

Value-based living and helping others can be the key to happiness



For this edition of HumanaCare's newsletter, we explore value-based living and the impact that helping others has on our overall well-being and living a fulfilled life. So, let's start with understanding what values are exactly.

Values 101

Values are what give our lives meaning, purpose and joy. They include things like relationships, career, service to others, health, leisure, etc. Each of us has our own set of values that make our lives worth living — and these may change over time. But when we're too preoccupied with avoiding pain to live a values-directed life, we often sink into depression, burnout or apathy because we're not doing the things that make us happy.

Values are not things you can "achieve" and be done with. Instead, they're directions that we constantly move towards

by setting and reaching goals that are in line with them. For example, if your value is relationships, then calling a friend might be a goal that helps move you in that direction. But, if you never called a friend again, then it won't be long before you felt disconnected and unfulfilled.

So, if a value is like one of the cardinal directions (i.e., west), and a goal in line with that value is a specific destination (i.e., Vancouver), then our emotions are the compass. Emotions give us critical information about whether we are moving in the right direction.

Let's talk about emotions

When we feel "positive" emotions like joy or love, it means we are in contact with our values, and when we experience "negative" emotions like anxiety, anger or sadness, it means that your values are out of reach or that something is threatening to get in the way.

With all the pain and suffering happening in the world, it can be tempting to turn away and numb ourselves from the pain — and, in the short term, we can do this. Much like the aperture of a camera that opens in a dark environment to let enough light in to take a picture and closes when it's bright out so that the picture doesn't get "washed out," our emotions work in a similar way.

When we're overwhelmed by difficult emotion, we can "close the aperture" by engaging in any distraction that takes us further away from our present experience. This could mean anything from watching videos and scrolling mindlessly through social media, to options that have the potential to be more clearly problematic, like using alcohol

or drugs. While, in and of themselves, any of these activities done in moderation can be a normal and healthy part of your lifestyle, when done in excess and in order to avoid your pain, they can cause significant problems.

Sometimes, we need to turn down the volume on our emotions in order to get through an emergency situation that requires urgent attention and response, or when we need to do damage control. For example, it might be the healthiest choice to distract ourselves when we're trying to prevent ourselves from making a situation much worse, like when we have urges to hurt ourselves or others, or to otherwise act on your emotions in a way that our better senses know will cause significant problems.

Many of us use this strategy to avoid day-to-day discomfort without addressing what caused the painful emotion in the first place. In doing so, we end up reinforcing the painful emotion so that it's even stronger the next time it's triggered.

Understanding the power of giving

When you listen to your emotions to help you figure out your values, is giving back or helping others one of them? Turns out there is truth to the saying "it's better to give than to receive." A study out of the National Institutes of Health measured the brain's response to giving. Volunteers were given money that they were either told to, or could voluntarily choose to, give away. Regardless of why they gave, their brain's pleasure centres lit up when they did.

If this rings true to you, consider volunteering, donating money to a cause you hold dear, or even picking up groceries or running an errand for a friend.

The holidays are an ideal time to give back and when you're doing it, pay attention to how you feel. If you experience positive emotions, it's likely safe to say that giving back is one of your values.

**Remember, support is always available for you if you experience any life challenges.
Reach out to our experts whenever you need.**

UPCOMING WEBINAR:

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