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**THE CARDS**  
**"USING THE**  
**CARDS**  
**AROUND**  
**SUBSTANCE**  
**ABUSE ISSUES"**

**A Process for People to Identify,  
Clarify and Prioritize Their  
Values, Strengths and Goals**

**Developed by Home, Safe  
A Child Welfare Consulting Agency  
Tacoma, WA**



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Following the use of the cards, your role as helper is to encourage, support, provide resources, and help them assess how it's going. The information on values and strengths gives you and the family an anchor to keep them from drifting away from the goals.

The cards can be used again as a follow-up activity after the family has achieved its goals, or if the plan isn't working and you need to do another assessment.

These cards can be tailored for your use. For example, they could be done in Spanish, or they could include different information for relevant for your population.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In today's fast paced, demanding world, most of us go through periods where we feel challenged to keep our lives in order. It takes effort and skill to live out our values, stay in touch with our strengths, and prioritize our goals toward leading the fullest, most productive lives possible. Sometimes these challenges can seem overwhelming. These cards have been developed to help all of us develop a clear vision of who we are and what we want to become. The three sets of cards enhance people's motivation to change, giving them a clear vision of their values, strengths and goals. The Free To Grow NTAC is available for training and consultation to individuals and agencies interested in integrating the use of these cards with people they help.

The strength of this approach is that the control of the change process is given to the people being

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served. When values and strengths are linked with desired goals, people are better able to access the personal resources needed to change. This tool is designed to empower people to meet their current needs and achieve specific goals they set, as well as to help them learn the process of goal setting and problem solving for themselves.

This package contains this Instruction Manual and three sets of cards:

**VALUES CARDS** to help people and families clarify their most important values.

**STRENGTHS CARDS** to help people and families identify their strengths and resources.

**GOALS CARDS** to take a holistic look at needs, and develop goals to address the needs most important to the family or individual.

## **WHO CAN USE THE CARDS?**

Anyone who is interested and willing can benefit by using the cards. Anyone who is wondering "Who am I, and where am I going?" can achieve some clarity and direction by using the cards. They are especially useful during a life crisis or turning point when clarification and planning are

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4. If you are working with several family members, you may want to have them identify fewer individual goals or discuss and identify the priority "family" goals to begin with.

**NOTE:** If people have difficulty narrowing down their needs or prioritizing them, ask questions to facilitate the process. The goals of your particular program will give some guidelines

From this list of goals, specific action plans can be developed by and with the family to achieve them.

## **THINGS TO THINK ABOUT**

There may be circumstances when you would not want to use the cards. Here are some of the situations we have run into:

- A person does not want to do the activity.
- A person does not read and may be trying to conceal that fact.
- A person does not wish to share such personal information as their own values.
- Very young children.
- Anyone who is unable to concentrate or understand the activity due to intoxication, mental illness, poor health, depression or fatigue, for example.

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## HOW TO BEGIN

1. Give each individual a set of cards and explain that the cards represent major areas of people's lives with specific goals in each area. Ask them to take some time to look through each card and write down any item that they feel needs attention or that they would like to change. Language is important here: "Select those things you would like to change" is empowering language that implies the individual is capable of making changes, whereas "Select your biggest problems" or "Select the things that are causing the most trouble" may convey that the person is incapable of making changes themselves.

Let the person know that they may select many items on one card and none at all on others. If you notice that the person is marking lots of items, remind them that while many of these factors are involved, what we want to do now is select those with the MOST impact or the biggest need to change -- those things they want to change in the near future. Ask them to add any other important goals that come to mind that may not be listed on the cards.

2. When Step 1 has been done, ask them to select the top two to 5 goals from the list.
3. Next, ask them to rank their few goals in order of importance.

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necessary. Family preservation in-home counseling programs use them when a family crisis makes it likely that a child will be placed into foster care. The birth of a child, entering or leaving school, a death in the family, or a job change are ideal times to take stock and set a course with the help of the cards.

The cards may be used in many ways by individuals, by couples, in family groups, in support and treatment groups, and in classroom settings. Part or all of the package can be used depending on the goals, interests and abilities of those involved.

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The three sets of cards may be used as a package or individually, depending on circumstances and preferences. The package is designed to help people draw connections between their values, behaviors, goals and assets, thereby increasing their understanding and motivation to change. However, when time and circumstances dictate, selected sets can be used individually.

Adaptations can be made for special populations and can be flexible to individual circumstances. For example, a blind man was able to clarify his values and identify needs and goals when the cards were read to him. Hyperactive children did well when exercises were spread over several sessions and interspersed with physical activity. A developmentally delayed couple used a pre-selected set of the Values Cards. Use your imagination to make the experience helpful and enjoyable for those you're working with.

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The first step in any helping partnership is to develop a trusting relationship between the person using the cards and helper. Helpers can do this by active listening, expressing accurate empathy, providing concrete services such as transportation, and helping to resolve immediate crises. Working with the cards often is an engaging activity in itself. These skills and strategies are part of the training program offered by Home, Safe, a child welfare consulting agency.

## HOW TO INTRODUCE THE CARDS

The cards are generally used in the early part of a helping relationship to guide in goal setting and action planning, yet they can be used at any time, or on their own as a useful clarification exercise. The cards have been used as a way to help review progress and plan follow-up services. They have also been used on follow up visits to help a family refocus and renew their motivation towards a long-term goal.

Structuring the use of the cards helps to ensure that each experience is pleasing and productive. Our experience has been that each set of cards takes from 45 minutes to an hour and a half, depending on the amount of discussion which takes place. Helpers try to schedule sessions lasting 2-3 hours at a time when there are likely to be few interruptions. A comfortable setting

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At the point the individual is ready to take a more systematic look at their lives and establish some goals, take out a set of Goals Cards, 20 to 30 blank cards, a pen or pencil, and a sheet of paper to list goals selected.

How to introduce this exercise depends a lot on the particular person and work setting, so be creative in making it work for you. Here are some ideas:

When the person has stated a goal, but before beginning much work toward it. "Let's do this exercise before we go any further, to make sure we haven't forgotten anything important and are seeing the big picture."

After making headway on initial goals. "We've done a lot! What I'd like to do now is an exercise to see where else I could be helpful to you -- what other areas we could give attention to for the next two weeks."

When it's all chaos. "You have a lot on your mind -- here's a tool that can help make things clearer and give us a better idea what to start working on first."

When crisis after crisis happens. "Here's a tool that helps us get a little distance from what's happening right now -- puts this crisis in perspective, and gives us some ideas about what we can do to prevent this kind of thing from happening again."

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You are in charge of deciding how to live it. You are capable of making good choices. I have confidence in you!" Since the process emphasizes capacity of the individual rather than worker expertise, it gives the message that the person can make changes and will be given credit for those changes. A person's confidence and motivation tends to increase with the knowledge that someone else believes in their ability.

The Goals Cards list hundreds of factors which interact to impact human health and well being. When people take a systematic look through these cards, it gives them the opportunity to think about a wide range of issues that may have an impact on their situation. This can be especially helpful during times of crisis, when people tend to focus exclusively on one or two problems, but haven't considered the "big picture." This process helps people discover how seemingly unrelated factors in their lives are connected; in other words, it helps them to think holistically about their life.

With these cards, individuals identify and prioritize factors they would like to work on in order to change their lives for the better. They set specific and meaningful goals. The process structures setting small goals, many of which will be readily achievable, leading to more success, which will enhance both their confidence and motivation for further change.

## HOW TO USE THE GOALS CARDS

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without too many distractions or interruptions is helpful, such as in the home, an office or a quiet restaurant or park (without wind). Roomy tables will be needed in a classroom or group setting.

Due to the intensity of the activity, and often the length of time, typically only one set of cards is used per session. If people seem tired or distracted, or if there are many interruptions, each exercise can be continued over two or more sessions. There are natural breaking points in each exercise.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### POINTS TO REMEMBER AND EXPLAINING TO THOSE YOU HELP

- This is NOT a test. It will NOT be scored. It is not our intention that a helper will make interpretations or diagnoses from this tool.
- The family can change their minds at any time. Any goals, values or strengths can be changed whenever they wish.
- They give us good feedback. They often have ideas about how the exercises can be tailored.
- Throughout the assessment process, helpers should continue to use their listening and other skills to stimulate discussions about the person's goals, values and strengths.

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- **Basic needs and safety issues almost always take precedence.** It is often wise to help take care of these needs, if present, before using the cards.

We have found the cards to be a fun and engaging way for the people to answer the following questions:

- What's important to me?
- What do I have going for myself - strengths, resources and special interests?
- Where would I like to be?
- How am I going to get there?

While a person may use the three sets of cards in any order she or he believes will work, we have found there is value in answering the above questions by doing the Values Cards, then the Strengths Cards, and then the Needs Cards.

You might explain that "before starting any major change process, it's helpful to ask 'Who **am** I? What things are important to me? What special interests and talents do I have? What are my strengths? What resources are available to me?' Next, we explore your needs, decide which ones need addressing, and set some clear, specific goals. Then we'll describe each goal thoroughly, to be sure we both understand it well. We'll explore the options available to you for reaching your goal making use of your particular strengths

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other family members can point out a strength that individual has in that area. You could even make a game out of it: the family member earns two points for identifying an strength of their own and one point for identifying the strength of others in the family. It's a game everyone wins!

3. Write down all the strengths that come up, and keep the list to refer to when problem solving.
4. Make a listing of all the strengths, to serve as a daily visual reminder that "I am a strong person with lots of assets", or some other creative way to help apply the strengths while you work together.

## GOALS CARDS

The Goals Cards help people:

- take a broad look at hundreds of factors impacting their lives,
- identify and prioritize needs they have
- set specific goals to work toward.

The act of identifying needs and setting goals is motivating in itself, and research tells us that when people set their own goals they are more likely to follow through on them (people don't work on problems they don't have!) and maintain progress once the goal is reached.

The very act of handing a person the Goals Cards is empowering. It says, in effect: "This is your life.

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People also may feel better about working with professional and other helpers, and thus more capable of change, knowing that the helper appreciates their strengths.

## HOW TO USE THE STRENGTHS CARDS

Talking about strengths can be a potentially discouraging discussion for people who are feeling overwhelmed by problems and hard pressed to come up with any positives about themselves. These cards are meant to be used in a positive way. Here are some suggestions:

- 1 Do it individually. To start a casual discussion, you might say, "This is an activity to get us started thinking about all the things that are going right in our lives. Sometimes when we have problems, they're all we think about and we tend to forget the good things or take them for granted. All people have special areas of strength, and I'm thinking that as we talk we'll discover strengths you have that you can use to make some of those changes you want." Then go through each card together, being sure to point out strengths you've observed about which the person may not have thought.
2. Do it as a family activity. Each family member takes a turn drawing a card, and describes a strength they have in that particular area. If they can't think of one (or even if they can),

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and interests whenever we can. We'll make an action plan, listing each step that needs to be taken to reach your goal. Step-by-step, you'll work your way through the plan. Periodically, we'll evaluate how things are going, what's working and what's not. When things are working, you'll keep on doing it; if things aren't working, we'll revise the plan. By following this process, you'll eventually come full circle; you've reached your goal. What was once a weakness or a problem is now a strength and becomes a resource for you to use in working toward your future goals."

## VALUES CARDS

- The Values Cards help people identify and describe their most important values, thereby increasing their own self-knowledge and self-esteem.
- This then creates a context for goal setting and planning.
- When helpers have an understanding of a person's value system, they can treat them with respect and suggest methods for change or growth consistent with those values.
- Values can serve as a guide for making decisions.
- When people discover inconsistencies between their values and their circumstances or behavior, they often are motivated to make changes.
- Sharing values can improve communication and understanding between people.
- Values often reflect the "best" of who we are.

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- Hope is engendered when people are encouraged to approach the change process with what is right rather than what is wrong.

## HOW TO USE THE VALUES CARDS

1. Introduce "Values Clarification" in a non-threatening manner. It can be described as an interesting process to help clarify those things that are most important to them individually and as a family. Explain that there are no right or wrong answers.
2. Place the five category cards (VERY IMPORTANT, IMPORTANT, SOMETIMES IMPORTANT, and SOMETIMES NOT IMPORTANT, NOT VERY IMPORTANT, and NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT) on a flat surface.
3. Ask the person to go through the cards and place each value card in a category. Ask them to use their first or "gut" reaction when deciding how to categorize a card. They should define each word as they wish (don't encourage use of a dictionary and don't offer your definition). If a word has no particular meaning to them, have them just set that card aside.
4. Give the person as much time and privacy as desired. Some people like to discuss values as they work; some want to do the exercise in private; either is fine.

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5. Encourage the person to add any values that are important but not included in the deck. Blank cards are included for this.

6. When all CARDS have been sorted, ask the person to select the six top values from the Very Important pile (six is not a magic number, it's simply an easy number of things for people to hold in their heads. Five or Seven is fine. The point is to elect a small number of "Core Values.")

7. Have the person prioritize their six core values from first to sixth.

8. Finally, have the person define each one, using their own words. We suggest the final list of core values and their definitions be in writing and left with the person for future use.

## STRENGTHS CARDS

This set of cards provides people with an enjoyable method of identifying their individual strengths, interests and resources that can be used to solve problems and achieve goals.

Research tells us that interventions are most successful when they build on existing strengths; however, people often are not able to identify their own strengths and resources, especially during times of crisis. These cards are one method to elicit a list of strengths. It's often helpful for the helper to point out strengths you've observed.