

Exploring values

Values can be described as what we do in life that gives us a sense of **fulfilment, vitality, and purpose**. Unlike goals they are never “completed”, values are ongoing, ever changing, and flexible. Often what feels the most scary, painful, and vulnerable to us can be linked to a value (e.g. loving someone, being a loyal friend, a caring parent).

A twelve year old girl (Amy) with Leukaemia has had extensive stays in hospital due to treatment. Over the last few days the nurses notice that she seems withdrawn and sad while on the ward.

It can be useful to have a sense of what a **patient’s values** are:

- What continues to be important to this young person even with the constraints of being in hospital or undergoing treatment?

Amy tells the nurses that she is missing out on everything her friends are doing together. She is worried that they won’t want to spend time with her when she is out of hospital, so she hasn’t spoken to them in the last week.

Asking a young person direct questions about their experience can help clarify a value:

- What is it about that activity that you like so much?
- Why is being with that person so important?

Amy values closeness to her friends that she misses while in hospital. Together with the nurse she decides she can still act on this value by writing letters to her friends.

Remember that our own **values as clinicians** are just as important as those of the patients and families we work with:

- What’s important to me in the work that I do and the way I relate to patients and colleagues?
- Does the way that I work reflect this value even when others might disagree with me?