



Exploring Exercise: Questions to Dive Deeper

We often only scratch the surface of someone's relationship to exercise. Most clinicians ask a simple question about exercise at the end of a session that might go something like this: "What are you doing for movement?". There's nothing wrong with this question. It's a great start. But how do you dive deeper? How do you get to know what this individual's relationship with movement is really like, how it serves them or not? That's where these questions come in.

1. Tell me about your relationship with exercise. Has it always been this way?
2. Tell me about what you recall about moving your body as a child?
3. Where do you get messages about exercise? How do those messages impact your thoughts, behaviors?
4. What has been most impactful or influential in your relationship with exercise
5. Tell me about your preferred types of exercise/movement. What is it about this activity that you like? Be as specific as possible. What don't you like about it?
6. If you didn't believe this exercise would change your body shape or size, would you still do it?
7. How do you see the relationship between exercise and food?
8. What does your ideal relationship with exercise look like?
9. Do you generally crave movement?
10. Do you have a sense of your appetite for exercise? Tell me about it. How does this play a role in your movement choices?
11. What types of movement might you engage in if you weren't thinking about how it would change your body size or shape?
12. What would it feel like to experiment with (form of exercise)?
13. What would it feel like to take a break from (form of exercise)?
14. What would need to change for this (answers to 12 or 13) to happen?
15. Tell me about your relationship with rest. How do you prioritize rest and recovery in your life?
16. How does it feel to rest?
17. What forms of movement do you enjoy or find fun?
18. How do you define exercise? How do you define movement?
19. How central is exercise in your identity? What other parts of your identity do you value?
20. What benefits do you get from your current form of exercise (escape, fun, community, relief from obsessive thoughts, etc.)
21. What would you need to feel if you couldn't exercise? How would tolerating this feeling help you? How open are you to tolerating this feeling? How might you cope with this feeling? How could we work together to help you cope with this?
22. What coping strategies do you have outside of exercise?
23. Imagine yourself 5 years from now, what do you see in your life? How does exercise fit into this picture?



It can be helpful to have clients do a values assessment. Then, discuss how their current relationship with exercise is aligning or not with their values. How might exercise be competing with other important aspects of their life? Here's a list of (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) values. It's helpful to have clients check off the values they most identify with. NOT the ones they think they SHOULD identify with.... the ones that really resonate and drive their choices Have them place a "V" next to values that are 'very important' to them, a "Q" next to those that are 'quite important' and an "N" next to those that are 'not important'.

- Acceptance: to be open to and accepting of myself, others, and life.
- Adventure: to be adventurous; to actively seek, create, or explore novel or stimulating experiences.
- Assertiveness: to respectfully stand up for my rights and request what I want.
- Authenticity: to be authentic, genuine, real; to be true to myself.
- Beauty: to appreciate, create, nurture, or cultivate beauty in myself, others, and the environment.
- Caring: to be caring towards myself, others, and the environment.
- Challenge: to keep challenging myself to grow, learn, and improve.
- Compassion: to act with kindness towards those who are suffering.
- Connection: to engage fully in whatever I am doing and be fully present with others.
- Contribution: to contribute, help, assist, or make a positive difference to myself or others.
- Conformity: to be respectful and obedient of rules and obligations.
- Cooperation: to be cooperative and collaborative with others.
- Courage: to be courageous or brave; to persist in the face of fear, threat, or difficulty.
- Creativity: to be creative or innovative.
- Curiosity: to be curious, open-minded, and interested; to explore and discover.
- Encouragement: to encourage and reward behavior that I value in myself or others.
- Equality: to treat others as equal to myself.
- Excitement: to seek, create, and engage in activities that are exciting, stimulating, or thrilling.
- Fairness: to be fair to myself or others.
- Fitness: to maintain or improve my fitness; to look after my physical and mental health and well-being.
- Flexibility: to adjust and adapt readily to changing circumstances.
- Freedom: to live freely; to choose how I live and behave, or help others do likewise.
- Friendliness: to be friendly, companionable, or agreeable towards others.
- Forgiveness: to be forgiving towards myself or others.
- Fun: to be fun-loving; to seek, create, and engage in fun-filled activities.



- Generosity: to be generous, sharing, and giving to myself or others.
- Gratitude: to be grateful for and appreciative of the positive aspects of myself, others, and life.
- Honesty: to be honest, truthful, and sincere with myself and others.
- Humor: to see and appreciate the humorous side of life.
- Humility: to be humble or modest; to let my achievements speak for themselves.
- Industry: to be industrious, hard-working, and dedicated.
- Independence: to be self-supportive and choose my own way of doing things.
- Intimacy: to open up, reveal, and share myself- emotionally or physically in my close personal relationships.
- Justice: to uphold justice and fairness.
- Kindness: to be kind, compassionate, considerate, nurturing, or caring towards myself or others.
- Love: to act lovingly or affectionately towards myself or others.
- Mindfulness: to be conscious of, open to, and curious about my here-and-now experience.
- Order: to be orderly and organized.
- Open-mindedness: to think things through, see things from others' points of view and weigh evidence fairly.
- Patience: to wait calmly for what I want.
- Persistence: to continue resolutely, despite problems or difficulties.
- Pleasure: to create and give pleasure to myself or others.
- Power: to strongly influence or wield authority over others, e.g. taking charge, leading, and organizing.
- Reciprocity: to build relationships in which there is a fair balance of giving and taking.
- Respect: to be respectful towards myself or others; to be polite, considerate and show positive regard.
- Responsibility: to be responsible and accountable for my actions.
- Romance: to be romantic; to display and express love or strong affection.
- Safety: to secure, protect, or ensure safety of myself or others.
- Self-awareness: to be aware of my own thoughts, feelings, and actions.
- Self-care: to look after my health and well-being and get my needs met.
- Self-development: to keep growing, advancing, or improving in knowledge, skills, character or life experience.
- Self-control: to act in accordance with my own ideals.
- Sensuality: to create, explore, and enjoy experiences that stimulate the five senses.
- Sexuality: to explore or express my sexuality.
- Spirituality: to connect with things bigger than myself.



- Skillfulness: to continually practice and improve my skills and apply myself fully when using them.
- Supportiveness: to be supportive, helpful, encouraging, and available to myself or others
- Trust: to be trustworthy; to be loyal, faithful, sincere, and reliable.

Now, have them identify their top 3 out of the values they labeled V's. Then, discuss different areas of life (relationships, school/work, health/wellbeing, personal growth, leisure) and explore how values relate to qualities they desire in one or a couple of these areas. How is exercise helping them come more/less into alignment with these goals?

Here are a couple exercises from the book, *The Happiness Trap* by Russ Harris. You can use these with clients to help them explore values.

IMAGINE YOU'RE EIGHTY YEARS OLD

Imagine you're eighty years old and you're looking back on your life as it is today. Then finish the following sentences:

- I spend too much time worrying about.....
- I spent too little time doing things such as....
- If I could go back in time, then what I would do differently from today onward is....

THE BIG QUESTION

Deep down inside, what do you *really* want?

This exercise helps clients go beyond "I just want to be happy/ rich/ successful". Below are a couple examples of how to dig a little deeper into what an individual really values.

Let's say your client places a high value on relationships and work/education.

Relationships

- What sort of relationships do you want to build?
- How do you want to behave in these relationships?
- What personal qualities do you want to develop?
- How would you treat others if you were the "ideal you" in those relationships?
- What sort of ongoing activities do you want to do with some of these people?



Work/Education

- What personal qualities would you like to bring to the workplace (or place of study)?
- How would you behave toward your colleagues/ employees/ customers/ clients/ fellow students, if you were the “ideal you”?
- What sort of relationships do you want to build in the workplace or at school?
- What skills, knowledge, or personal qualities do you want to develop?

Once you’ve had your client answer these questions, explore how their relationship with exercise aligns with these values. How does it help them move closer to these ideals? Further away?