

AFFIRMING IMPORTANT VALUES

Difficulty: **MODERATE** | Frequency: **VARIABLE** | Duration: **15 MINS**



WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

In our daily lives, we sometimes encounter threats to the self—from receiving negative feedback at work to being excluded in social situations. In these moments, it's difficult to stay clear-headed, open-minded, and in control. We may get defensive or act out, depriving ourselves of constructive lessons and harming our relationships with others.

Researchers have found that writing about our most important values can help us experience less stress, be less defensive and more open to information, and make healthier choices in these situations.

TIME REQUIRED

15 minutes. You can try this practice whenever you feel defensive or threatened.

HOW TO DO IT

1. The following is a list of different values, some of which may be important to you and some of which may not. Start by ranking them in order of their importance to you, from 1 to 11:

- artistic skills/aesthetic appreciation
- sense of humor
- relations with friends/family
- spontaneity/living life in the moment
- social skills
- athletics
- musical ability/appreciation
- physical attractiveness
- creativity
- business/managerial skills
- romantic values

2. Then, write a brief account (one to three paragraphs) of why your #1 value is important to you, including a time when it played an important role in your life.

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Tang, D., & Schmeichel, B. J. (2015). [Self-affirmation facilitates cardiovascular recovery following interpersonal evaluation](#) *Biological Psychology*, 104, 108-15.

When participants received negative feedback on an essay they wrote—a form of self-threatening information—their blood pressure increased. But it recovered more quickly after they wrote about why their top value was important to them, compared to writing about why other people might hold a particular value.

Sherman, D. K. (2013). [Self-affirmation: Understanding the effects](#). *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 7(11), 834-45.

Sherman reviews the benefits of self-affirmation on defensiveness, stress, and performance and proposes a model to explain how it works: by increasing our psychological resources, broadening our perspective, and keeping threats separate from our sense of self.

WHY IT WORKS

When our ego takes a hit, reflecting on what matters most may help us move beyond narrow self-image concerns. It can remind us of the other resources we have in our lives: how strong and capable we are, or how much support we receive from others. We start to realize that there's something we care about—whether it's cultivating relationships or creativity—that matters more to us than whatever difficulty we're experiencing in the moment.

Once we gain this broader perspective, we become more open to hearing negative feedback or potentially scary but useful information. We can take a wiser and more long-term perspective, instead of getting bogged down in momentary negative feelings.

SOURCES

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This practice is part of [Greater Good in Action](#), a clearinghouse of the best research-tested methods for increasing happiness, resilience, kindness, and connection, created by the [Greater Good Science Center](#) at UC Berkeley and [HopeLab](#).

