

Working out what's important and how to live in line with this



Country
Cancer
Support
South Australia

Often a diagnosis of cancer challenges what people believe about their world, their relationships and themselves. It can also make them examine their life, think deeply about what's important to them and provide a new perspective on their life and priorities. This can bring about positive changes in the way they go about their life. If you haven't thought about this, that's okay – you might prefer to come back to this at another time. If you feel ready to start thinking about it, the following questions might be useful.

What has your experience with cancer told you about what really matters or what you really care about?

How can your experience with cancer help you to learn or develop new skills and strengths?

How can this experience help you to improve the way you relate to others?

What do your worries or fears show you that you care about and find important?

Understanding changes in your values and explaining them to others can be difficult. The following exercises are designed to help you do this.

Before you begin, it's important to understand exactly what values are. Values are statements or principles about what we want to do with our life, including what we want to stand for and how we want to behave. There's an important difference between values and goals. Values (e.g. creativity) are like a direction or process, not a destination – they can guide you through life, towards certain goals. Goals (e.g. to finish a particular painting) are like a destination or outcome in the future that once you've reached, you can't continue to strive towards. You never have to justify your values, but you may need to prioritise them.

Examples of values include: fun, flexibility, commitment, affection, accuracy, maturity, money, peace, professionalism, religion, service, tidiness, trust, warmth, wisdom, friendship, being caring, being bold.

You could make a list of your own values, or keep reading and use the following prompts to help you do this. Being clear about your values is likely to help you understand 'the new you' and work out how best to move forward with your life.

Below is a list of areas of life that are valued by some people.

To what extent do you value the following aspects of your life?

Please select a value between 1 (not at all important) **and 10** (extremely important). Remember that there are no right or wrong answers – this is an indication of how important they are to YOU now (not before you were affected by cancer).

	Not at all important ↔ Extremely important									
Family relations <i>(not parenting or marriage)</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Marriage/ intimate relationships	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Parenting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Social life/ friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Work	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Education/ training	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Fun/ recreation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Spirituality	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Community work/ citizenship	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Physical self care <i>(e.g. sleep, exercise, diet)</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Creativity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Thinking back over the past week, how consistent have your actions been with each of these values? Remember this is about how YOU think you've done, not about what anyone else thinks, or what you wish you'd done. Please select a value between 1 (not consistent) and 10 (completely consistent).

	Not consistent with my values in this area of my life					↔	Completely consistent with my values in this area of my life				
Family relations <i>(not parenting or marriage)</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Marriage/ intimate relationships	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Parenting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Social life/ friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Work	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Education/ training	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Fun/ recreation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Spirituality	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Community work/ citizenship	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Physical self care <i>(e.g. sleep, exercise, diet)</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Creativity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

** (Adapted from Wilson's Valued Living Questionnaire)

Now answer the following questions:

How consistent is your current lifestyle with your values? If your values aren't driving your actions, consider asking yourself – what is? Is it negative emotions such as sadness, guilt, worry or fear?

To what extent do you think your life might be more fulfilling if you let your values guide your actions instead?

If you started doing more things that are meaningful and important to you, to what extent do you think this could reduce some of the negative emotions you are experiencing?

Now list the aspects of your life that you value the most in order of importance and complete the following exercise:

	Valued area of life	What I'm currently doing that is consistent with this value	Things I could realistically do in the next week to live more consistently with this value	Things I could realistically do in the next month to live more consistently with this value
<i>E.g.</i>	<i>Social life/ friends</i>	<i>Attending weekly coffee catch-ups with a group of ladies from church</i>	<i>Ring Mary and have a chat to her over the phone</i>	<i>Make arrangements to go out to dinner with Susan</i>
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				

Now schedule times in your diary to do them. You may like to rate your mood out of 10 before and after doing each activity so you can keep track of which activities have the biggest impact on your mood.

At the end of the week, if you find yourself unable to do what you've outlined above, ask yourself why? What got in the way? What strategies could you use to overcome these hurdles to living a more valued, meaningful life? Should you ask someone for assistance? Or would you benefit from using other worksheets? These could help you with [problem solving](#) (e.g. if you don't know where to start), or to learn the [calming technique](#) (e.g. if anxiety has been making it difficult).