A 50-minute values group

A facilitator guide for one 50-minute session, drawing on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and Motivational Interviewing. Use it with the 50-minute participant handout.

What this session is for

In under an hour, each member sorts a list of 83 values, chooses five, and looks honestly at how much their days reflect them. The session is built around one moment. A member notices a gap between what they say matters to them and how they spend their time, and feels their own pull toward closing it. The rest of the plan is there to set that moment up and then leave it alone.

The one rule to hold on to. When someone names a gap, don't fix it or reassure it away. Reflect it and let it sit. That discomfort is what moves people.

What you'll need

- One 50-minute handout per member, four pages, and pens.
- A whiteboard or flip chart.
- Optional: a printed card deck for anyone who would rather sort cards by hand.

The session at a glance

MINUTES	STAGE	WHAT HAPPENS
0 to 5	**Welcome and norms**	A one-word check-in, then the norms.
5 to 12	**Values versus goals**	Two columns on the board.
12 to 33	**The sort**	Check, star, choose five, and rate the gap.
33 to 45	**Discussion**	Three questions, in order.
45 to 50	**One step and close**	One value and one step each, then the closing words.

Welcome and norms, 0 to 5 minutes

Ask for one word on how each person is arriving, and let anyone pass. Then set the norms out loud.

- **Nobody has to share.** Passing counts as taking part.
- **No comparing lists.** There's no better or worse set of values.
- **No rescuing.** If someone gets emotional, give them room instead of reassurance.
- **What's said here stays here.**

SAY "You never have to tell us what's on your list. If you want to talk, you can talk about what this was like without saying what you chose."

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Values versus goals, 5 to 12 minutes

Draw two columns on the board, one for goals and one for values, and ask the group for an example or two of each.

SAY "I want to start with the difference between a goal and a value. A goal is something you can finish. Get the job or finish the program, and it's done. A value is a direction. It's more about how you travel than where you end up. Nobody ever finishes being a loving parent or being honest. You just keep choosing it."

"This matters because goals can be taken from you. Illness can take them, and so can money trouble or other people. A direction can't be taken. Even on your worst day, you can still turn toward what matters to you."

The sort, 12 to 33 minutes

Members work silently on the handout. Read each instruction aloud, then give them time. Watch the room more than the clock.

1. **First pass, check. About 9 minutes.** "Read through all seven headings and check anything that matters to you at all. Don't limit yourself. Most people check 25 to 35. The headings are only there to make the list easier to read."
2. **Second pass, star. About 5 minutes.** "Go back through only the values you checked, and star the ones that are very important, the ones you'd call core and not just nice. Most people end up with 10 to 20."
3. **Choose five and rank them. About 4 minutes.** "From your stars, choose the five you'd keep if you could keep only five, and number them. Cutting a value doesn't mean you don't care about it. Notice what it feels like to let go."
4. **The gap. About 3 minutes.** "For each of your five, rate from 0 to 10 how much your life right now reflects it. Not how much you care about it, but how much your time and your choices show it. Be honest. Nobody is reading this."

If someone stars almost everything, say to the whole group, "If nearly everything you checked also got a star, go back and be stricter. The question isn't whether it's good. It's whether it's core."

Walk the room quietly without reading over shoulders. If someone is stuck, ask, "Which one would you miss most if it disappeared from your life?"

Discussion, 33 to 45 minutes

Three questions, in this order, about four minutes each.

1. **"What was it like to do that?"** Ask about the process, not the choices. Anyone can answer without revealing their list.
2. **"Which value surprised you by making your list?"** This is usually where people start talking about what they found.
3. **"What's one thing you're already doing, even a small thing, that lines up with one of your five?"** It ends on something members already do, which makes the next step easier to choose.

When someone names a gap, say back what you heard and let it sit. "So it's near the top of what matters to you, and it's been three years. What's it like to say that out loud?" Then wait. Count to ten before you fill the silence.

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One step and close, 45 to 50 minutes

SAY "Pick one value. Not necessarily the biggest gap, but the one you have some willingness to move on this week. Write down one thing you'll do, and make it small enough that you'll actually do it. 'Call my sister on Sunday' beats 'be a better sister.'"

Go around once. Each member says their value and their step in one sentence, and passing is allowed.

SAY "One last thing. You won't live these values perfectly this week. Nobody does. The point of naming them isn't to give you a new list to fail at. It's so that when you drift, you know which way home is. Drifting and coming back is the practice."

If something comes up

- **Shame about the gap.** The gap becomes evidence of failure instead of direction. Interrupt this one actively: "The gap isn't proof you've failed. It's proof the value is still alive. You can't miss something you don't care about."
- **Grief.** Someone realizes a top value has been dormant for years, or ended with a relationship. This is an appropriate response, and for that member it may be the most important part of the session. Reflect it rather than fixing it: "That one's been gone a long time."
- **The should list.** Values chosen because they sound right. The tell is that the person can't say much about why. Ask, "When did you last feel that one strongly?" If nothing comes, point that out kindly.
- **Safety concerns.** If anything a member says raises concern about their safety, follow your setting's usual procedures.

Notes by setting

- **Inpatient units.** Reading a long list can be hard on a unit, so read the instructions aloud and offer the printed cards to anyone who struggles with the list. Keep steps doable on the unit or in the first days after discharge, like calling someone who visits or asking staff about an activity. Don't depend on homework, and expect members to come and go.
- **Substance use treatment.** Values often carry recovery motivation, which makes this a strong fit. Sobriety works better as a way of living a value than as a value itself, so ask what staying sober makes room for. Watch for shame about the gap, which can run high in early recovery.

Source

The 83 values and their meanings come from the Personal Values Card Sort by W. R. Miller, J. C'de Baca, D. B. Matthews, and P. L. Wilbourne, University of New Mexico, 2001, which the authors placed in the public domain. The seven headings on the handout were added for readability and are not part of the original.

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