

Values and the Rhythm2Recovery Model

Exploring and identifying core values is a central part of the R2R model.

Recently I was working with a team of trauma counsellors and during the course of the training there was some strong debate about the worth and potential dangers of examining values with individual's in therapy. Some of this debate was premised on the fear that many people have of being forced to accept values that may differ widely between countries and cultures, (e.g. collective versus individualistic) or the negative association between religious dogma and values. Other people raised the issue of how a focus on values might shame those who have been forced to act in unethical ways in order to survive. There were many good points raised that drew me to clarify exactly how we use the different value related exercises within the R2R model.

Our focus on values is orientated towards helping people confirm their core beliefs as a foundation for identity, & behaviour. As a guide to negotiating the many challenges in life through the choices they make and the actions that follow. And in so doing, acquiring a sense of personal harmony that comes when our actions mirror our beliefs. It is not to judge or influence an individual's beliefs, other than through their own self-awareness. So that in certain circumstances we may as counsellors alert an individual to a new perspective if the thoughts they have around their values are unhelpful or irrational e.g. pointing them toward positive alternatives if they are depressed & fixated on the negative, or alerting them to alternative scenarios if their thoughts become paranoid through anxiety.

From my own perspective it has always been important to acknowledge that there is a big difference between knowing our values and living them, but that living them starts with identifying them. All of us compromise our values at different times and often for good reason. For people who have faced severe adversity this compromise is often a necessity of survival and many people I work with have struggled to move forward because of the shame they harbour inside of themselves around these situations. Discussion should always acknowledge the challenge of adhering to our values and the necessity to compromise them under different circumstances.

The values and boundary exercises within the Rhythm2Recovery resources are like all exercise: voluntary, and used at the practitioner's discretion. How deeply one discusses these issues will very much depend on the client's cognitive capacity, their fluency with language and their emotional stability. As well as the comfort of the practitioner in opening up this topic. Drawing from people's own life experiences, and in particular their relational experiences, can help to identify, not only which beliefs are important to them, but also which beliefs serve them well in different circumstances. A key analogy in our work being identifying the rhythms or patterns of belief that are unhealthy and learning how to develop new rhythms that will serve you and those around you better.

The value exploration exercises in Rhythm2Recovery can help people identify some of their core beliefs and then use this as a foundation for identity, providing themselves with a greater sense of self. This awareness can also help link them to individuals and communities that share similar values. Shared core values, being the building blocks of healthy relationships.

Additionally, in identifying our core beliefs and values we identify what has been termed a 'moral compass' or template for behaviour. Clear values can help people make clearer choices, particularly when those choices are subject to external pressures. Feelings of dissonance, shame and guilt, already mentioned, arise when we act outside our values and though in extremes these can be problematic, mostly they guide us to make the right decisions.

This video gives a nice representation of the way we use values to help steer a course through heavy weather.

<https://youtu.be/yoVmoOnjscM>