Understanding Core Values in Recovery

Rebuild authentic identity foundation

Printable worksheet · 5 parts

Name _____ Date _____

Understanding Core Values

Your Internal Compass for Recovery and Life

Embrace, Empower & Evolve — The Recovery Files

Eroded

Values compromised by addiction

→

Aligned

Living your values daily

Reading Sections

Self-Assessment

Worksheets & Exercises

10 interactive exercises available after completing readings and assessment

Export Your Progress

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PART 1 OF 5

What Are Core Values and Why Do They Matter?

Core values are the fundamental beliefs and principles that define who you are at your deepest level — not who you pretend to be, not who others expect you to be, but who you genuinely are when all the masks are removed.

Think of core values like the root system of a tree. Everything visible is sustained by roots that no one sees. When the root system is healthy, deep, and well-nourished, the tree stands strong through storms. Core values are your root system.

Values are not goals. A goal is a destination — something you achieve and check off. Values are directions — they guide movement without ever being fully "achieved." You never "arrive" at your values — you live them, imperfectly, one choice at a time.

Reflection Questions

1. How does the "root system" metaphor resonate with your experience? How deep and healthy are your roots right now?

2. What is the difference between values and goals in your own life?

3. During active addiction, which of your core values were most consistently violated?

4. Do you feel that your values are being excavated or created in recovery?

5. If someone observed your daily behavior, what would they conclude your values are?

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CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 1 OF 5

Values-Behavior Alignment

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. My daily behaviors consistently reflect the values I say are most important to me
   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

2. I make decisions based on my values rather than on fear, convenience, or habit
   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

3. I prioritize activities that align with my core values, even when they are difficult
   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

4. I notice when my behavior is drifting away from my values and I self-correct
   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

5. The people closest to me would describe my actions as consistent with my stated values
   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

6. I allocate my time and energy in ways that reflect my actual priorities
   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

7. I am willing to sacrifice short-term comfort to live in alignment with my values
   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

8. My recovery program reflects my values rather than just someone else's expectations
   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

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PART 2 OF 5

How Addiction Erodes Values — and How Recovery Rebuilds Them

Addiction does not simply override your values — it systematically erodes them through a process so gradual that you often do not recognize it until you look back from recovery and see the devastation.

The erosion begins with small compromises. Each individual compromise feels insignificant. But each one creates a precedent, a slightly lowered standard, a new baseline for acceptable behavior.

Recovery interrupts this cycle. The twelve-step process is, at its heart, a values reconstruction project. The rebuilding is not restoration — you do not simply return to who you were before addiction. You become something new: a deeper version forged by suffering, clarified by honesty, and strengthened by daily practice.

Reflection Questions

1. Can you trace the "small compromises" at the beginning of your values erosion?

2. What "addiction values" replaced your authentic values during active use?

3. How has shame contributed to the cycle of values erosion in your life?

4. Which of your authentic values survived the erosion relatively intact?

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5. How do you think of yourself right now — as someone returning to who they were, or as someone becoming something new?

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Values Erosion & Addiction Impact

Scale: 1 = of

During active addiction, I regularly acted against my core values

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

2. I carry significant shame about the gap between the person I wanted to be and the person addiction made me become

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

3. Some of my values were damaged or distorted by the lifestyle of active addiction

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

4. I lost trust in my own moral compass because of the choices I made while using

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

5. I am still sorting out which values are authentically mine versus which were products of the addiction mindset

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

6. I have harmed people whose values I share — and the disconnect haunts me

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

7. I struggle to believe I am capable of living a values-driven life after the things I have done

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

8. The fear of violating my values again creates anxiety that sometimes threatens my recovery

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

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Discovering Your Authentic Values: Separating Truth from Noise

One of the most challenging tasks in early recovery is determining which values are authentically yours and which are inherited noise: values you absorbed from family, culture, peer groups, or addiction that may not actually reflect who you are.

Inherited values from family, cultural values from your community, peer-influenced values from social groups, and addiction-distorted values all compete for space in your value system.

Authentic values emerge through honest self-examination. They are the values that resonate in your chest rather than your head — the ones you feel rather than think. They are the values you would hold even if no one was watching.

Reflection Questions

1. Which of your current values were inherited from your family of origin?

2. What cultural values may be in conflict with what your recovery needs?

3. Are any of your current recovery practices driven by genuine values or by external compliance?

4. What addiction-distorted values are you still carrying?

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5. Describe a moment when you violated an authentic value and felt the "deep internal wrongness".

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 3 OF 5

Values Clarity & Identification

Scale: 1 = of

I can clearly articulate my top 5 core values without hesitation

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

2. I understand the difference between values I genuinely hold and values I think I should hold
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

3. I am aware of how my core values were formed — by family, culture, experience, and recovery
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

4. I know which of my values are non-negotiable and which are aspirational
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

5. I can distinguish between my authentic values and values I adopted to please others
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

6. I have reflected on how my values have shifted since entering recovery
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

7. I understand how my values differ from goals — values guide direction, goals mark destinations
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

8. I have examined values that may have been distorted by active addiction
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

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Values-Based Living: Turning Beliefs Into Daily Practice

Knowing your values is the foundation. Living them is the practice. Values-based living is not about moral perfection — it is about consistent, imperfect effort to align your daily choices with your deepest beliefs.

The first skill is values-based decision-making — pausing before significant choices and asking: "Which option is most consistent with my core values?" The pause itself is the practice.

Values-based living produces "eudaimonic well-being" — the deep, sustainable satisfaction that comes from living a life of meaning and purpose. This is recovery: the slow, daily construction of a life that feels worth living.

Reflection Questions

1. How often do you pause before decisions and ask "Which choice aligns with my values?"

2. Select one of your core values and create a SMART goal connected to it.

3. Which of your current boundaries are rooted in clear values?

4. How do you currently practice values accountability?

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5. When you fall short of your values, what is your dominant response — shame or self-compassion?

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Values Practice & Integration

Scale: 1 = of

I use my core values as a guide when making important decisions

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

2. I regularly reflect on whether my life is aligned with what matters most to me

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

3. I have shared my core values with my sponsor, therapist, or support network

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

4. I set goals that are specifically connected to my core values

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

5. I practice self-compassion when I fall short of living up to my values rather than spiraling into shame

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

6. I seek out relationships and communities that share and support my core values

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

7. I see values-based living as a practice that improves over time, not a standard I must achieve perfectly

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

8. My recovery program has helped me discover values I did not know I had

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

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PART 5 OF 5

Values in Relationships: Connection, Conflict, and Growth

Your core values do not exist in isolation — they are lived, tested, and refined in the context of your relationships. For people in recovery, relationships are both the arena where values are most severely tested and the context where values-aligned living produces the most profound rewards.

Values conflict in relationships is inevitable. Your value of honesty may conflict with a family member's value of privacy. Learning to navigate these conflicts with wisdom is a critical recovery skill.

Recovery friendships, when genuine, are built on values like honesty, mutual support, accountability, and the willingness to be seen. These become the living proof that values-based living is the foundation for the kind of connection you always wanted.

Reflection Questions

1. Which relationships in your life are most aligned with your core values?

2. How has your recovery affected the values dynamics in your closest relationships?

3. Is there a relationship where you need to communicate a values-based boundary?

4. If you are working a program of amends, how do you understand the amends process as values work?

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5. Have you had to let go of relationships that were incompatible with your recovery values?

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Values Conflict & Navigation

Scale: 1 = of

I regularly experience conflict between two or more of my core values

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

2. I struggle when my recovery values conflict with professional or social expectations
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

3. I have difficulty knowing which value to prioritize when they compete with each other
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

4. I feel torn between values from my past and values I am developing in recovery
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

5. I experience guilt when I must compromise one value to honor another
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

6. I sometimes abandon my values under pressure from others or from my own cravings
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

7. Old values from active addiction still pull at me even though I know they are harmful
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

8. I am uncertain whether some of my values are truly mine or were imposed by family, culture, or peers
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

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