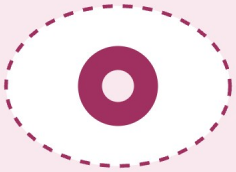
Values & the Neurodivergent Brain

Neurodivergent people hold values like anyone else. What can differ is how hard it is to find them under years of fitting in, and how much energy it takes to live them.



Outer layer
rules learned to stay safe

Core
what you actually care about

Masking vs. values

Masking (also called camouflaging) means hiding or changing natural traits to fit in. Research links it to exhaustion, anxiety and a blurrier sense of identity (Hull et al., 2017).

After years of masking, it can be hard to tell which values are truly yours and which were rules for staying safe.



Limited charge
Spend it on what matters to you.

Values as an energy guide

Sensory load, masking and executive-function demands can leave less energy to spare. Many neurodivergent people describe this as running on a smaller battery.

Values help you decide where the energy you do have goes: toward what matters to you, rather than toward what's expected.

Strengths
advocacy, honesty, loyalty



Costs
distress, rumination, burnout

Justice & intensity

Strong values around fairness, truth and loyalty come up often in neurodivergent communities. In one study, adults with ADHD reported higher justice sensitivity than controls when seeing others treated unfairly (Schäfer & Kraneburg, 2015).

Intense values are a strength. They also need boundaries so caring doesn't cost you everything.

"SHOULD"		VALUE
~~Be productive every day~~	→	Contribution, at a pace I can keep
~~Make eye contact~~	→	Connection, in ways natural to me
~~Keep up with everyone~~	→	Growth, measured on my own path

Values vs. "shoulds"

"Shoulds" are often neurotypical norms dressed up as values. They tell you *how* you're supposed to act.

A value names *what matters* and leaves room for you to live it your way, with accommodations included.

Hull et al. (2017), *J. Autism Dev. Disord.* 47(8) · Schäfer & Kraneburg (2015), *J. Attention Disorders* 19(8)

Reflect

Answer only what feels safe today. You can skip any question and come back.

MASKING

Which values did you hold as a kid that you hid or traded to fit in?

ENERGY

Where does your energy go right now that doesn't match what matters to you?

JUSTICE & INTENSITY

What unfairness gets under your skin most? What boundary would help you care without burning out?

SHOULDS

Pick one "should" you carry. What value might be underneath it, and how could you live it your way?

Gentle reminders

- **Unmasking is safe-first.** You choose where and with whom, a little at a time.
- **Accommodations count.** They're one way of living your values, not a way around them.
- **Big values need boundaries.** Protecting your energy protects what you care about.

One value I want to protect this week _____