing to a group

## Creation

Building, designing, and/or repairing things

## Security

Maintaining the safety and security of myself and my loved ones

## Loyalty

Being loyal to friends, family, and/or my group

## Loving

Having relationships involving tenderness, love, and affection

## Competent

Being competent and effective in what I do



# Authority

Having authority and being in charge of others

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# Courageous

Acting with courage

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This value is  
very important  
to me

This value is  
important to  
me

This value is  
less important  
to me