

Does this sound like you?

- You feel that life is more confusing than it used to be
- You were once pretty sure about what was important to you in life, but now you are less sure
- Other people seem to have different ideas about life, and you find yourself wondering if some of those ideas would work for you
- You grew up agreeing with your parents about what is important (for the most part), but now you're not so sure
- Others do things that conflict with your values, but you sometimes feel pressured to do the things they do
- You feel guilty because you have done some things that violate your values
- Your parents or friends tell you that you have changed

What are values?

Values are the personal guidelines that individuals use to make decisions about their lives. Values are often important, deeply held convictions. They help create meaning in situations and give purpose to the things people do. They are based on personal, cultural, and societal experiences.

Most individuals have developed a set of values by age ten. They are typically values that have been learned from important people in their lives such as parents, teachers, and friends. Adolescence is a time when many individuals begin to develop some values of their own.

When individuals go to college, however, they encounter new values and ways of thinking that they have never been faced with before. Many college students begin to question the values they previously held, which are often those of their parents. Individuals are often confused about which values are right for them.

Things can become even more complicated if parents or friends don't understand why an individual is questioning or has changed his or her values.

What happens if I question or violate my values?

As circumstances change in individuals' lives, they need to reexamine their priorities and values. Individuals sometimes find themselves in an internal conflict, because they are faced with a situation that conflicts with their values.

Individuals sometimes violate their own values. This often happens in college, as individuals are faced with new situations and people with different values. When individuals question or violate their values, they may feel confused and uncertain. They may discover that some of their values no longer work for them.

How can I be sure that a value is right for me?

- Don't rush into anything. Take time to decide what is best for you
- Consider each alternative and the pros and cons of each carefully
- Make sure your decision is yours. Try to avoid pressure from others
- Choose something that will be right for you on a consistent basis, not something that seems right one time
- Your values should feel comfortable. They should be things that you would be proud of, and not embarrassed, to share with others

Can a counselor help me?

Sometimes it can be very confusing to try to sort through what is most important to you. A counselor can talk with you and try to help you carefully consider your alternatives. A counselor may have value clarification exercises that may be helpful.