



Introduction to Journaling

Helpful conversations with yourself

What happens to us is not as important as the meaning we assign to it.

Journaling helps to sort this out.

Michael Hyatt

What is journaling?

Journalling is a simple practise of writing about what is going on within you. You could describe it as having a kind and caring conversation to understand yourself better. Making time to write about: -

- certain feelings and emotions that you are struggling with.
- situations and people that make you feel uncomfortable.
- why you do not want to tackle certain issues.
- what direction you want to move towards in the future
- what steps you could take to bring about improvement in your life.
- what you are grateful for in life

The most important thing to keep in mind about journalling is, that you cannot get it wrong. It's a simple tool to help you to declutter your mind so that you can get to see things differently.

It's best to approach journalling with an attitude of curiosity. You are looking to understand what may be driving certain thoughts, feelings and behaviour and how you can support yourself through any changes you may want to make. Getting thoughts down onto paper can help to lighten the internal pressure. It can feel like you are taking a step back and looking at things from a different perspective.

How can it help?

There are endless ways that journalling can help to support you as part of your health and wellbeing routine. Just as clearing out spaces in our home or work environment can feel cathartic – the same experience can happen when you get into the habit of noticing, but not acting on unhelpful thoughts in your mind. Journaling can act as a gentle tidy up. Helping you to have a fresh perspective on what is going on in your life.

Benefits of journalling

There is no right or wrong way to journal – but the practise of doing it has been proven to help many people. For example: -

- **Helps to reduce stress and anxiety.**
Writing about what is making you feel overwhelmed or anxious is a healthy way of getting it out of your mind and on to the paper. This simple process can act as a release valve for

bottled up feelings and emotions – and to improve your energy levels. It can help you to put a distance between you, the person who is writing, and the feelings and emotions that you are experiencing.

- **Helps cope with depression and low mood.**

Many of us will experience times when we feel low and can't explain what it is that is impacting us. Writing about the 'not knowing' or the 'not understanding' can be very useful. Part of being a human being is that there will be times when we will struggle and find things challenging.

- Writing about our feelings without judgement is an acknowledgment of how we are feeling without making it mean that there is something wrong with us. Sometimes we go through periods like this. That's why journaling can help, as it provides a way to let those emotions out where they can cause us less harm.

- **Improves confidence and self-esteem.**

Acknowledging that you are experiencing certain doubtful thoughts is the first step to overcoming them. Lack of confidence is a natural human experience to feel especially when doing things that are out of your comfort zone – so don't be hard on yourself if you are experiencing doubt.

- Sometimes doubt can arise because you are comparing yourself to others or having high expectations of yourself. Journaling can help by asking yourself certain questions to uncover what assumptions you are making about yourself or about other people.

- This can help you to get things into perspective, especially if you adopt an encouraging and supportive attitude towards yourself. Journaling can act as your inner coach rather than your inner critic.

- **Helps to prioritise and plan for the future.**

Feelings of overwhelm and fear can stop us from taking action. Having a journaling practise can help you to identify what it is you need to put in place for yourself to feel safe and secure. This could be something as simple as breaking things down into small steps. This can help to reduce feelings of anxiety and overwhelm. You could start by asking yourself questions such as:

Q. What benefit am I getting by avoiding taking action?

Q. What one simple thing could I do today that I have been putting off?

Writing freely about how you want to be showing up every day in your life can start to open your mind to possibilities that you may never have thought of. Journaling is a great tool for letting the imagination run free and allowing yourself to play with possibility. Don't rule anything out.

Different ways to journal

- **Freewriting** – this is a way of writing where you just let whatever is on your mind pour out onto the pages. This can be a simple way to start journaling. Writing with no intention on your mind other than to express what is going on internally. You can write for as long as you need to – this will change depending on the issues you are writing about.
- **Prompts** – This is beneficial if there is a particular issue or problem you are struggling with. Having a set of questions to answer can help you to uncover what may be making you feel a certain way. For example, asking questions such as
 - Q. What am I making this situation mean about me?
 - Q. What have I been doing and continue to do that I know is not working for me?
 - Q. What am I putting off doing?
 - Q. Why is this situation upsetting me so much?
 - Q. What am I assuming is going to happen?
 - Q. How would I advise my best friend if they were experiencing this issue.
 - Q. If I knew that I could handle whatever happens what would my next step be?
 - Q. Looking back over past things that I have faced – what lessons did I learn that I could apply to this situation.
 - Q. What simple systems could I put in place to make myself feel safe?
 - Q. How will I support myself through this transition.

Get curious – the whole point about using prompt questions is to explore what may be going on in your unconscious. This can help you to become more self-aware so that you can have a more compassionate and caring attitude towards yourself. Respond to yourself in the same way you would a good friend. Curiosity is the key to helping yourself.

Gratitude - Having a gratitude journal is a great way to keep yourself focused on what is going well in your life. When we keep our focus on what we are grateful for, it becomes difficult to get caught up in negativity or lack. Bringing our attention to the simple things we sometimes take for granted can be a great way to keep us in the present moment and to take life in our stride.

When to journal?

It's entirely up to you. It's a personal practise. Find what works and just start.

Some people, like to make it a morning routine.

Writing over a cup of tea/coffee before you get into the day. It can be as simple as writing about:

What is my intention for today?

- How do I want to be feeling today?
- What am I going to do today that I have been putting off?
- What 3 things am I grateful for this morning?

Instead, you may choose to write at the end of the day. Asking questions such as: -

- What am I most proud of myself for today?
- What made a difference to me today?
- What 3 things am I grateful for today?

Or you may prefer to just write when you feel the need to.

For example, if you want to brainstorm ideas about changing jobs, starting a new business, or coping with a challenging experience. It doesn't matter what the issue is – journaling can help you to get some clarity and perspective around whatever you are dealing with. Just write like know one is judging – let all those feelings and emotions, frustration, and anger out,

What is important to you?

Another useful thing to journal about is your values. What is it you care about in life and why do you get upset about certain things. Journaling on these and similar questions can provide you with great insight into what drives your thinking and behaviour. Knowing yourself in this way can be helpful to ensure that you are living in alignment with your values. Much of our unhappiness can be caused because we are not “walking our talk”. We are not in alignment with what we say we care about in life. Some questions to consider: -

Q. What is important to me at this time in my life.

Q. What drives and motivates me?

Q. Who inspires me?

Q. What upsets me?

Q. What are my strengths

Q. What are the issues I care about?

Q. What qualities do I want to be remembered for?

Q. When am I happiest? What am I doing?

How to journal?

There are no rules. I prefer to write using a pen or pencil in a lined notebook. Other times I write on loose pages and then destroy them. Its more important that I write rather than what I write on.

Some people prefer to use digital devices – go for whatever suits you. The most important thing is that you get into the habit of doing it – journaling is a life tool that can help you to feel better, get unstuck and shift your energy levels. Just like any tool it won't be of much help if you don't use it.

How often or for how long?

Again, this is entirely up to you. It's your practise,

Don't let it become something else that you feel that you must put on your to do list. Journaling is a practise aimed at reducing pressure – not adding to it by making you feel that you 'have' to do it. I have been journaling for over forty years and it was never something I felt I had to do. I started doing it because of the benefit I felt from writing. It helped to create some order for myself when my mind was in chaos.

If you are new to journalling – I would suggest you keep it simple and short. Start doing it for between 5 – 15 mins and then increase it as and when you feel like it.

Should I read over what I have written?

Just the process of writing can make you feel better. There is no need to go back over what you have written unless you are journalling to get some clarity around a particular issue. Then you can go back and develop the points that you recorded.

Remember, journaling is a simple way to become more self-aware which is essential to having a healthy relationship with yourself.

“Without knowing yourself there is no peace”.

Jiddu Krishnamurti

How to overcome resistance?

Journaling is a practise which has been proven to help people to manage their emotional and mental wellbeing, but it won't suit everyone. If you want to start a journaling practise but you feel there is some resistance to doing it, then getting to understand the resistance can be a good place to start.

Ask yourself some questions to find out what is getting in the way. It may be a belief that the writing has to make sense, or that it needs to be written perfectly. Nothing could be further from the truth. Journaling is for your eyes only - no one is going to critique it. Just let your thoughts tumble out on to the paper (or laptop screen).

Here's a few questions to get you started: -

- Q. What am I assuming is going to happen if I start writing?
- Q. What am I making it mean about me if I start a journaling practise?
- Q? How can I help myself when I feel vulnerable?

The aim of journalling is to not only help us gain clarity on what may be triggering certain feelings, but the practise can also help to explore what else is possible for us.

'When we transform the stress in us, we get to discover what is best in us'.

I hope you have found this "Introduction to Journaling" helpful and that you consider making it part of your self-care routine. Taking time to get to know yourself through journaling may be one of the best investments you will ever make for tapping into and discovering your full potential.

**"what lies behind us and what lies before us
are tiny matters compared to what lies within us".**

Ralph Waldo Emerson