

Values Exercise for Forensic Patients



This resource is a brief, structured values-identification exercise designed for use with forensic or otherwise resistant patients. It offers a simple, conversational way to help patients clarify what truly matters to them such as freedom, respect, stability, or relationships and then gently link those values to their daily choices and behaviors. Grounded in motivational interviewing principles, it avoids confrontation and instead emphasizes autonomy, collaboration, and personal meaning.

The exercise is intentionally short, practical, and easy to deliver during brief contacts and quick check-ins. By focusing on values rather than compliance, the tool helps patients articulate their internal motivators while giving clinicians a framework to guide healthier, goal-aligned actions. Use this tool anytime you need to quickly engage a patient, understand their priorities, and guide treatment in a collaborative way.

When to Use This Exercise

Brief cell-side or
day-room contacts

Before or after
incidents

During treatment
refusal
conversations

When building
rapport with
resistant patients

In skill-building
or treatment-
planning sessions

Why This Works

Fast and simple,
no materials
needed

Supports
autonomy in
involuntary
settings

Creates intrinsic
motivation

Reduces power
struggles and
defensiveness

Works even with
irritable, guarded,
or concrete
thinkers

STEP 1

Present the Values List

Say: "Here are some things people care about. Pick one or two that matter most to you right now."

Values List:

- Freedom / Independence
- Respect
- Family / Relationships
- Safety
- Stability
- Health
- Faith / Spirituality
- Privacy
- Self-control
- Being treated fairly



Tip: If the patient struggles, ask: "Which one sounds most like you?"

STEP 2

Reflect the Value Back

Examples:

"Freedom is really important to you."

"Respect matters a lot to you."

"Stability is something you're looking for."



Reflections validate and deepen the conversation.

STEP 3

Reflect the Value Back

Use 1–2 linking questions:

“How does that value show up for you here?”

“What would help you move closer to that value today?”

“Does anything get in the way of that value right now?”

“What’s one thing you could do that lines up with that value?”

Example:

If the patient picks Freedom:

“What’s one thing today that could help you move toward more freedom?”

STEP 4

Summarize

Summaries reinforce internal motivation.

Example:

If the patient picks Freedom:

“So your top value is respect, and keeping things calm helps you stay aligned with that.”

“You want stability, and you said taking small steps today moves you toward that.”

Clinician Script (60–90 seconds)

1

“Pick one or two things from this list that matter most to you right now.”

2

“So (value) is important to you. Tell me more about that.”

3

Reflect the meaning back.

4

“What’s one thing you could do today that aligns with that value?”

5

Summarize.