

10 Ways to Use Values Vault in Therapy



Flexible starting points for values work across therapeutic approaches.

Values work can help clients clarify what matters, make sense of internal conflict, and move toward choices that feel more intentional and authentic.

Values Vault can be used flexibly across many therapeutic approaches. The ideas below are not meant to be rigid protocols. Instead, they are starting points you can adapt based on your client, your clinical framework, and the goals of treatment.

- 1 Identify Core Values
- 2 Explore Inherited vs. Chosen Values
- 3 Explore Values in Conflict
- 4 Clarify Boundaries
- 5 Examine Relationship Alignment
- 6 Reconnect With Identity After Trauma or Major Life Change
- 7 Turn Values Into Goals
- 8 Explore Discrepancies Between Values and Current Life
- 9 Explore Guilt Through Values Alignment
- 10 Use Values as a Session Check-In or Closing Reflection

1 Identify Core Values

Invite your client to sort the cards and identify the values that feel most important to them. Once they have narrowed their choices, explore:

- ✦ What makes this value important to you?
- ✦ When do you feel most connected to it?
- ✦ How do you know when you are living in alignment with it?
- ✦ What happens when this value is missing from your life?

This can provide a useful foundation for later work around goals, relationships, identity, and decision-making.

2 Explore Inherited vs. Chosen Values

Not every value we carry feels fully our own. Invite clients to consider which values may have been shaped by family, culture, religion, community, or other important relationships. Questions might include:

- ✦ Which of these values feel deeply yours?
- ✦ Which feel more like something you were taught to prioritize?
- ✦ Are there values you once held that no longer fit?
- ✦ Are there values you are only beginning to give yourself permission to claim?

This can be especially useful during identity development, life transitions, faith transitions, or work around family-of-origin expectations.

3 Explore Values in Conflict

Many difficult decisions are not simply about choosing between a “good” option and a “bad” option. They involve two meaningful values pulling in different directions. For example:

Security vs. Adventure

Loyalty vs. Authenticity

Achievement vs. Balance

Belonging vs. Independence

Ask the client to identify the values represented on each side of the conflict. Then explore:

- ✦ What is each value trying to protect or create?
- ✦ What might be lost if one value is consistently prioritized over the other?
- ✦ Is there a way to honor both?
- ✦ Which value needs more attention in this situation?

This can help reduce black-and-white thinking and create more nuanced decision-making.

4 Clarify Boundaries

Values can provide an anchor when clients are deciding whether, when, or how to set a boundary. Invite the client to identify the values connected to the situation. For example, a boundary may support values such as:

Self-respect

Honesty

Safety

Family

Compassion

Responsibility

Then explore:

- ✦ What value would this boundary protect?
- ✦ What value makes setting the boundary difficult?
- ✦ What would a boundary look like that reflects both care for others and care for yourself?

This can help shift boundary work away from “Am I allowed to do this?” and toward “What kind of person do I want to be in this situation?”

5 Examine Relationship Alignment

Values can offer a useful way to explore satisfaction and tension within relationships. Clients can identify:

- ✦ Values they want to embody in relationships
- ✦ Values they hope to experience from others
- ✦ Values they believe are currently present
- ✦ Values that may be missing or in conflict

Questions might include:

- ✦ What matters most to you in close relationships?
- ✦ Where does this relationship feel aligned with those values?
- ✦ Where does it feel out of alignment?
- ✦ Is the issue a difference in values, or a difference in how those values are expressed?

This can be used with individuals, couples, families, or other relational systems.

6 Reconnect With Identity After Trauma or Major Life Change

Trauma, loss, illness, divorce, parenthood, career changes, and other major transitions can disrupt a person's sense of who they are.

Values work can provide a way to explore identity without requiring the client to immediately answer the much bigger question, "Who am I now?" Instead, begin with:

- ✦ What still matters to you?
- ✦ What matters now that may not have mattered before?
- ✦ Are there values you want to reclaim?
- ✦ Are there values you want to build your next chapter around?

Values can help create continuity while also making room for change.

7 Turn Values Into Goals

Goals are often easier to sustain when they are connected to something meaningful. After identifying a core value, ask:

- ✦ If I were living this value more fully, what would I be doing differently?
- ✦ What is one behavior that would express this value?
- ✦ What is one small step I could take this week?

For example:

VALUE Connection GOAL Reach out to one friend this week.	VALUE Learning GOAL Spend 20 minutes reading about something I am curious about.
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The focus is not on performing a value perfectly, but on moving toward it intentionally.

8 Explore Discrepancies Between Values and Current Life

Clients may know what matters to them and still find that their daily life does not reflect it. Invite them to compare their core values with how they currently spend their:

Time
Energy
Attention
Money
Emotional resources

Ask:

- ✦ Which values are well represented in your life right now?
- ✦ Which are being neglected?
- ✦ Where do you feel the biggest gap?
- ✦ What is getting in the way?
- ✦ What would even a small increase in alignment look like?

This can be useful when clients feel stuck, dissatisfied, burned out, or unsure why something feels “off.”

9 Explore Guilt Through Values Alignment

Guilt can sometimes signal that our behavior is out of alignment with what matters to us. But feeling guilty does not necessarily mean we have done something wrong.

Once clients have clarified their core values, those values can provide a useful framework for exploring where guilt is coming from. Ask:

- ✦ What value do you believe you violated?
- ✦ Did your behavior actually conflict with that value?
- ✦ If it did, is there something you want to repair, change, or do differently?
- ✦ If your behavior was consistent with your values, where might the guilt be coming from?
- ✦ Is someone else disappointed because your choice did not meet their needs, expectations, or values?
- ✦ Are you experiencing guilt because setting a boundary, saying no, or choosing differently feels unfamiliar?

IF THE BEHAVIOR CONFLICTS WITH THEIR VALUES

The goal does not have to be self-punishment. Instead, values can offer a path forward: acknowledge what happened, repair what can be repaired, and choose behavior that better reflects the person they want to be.

IF THE BEHAVIOR IS ALIGNED WITH THEIR VALUES

The work may look different. They may need support tolerating someone else's disappointment or discomfort without interpreting that reaction as evidence that they have done something wrong.

Values can help clients distinguish between guilt that points toward meaningful repair and guilt that arises when they are honoring themselves while disappointing someone else.

10 Use Values as a Session Check-In or Closing Reflection

Values work does not always need to be a full activity. You can also use individual cards as brief prompts.

AT THE BEGINNING OF A SESSION

- ✦ Which value feels especially important to you today?
- ✦ Which value has been difficult to honor lately?
- ✦ Which value has shown up strongly this week?

AT THE END OF A SESSION

- ✦ Which value connects most closely to what we talked about today?
- ✦ What value do you want to carry with you after this session?
- ✦ What would honoring that value look like before we meet again?

This can provide continuity between insight gained in session and the client's life outside the therapy room.

A Flexible Tool

There is no single “right” way to use Values Vault in therapy. The cards can be used for structured sorting, open-ended exploration, decision-making, goal setting, relationship work, or simply as prompts for deeper conversation.

The goal is not to identify a perfect set of values. It is to help clients better understand what matters to them and how they want to move through their lives.



Values Vault Cards

Explore more tools, worksheets, and resources at ValuesVaultCards.com.

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