

How To Keep a Journal

Continuing this discussion of stress management techniques is journaling. A journal refers to a personal book that you use to meditate with yourself. It's a way for you to get in touch with yourself, your life, and your problems. It is a **safe** place where you can vent your feelings and frustrations so that they don't **eat you up inside**. It's also a place for you to apply coping skills to the difficulties that you encounter in your recovery. You don't have to worry about writing in it everyday or limiting yourself to recording the events of your life. The main thing is that you use it.

Besides its stress management benefits, journaling can help in other ways too. The most important one is that as wonderful as a counselor, psychiatrist, or other mental health professional is, you are the one who can help yourself the most. Your journal is the place where you can **do your own therapy**. Furthermore, a journal is a place where you can fully be yourself without having to deal with the judgments of others. Finally, journaling is a way to ventilate and to get difficult and troubling issues out of your "head" so that they don't overwhelm you.

The following tips will get you started on benefiting from journaling.

1. Get something that you will enjoy writing, drawing, or pasting in. It may sound trivial to some, but many people say that they find it much easier to connect with their feelings and thoughts when they have an inviting journal to write in. Blank books are quite inexpensive and can be found at stationery or book stores. You can of course also use a composition book or spiral binder.

Some people use their personal computer as a diary. If this works for you then that's okay. The problem with this technique is that a computer is not very transportable and ideally, your journal should be something that you can take anywhere. Avoid using loose leaf pages. They are often lost and you miss out the opportunity to look at your progress as time goes by.

2. You don't have to write. You can also draw or scribble. Some people paste items into their journal. This is your safe place where you can withdraw and be yourself.
3. Journal regularly. Those who benefit the most from journaling are those people who spend some time everyday working their journal. They set aside a time, perhaps early in the morning or late at night, to sit down for a half hour and journal. You will find that such discipline will pay off for you by raising your self esteem and your peace of mind.
4. Start anywhere. You need not begin with any particular event. You can start wherever you are. Perhaps you can start your journal entries with the phrase, "I am now feeling... This morning I was feeling..." Once you get started you will usually find that your soul opens up and you can begin to process emotions, reactions, events, and perceptions.

If you continue to find it difficult to get started, consider some of these trigger questions:

- A. What makes me happy?

- B. If my life could be any way that I want, what would it be like?
 - C. What do I like about myself?
 - D. What made me feel sad today?
 - E. What are the stresses in my life?
5. Use your journal to identify and process cognitive errors and automatic thoughts. You will find it helpful in boosting your mood and improving the thoughts that circulate around your head by examining one or two events and emotional responses that you experienced during the day. This way you can examine the way that you are responding to yourself and change negative thinking and behavior.
 6. Keep your journal confidential. The privacy of the journal should not be violated by anyone. You don't have to share your writings with anybody unless you want to. You may want to consider finding a safe place to keep it where others cannot get to it easily. On the other hand, the vast majority of people in our lives will respect our privacy if we make it clear that this is what we wish. Also, keep in mind, that if the worst should happen and your privacy is violated, it says a lot more about the violator than about you. At least you have the good sense and courage to vent your feelings on paper.
 7. Use your journal as a way to track progress on the accomplishment of your goals. An acquaintance rewrites his goals every day in his journal. After each goal he jots down the progress that he has made toward accomplishing the goal and one thing that he can do tomorrow that will help bring him closer to accomplishing the goal.
 8. Use your journal as a self esteem album. Consider making a daily ritual of writing ten things that you accomplished today. This will help you see yourself as the disciplined person and winner that you can be.