Exploring and living your values

This exercise focusses on how you would like your life to be in seven domains. Six of these domains are commonly identified by people as areas of value. There is also an extra one without any theme to it. People value different things, and some of them are quite original. This seventh domain will be your own very personal domain.

Now we would like you to dig deep into your dreams and aspirations. We would like you to set aside your current predicament and think of how you would most want things to be in each domain. Describe how you would want to experience each of the domains regardless of your age or life circumstances.

Family: Describe in a few sentences how you would like your relationship to be with your parents, children, siblings, perhaps even extended family. If the world was perfect, what would these relationships be like? What qualities would you bring to these relationships to make them the best possible?

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Intimate relationships: Consider the relationship you have with that special person who is closest to you. Maybe it's your husband/wife, your partner. Think about what it is in that relationship that is so valuable to you. Even if you don't have anyone you consider intimate at this moment, try to think about what would be the most important thing in a relationship. Write down a few sentences on the qualities of an ideal intimate relationship and what this would bring to you. Think about the kind of person you would most want to be in that relationship.

Friendships: Thinking about these types of relationships can cover a wide variety of people. You can consider how you relate to close friends, work friends, acquaintances, or even with people you meet in a particular situation. Write a few sentences about what relating to these people would look like in an ideal world. If you really got to choose, what kind of a friend would you be?

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Work: Think about what sort of valued qualities come with having a job or volunteering. You can maybe think of a personal endeavour, like a career, that you might have given up on or seen being affected by your GI symptoms. What type of work would make the most use of your special set of skills? What would a job that gives you meaning look like? What would be the qualities of such a perfect job or volunteering?

Health: Think about the importance of keeping physically healthy. Does exercising, eating right, and getting a good night's sleep play an important role in your life? Write down some sentences about how you would like to take care of your body in ideal circumstances.

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Growth and learning: Think about how important it is for you to learn new skills or knowledge. Is improving yourself something that drives you? Write down the qualities related to your personal growth as a human being that you would like to develop throughout your life, regardless of any difficult circumstances or age. If you could choose to make your life be about your own growth and learning, what would that life look like, what would you be doing differently?

Your own personal value: Think about something that has not been listed before but that is really important to you. Some examples could be issues of spirituality or having a hobby; for other people community participation or citizenship is important. Some people express this by serving on community councils, parent-teacher associations and so on. Just try to write some sentences about something you feel truly passionate about, what that brings to you, and what it would look like in an ideal world.

Values to goals

Hopefully the previous exercise has given you a good idea of what really matters to you and in which direction you would like to take your life. This is essential because now you can start being a bit more specific and begin to look at the goals that are consistent with your values.

Goals, like values, also orient you in a direction, but they have an end point and an outcome that you can achieve. So goals are like points on a map that you can arrive at on your way to your desired value. Because goals are achievable, they are very important as they give you a more concrete sense of movement. Having a value-consistent goal is also essential to move in your desired direction because it will allow you to plan what actions you have to take to get there.

For each of the value domains, try to come up with one or two specific actions that you could do that will show you that you are living that value.

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Family goals:

Intimate relationships goals:

Friendships goals:

Work goals:

Health goals:

Growth and learning goals:

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Your personal value goals:

How well are you living your values?

It's easy to get caught between what you want your life to be about and what you are doing in your life that is consistent with your values. This exercise will hopefully help us gain some perspective on how well you are living your values. I would like you to think about the most honest friend you have, someone who has consistently been truthful with you even in difficult situations. Now I want you to think about your ideal score in the seven life domains we have talked about before. Let's say this scale goes from 0 to 10, with 0 being "Not acting at all according to values" and 10 being "acting fully according to values". Now I want you to think what score your honest friend would give you. Remember that all your friend has available to him/her is your actions, not what you are thinking.

Domains:	*Friend score:*	*Your ideal score:*
Family		
Intimate relationships		
Friendship		
Work		
Health		
Growth and learning		
Your personal value		

Notice if there is a discrepancy between things that are important to you and how much you are engaging with these domains. Is there something you could do that could bridge that gap?

This handout was written by Associate Professor Nuno Ferreira based upon his chapter entitled "Emerging approaches – Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) approaches to gastrointestinal conditions" (Chapter 17) from Knowles, S.R., Keefer, L., & Mikocka-Walus, A. (2019). Psychogastroenterology with Adults: A Handbook for Mental Health Professionals. Oxon, UK: Routledge Press.

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