

What is a value?

Values are those inner standards from which you receive the motivation to act as you do and by which you judge behavior (both yours and others).

Values signify what is important and worthwhile. They serve as the basis for moral codes and ethical reflection. Individuals have their own values based on many aspects including family, religion, peers, culture, race, social background, gender, etc. Values guide individuals, professions, communities, and institutions.

1. A value must be chosen freely. If you don't cheat because someone tells you not to, or because you know you will get into trouble with some authority figure, say, you are not freely acting on your values of honesty and integrity.
2. A value is always chosen from among alternatives. If you don't cheat because you are taking a test in an empty room without any resources, you cannot say you chose not to cheat. There must always be an alternative in choosing your value.
3. A value results from a choice made after thoughtful consideration of choices. If you don't cheat because it never occurred to you to do otherwise, there is no value at play. If you cheat thoughtlessly or carelessly, it does not reflect a value. Only when you carefully consider alternatives and consequences and then make a choice is value reflected in that decision.
4. When you value something, it has a positive quality for you. If your decision not to cheat is something you feel good about, then it is based on a value. You like yourself for your honesty and integrity. You prize them and cherish these qualities in yourself.
5. You are willing to publicly stand by your values. Not only are you proud of your choice not to cheat, you will speak about your position and even try to convince others not to cheat. You declare in your actions and your words that you value honesty and integrity.
6. When you have a value, it shows up in every aspect of your life. You don't just talk about having honesty and integrity – you live it. You will spend time and energy on developing your honesty and integrity. You will associate with people who also value honesty and integrity. You will make sacrifices (money or otherwise) to live by your values.
7. Values show up again and again in your actions. Not cheating on one thing does not mean you hold a value. Only when you make the same kind of choices over and over again in similar circumstances is value at play. Because of your honesty and integrity, you don't cheat on anything. From small quizzes to big tests, from board games to big contests, your value is in effect in every circumstance.

Adapted from materials found on: <http://www.mtsu.edu/~u101irm/valuedef.html>

*Originally from Louis E. Rath, Merrill Harmin, and Sidney B. Simon, **Values and Teaching**, Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1978.*