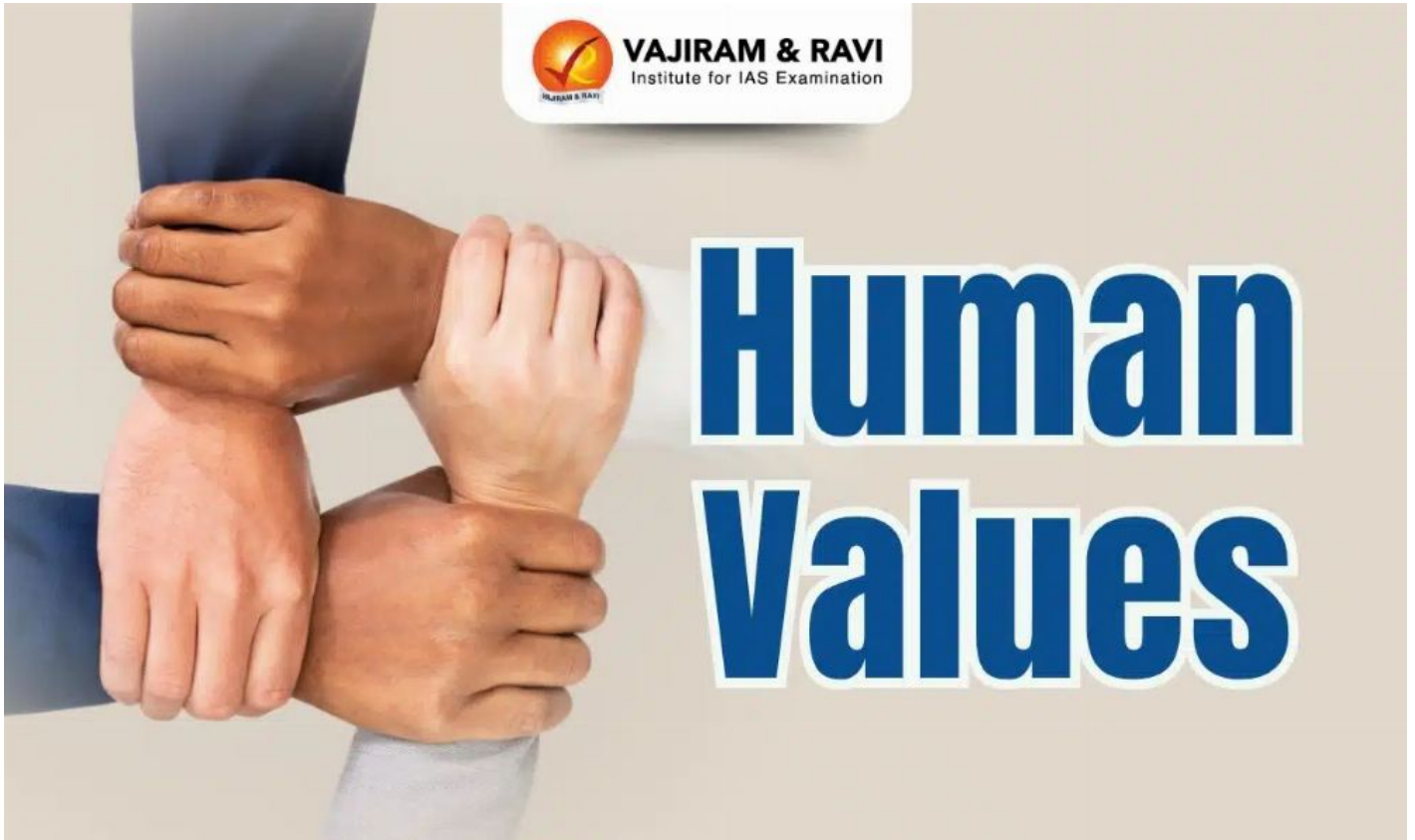


# Human Values, Meaning, Types, Sources, Role in Life and Society

June 10, 2026 • vajiramandravi.com



Human Values are the basic **principles** and **beliefs** that guide our **behavior** and help us understand what is **right and wrong** in life. They shape the way we **think, act, and interact** with others in society. Values like **honesty, respect, kindness, and responsibility** help in building **good relationships** and creating a **peaceful and balanced life**. In a general sense, human values are important because they help individuals become **better people** and contribute positively to **society**.

## Meaning and Concept of Human Values

- Human Values play a major role in shaping our **personality and character**, as the values we follow influence the kind of person we become and how we deal with different situations.
- Human values act like an **inner guide or moral compass**, helping us make the right decisions, especially in difficult or confusing situations where choices are not easy.
- Values such as **honesty, kindness, respect, and responsibility** help us build **strong relationships** and live peacefully with others in society.

- These values are essential for giving **purpose and direction** to life; without them, life can become **confused, directionless, and lacking meaning**.
- Human values are not only important for individuals but also for society, as they promote **harmony, cooperation, mutual respect, and social well-being**.
- They are considered **universal in nature**, meaning people across different cultures and backgrounds share similar core values, which helps in maintaining unity and understanding.
- It is important for both individuals and institutions to **promote and practice these values**, so that society remains ethical, balanced, and progressive.

Also Read : **Technology Ethics**

## Types of Human Values

Human values can be classified in different ways based on their **role, purpose, and importance in life**, which helps us clearly understand how they influence our behavior and decisions at both personal and social levels.

### • Terminal and Instrumental Values

- **Terminal values** are the **final goals or life objectives** that a person wants to achieve, such as **happiness, freedom, self-respect, inner peace, and a secure life**. These values represent the **end results of our efforts** and often become a permanent part of our personality, making them difficult to change over time.
- **Instrumental values**, on the other hand, are the **means or ways of behaving** that help us achieve these goals. Qualities like **hard work, honesty, courage, patience, and discipline** act as tools that guide our actions and help us move towards our desired goals.
- In simple terms, **terminal values tell us what we want in life**, while **instrumental values show us how to achieve it**.

### • Intrinsic and Extrinsic Values

- **Intrinsic values** are those that are **valuable in themselves**, meaning they are important regardless of any external benefit. Values like **truth, happiness, peace, honesty, and love** are considered good because they have their own worth and give meaning to life.
- **Extrinsic values** are those that are **valued because they help us achieve something else**. For example, **money, status, or fame** are not ends in themselves but are useful in achieving goals like security, comfort, or success.
- Thus, **intrinsic values are ends**, while **extrinsic values are means** that support those ends.

### • Individual and Institutional Values

- **Individual values** are the personal beliefs and principles that guide a person's **own behavior, choices, and priorities**, such as **self-respect, ambition, or personal growth**. These values differ from person to person depending on their experiences and background.
- **Institutional values** are promoted by **organizations and social systems** like family, government, religion, or education. For example, **liberty in a democratic system** or **loyalty in marriage** are values encouraged by institutions to maintain order and stability.

- Both types of values are important as they help balance **personal development with social responsibility**.

- **Personal and Social Values**

- **Personal values** focus on the **well-being and development of an individual**, including values like **freedom, self-respect, comfort, and personal success**. They help individuals grow and achieve their goals.
- **Social values** focus on the **well-being of society as a whole**, including values like **equality, justice, cooperation, and peace**. These values ensure harmony and collective progress.
- A balanced life requires maintaining both **individual happiness and social responsibility**.

- **Moral, Immoral, and Amoral Values**

- **Moral values** guide people towards **right and ethical behavior**, such as honesty, fairness, and kindness, which help build a just and responsible society.
- **Immoral values** lead to **wrong or harmful actions**, such as greed, dishonesty, or corruption, which negatively affect both individuals and society.
- **Amoral values** are those that are **not related to morality**, such as preferences for beauty, fitness, or style, and do not involve right or wrong judgments.

- **Other Important Types of Human Values**

- **Personal values** like honesty, discipline, and courage help in building **strong character and self-control**.
- **Social values** like empathy, tolerance, and cooperation help individuals **live peacefully and work together in society**.
- **Moral and ethical values** like integrity and non-violence help in **making the right decisions** and maintaining ethical standards.
- **Spiritual values** like compassion, inner peace, and detachment help individuals find **deeper meaning and emotional balance in life**.

Also Read : **Professional Ethics**

## Sources of Human Values

Sources of human values refer to the various foundations from which individuals learn and develop moral principles. These sources, discussed below, shape our attitudes, behavior, and understanding of right and wrong in society.

- **Family as the primary source:** Family is the first and most important place where values are learned. From childhood, parents shape a child's thinking through their behavior, upbringing, and guidance. Values like honesty, respect, discipline, and responsibility are developed at this stage and often stay for life.
- **Society and social environment:** After family, society plays a major role in shaping values. Schools, peer groups, and community interactions teach discipline, cooperation, equality, and social responsibility. A child learns how to behave in public and adjust to social norms.
- **Education system:** Schools and teachers not only provide knowledge but also help build character. Through rules, activities, and interactions, children learn values like punctuality, teamwork, respect for others, and a sense of duty.

- **Culture and traditions:** Cultural practices, customs, and beliefs influence how people think and behave. These values are passed from generation to generation and provide a sense of identity, discipline, and belonging in society.
- **Religion and spirituality:** Religion teaches moral principles and helps individuals understand the difference between right and wrong. It encourages values like compassion, honesty, forgiveness, and self-control in daily life.
- **Personal factors and personality:** Individual qualities like intelligence, education, and awareness also shape values. People with higher understanding and exposure tend to develop a more refined and balanced value system.
- **Life experiences:** Real-life situations, challenges, and experiences strongly influence values. Lessons learned from success, failure, or hardships often stay longer and shape a person's outlook and decisions.
- **Organizational and professional environment:** At the workplace, individuals adapt to values like discipline, responsibility, teamwork, and accountability. Professional roles often shape behavior and decision-making patterns.
- **Role demands and responsibilities:** Every individual plays multiple roles in life (student, employee, citizen, etc.). These roles influence behavior, and sometimes conflicts between roles help individuals refine and strengthen their values.
- **Constitution and legal framework:** The values enshrined in laws and the Constitution, such as justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity, guide citizens' behavior and promote fairness and harmony in society.

Also Read : **Media Ethics**

## Significance of Human Values in Individual Life

The significance of human values in individual life can be understood through the following aspects, which highlight how they guide behavior, decisions, and personal development.

- **Foundation of character and inner strength:** Human values shape personality and guide actions, helping individuals achieve inner peace, clarity, and personal growth.
- **Support in decision-making:** Values act as a moral compass, guiding individuals to make right and balanced choices in daily life.
- **Build strong relationships:** Qualities like honesty, empathy, and respect foster trust and strengthen personal and professional relationships.
- **Promote resilience and emotional stability:** Values such as patience and humility help individuals handle challenges positively and stay emotionally balanced.
- **Enhance professional and social life:** Strong values build credibility, improve reputation, and contribute to a trustworthy and ethical environment.

## Human Values in Public Administration

Human values in public administration are the ethical principles guiding the behavior of public officials. They ensure fairness, accountability, and trust in governance, as discussed below.

- **Guide discretionary power:** Since laws cannot cover every situation, administrators often have to use their judgment. Values like fairness, objectivity, and justice act as an inner compass, helping them make unbiased decisions and preventing misuse of power or favoritism.
- **Help resolve ethical dilemmas:** Officers frequently face situations where two good options conflict, such as efficiency vs accountability. Values help them prioritize what is more important in a given situation while maintaining transparency and public trust.
- **Shape organizational culture:** The values followed by leaders influence the behavior of the entire administration. When senior officials show humility, respect, and accessibility, it encourages staff to act responsibly and treat citizens with dignity, creating a positive work culture.
- **Promote human-centric governance:** Values like empathy and compassion ensure that decisions are not just technically correct but also sensitive to people's needs, especially the poor and vulnerable sections.
- **Focus on welfare of the weakest (Antyodaya):** A strong value system pushes administrators to prioritize marginalized groups. Decisions are made not just on efficiency but also on social justice and inclusiveness.
- **Ensure accountability and integrity:** Values discourage corruption, bias, and misuse of public resources. They help build honesty and responsibility in administration, which strengthens public trust.
- **Improve quality of public service:** Ethical values make governance more transparent, responsive, and citizen-oriented, leading to better delivery of services and increased satisfaction among people.
- **Balance efficiency with fairness:** Values help maintain a balance between quick decision-making and justice, ensuring that urgency does not compromise fairness or due process.

Also Read : **Business Ethics**

## Human Values and Professional Life

Human values in professional life guide ethical conduct, responsibility, and integrity at the workplace. They promote trust, teamwork, and accountability, ensuring long-term success and credibility, as discussed below.

- **Human values connect our thoughts and actions:** They are the basic beliefs like honesty, integrity, compassion, and humility that guide how we behave in everyday life. They help us choose what is right, even in difficult situations.
- **Act as an inner moral guide:** In professional life, rules and codes may exist, but values act as an internal compass. They help us take ethical decisions, especially when rules are unclear or situations are complex.
- **Build trust and credibility:** When a person consistently follows values like honesty and responsibility, it creates trust among colleagues, clients, and society. Over time, this builds a strong and reliable reputation.
- **Core Human Values at Work**
  - **Integrity and truthfulness:** Doing the right thing with honesty and fairness, even when no one is watching. It means avoiding shortcuts and staying committed to duties and responsibilities.
  - **Empathy and compassion:** Understanding others' feelings and showing kindness. This improves teamwork, reduces conflicts, and helps in handling criticism in a positive way.
  - **Humility and respect:** Being open to learning and valuing everyone's contribution, regardless of position. It creates a healthy and inclusive work environment.
  - **Self-discipline and emotional balance:** Staying calm and focused, especially in stressful situations. It helps in making better decisions without anger or frustration.

- **Link Between Human Values and Professional Ethics**

- **Foundation of professional ethics:** While workplace rules tell us what to do, human values guide us on how to do it in the right way. They fill the gaps where rules cannot reach.
- **Encourage collaboration and teamwork:** Respect for different opinions and backgrounds promotes inclusiveness and better cooperation in organizations.
- **Ensure fairness in decision-making:** Values help avoid bias and ensure that decisions are just, transparent, and beneficial for all stakeholders.
- **Support long-term success:** True success is not just about achievements but also about maintaining ethics, relationships, and social responsibility.
- **Promote accountability and responsibility:** Value-based individuals take ownership of their actions and are willing to accept mistakes and improve.

## Role of Family and Society in Inculcating Values

Family and society play a crucial role in shaping human values by instilling morals, traditions, and social norms. They nurture ethical behavior, responsibility, and empathy, as discussed below.

- **Family as the first source of values:** A child's earliest learning happens at home, where parents teach basic values like honesty, respect, and responsibility through both words and actions, shaping the child's character from the beginning.
- **Learning through observation:** Children naturally imitate what they see around them. When they observe elders behaving with kindness, discipline, and respect, they slowly adopt these values in their own behavior.
- **Emotional and moral development:** A supportive and loving family environment helps children develop empathy, patience, and tolerance, which are essential for building strong moral character.
- **Role of elders and traditions:** Elders act as role models and pass on cultural values, customs, and traditions, which help children understand discipline, respect, and a sense of belonging.
- **Society as a wider learning space:** Schools, peer groups, and community interactions expose children to diversity and teach values like cooperation, equality, and social responsibility beyond the family.
- **Formation of right and wrong understanding:** Continuous guidance from family and society helps children develop a clear sense of what is right and wrong, enabling them to make ethical choices in life.
- **Building strong and responsible individuals:** A strong value system gives children confidence to resist negative influences and grow into responsible, ethical citizens who contribute positively to society.

## Challenges to Human Values in Modern Society

Modern society faces several challenges that weaken human values due to rapid social and technological changes. The following points highlight key issues affecting ethics, empathy, and moral conduct, as discussed below.

- **Materialism and Consumerism:** Success is increasingly judged by wealth and status, which reduces the importance of values like honesty, simplicity, and contentment in everyday life.
- **Technological Overdependence:** Excessive use of phones and social media limits real human interaction, weakening emotional bonds, empathy, and social understanding.

- **Self-Centered Attitude:** People are becoming more focused on personal goals and rights, often ignoring responsibilities towards society and the needs of others.
- **Decline of Family and Cultural Values:** Busy lifestyles and migration reduce family bonding, weakening the transfer of moral values and traditions to younger generations.
- **Unethical Practices in Work and Public Life:** Intense competition encourages shortcuts like corruption and dishonesty, lowering the importance of integrity and fairness.
- **Rising Economic Inequality:** The growing gap between rich and poor creates dissatisfaction and weakens trust in justice, equality, and social harmony.
- **Weak Community Bonds:** Reduced social interaction and busy lives have weakened the sense of belonging, cooperation, and mutual support in society.

## Human Values Learned from Inspirational Personalities

Human values learned from inspirational personalities reflect the principles of integrity, courage, and compassion demonstrated through their lives. These values guide individuals towards ethical living and responsible conduct, as discussed below.

- **Mahatma Gandhi**
  - Emphasized **Truth (Satya)** and **Non-violence (Ahimsa)** as guiding principles.
  - Showed that **peaceful methods** can bring major social and political change.
  - Lived a life of **simplicity** and **integrity**, proving values matter more than power.
  - Key lesson: **Change begins with oneself.**
- **Nelson Mandela**
  - Example of **Resilience** and **Forgiveness**.
  - Chose **reconciliation over revenge** after long imprisonment.
  - Promoted **unity and peace** in a divided society.
  - Key lesson: **Forgiveness is a powerful tool for healing.**
- **Abraham Lincoln**
  - Upheld **Justice, Equality, and Democracy**.
  - Played a key role in the **abolition of slavery**.
  - Demonstrated **strong leadership during crisis**.
  - Key lesson: **Stand firm for what is right despite challenges.**
- **Swami Vivekananda**
  - Promoted **Self-confidence** and **Service to humanity**.
  - Key lesson: **Believe in yourself and work for others.**
- **Dalai Lama**
  - Emphasizes **Peace, Compassion, and Inner Happiness**.
  - Key lesson: **Kindness is essential for a better world.**
- **A. P. J. Abdul Kalam**
  - Inspired youth with values of **Hard Work, Discipline, and Dreams**.
  - Key lesson: **Dream big and achieve through dedication.**
- **Martin Luther King Jr.**
  - Advocated **Equality, Justice, and Non-violence**.

- Promoted the idea of **unity in diversity**.
- Key lesson: **Fight injustice with dignity and peaceful means**.

- **Albert Einstein**

- Represented **Curiosity** and **Scientific Temper**.
- Encouraged **questioning, learning, and critical thinking**.
- Key lesson: **Knowledge and curiosity drive progress**.

---

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/human-values/>

© Vajiram & Ravi. For personal use only.