

Journaling

Many people use their jobs, food, alcohol, drugs, sex, etc., to avoid thinking about events in their lives. These behaviors dull our pain by making us less thoughtful and aware.

Holding back thoughts and feelings can weaken the immune system and put us at greater risk for elevated cholesterol levels, high blood pressure, heart attack, cancer, and other types of illnesses. The more we try to suppress thoughts, the more likely it is that they will resurface.

Psychologically confronting upsetting experiences produces long-term benefits in psychological and physical health.

Research has shown that writing about our deepest thoughts and feelings results in improved moods, a more positive outlook, and better physical health.

Some people find that writing about experiences is as beneficial as talking about them. When we write about upheavals in our lives, we can better organize, understand, and deal with them.

Writing in a journal is the ideal form of self-communication. Putting pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) is the easiest way to express our deepest feelings with complete privacy.

Advantages of Journaling

1. Gives you a few moments to hear yourself think, which can increase your sense of well-being and give you a more positive outlook on life.
2. Allows you to write anything you think and explore alternative ways of thinking, feeling, acting, and being, without external restraints or judgments.
3. Provides a type of self-therapy. For some people, journaling can accomplish the same goals as working with a professional and can improve self-discipline, analytical ability, and self-counseling skills.
4. Encourages introspection as you finely tune your perceptions of the world, which can make you more sensitive to others' behavior and help you view events around you with a more educated eye.
5. Helps organize your life.
6. Suggests how certain days, times of day, stresses, interactions with people, and physiological factors affect your mood and behavior.
7. Helps you cope with tragedy, solve problems, make tough decisions, and become more creative.
8. Allows assessment of problems requiring attention, and leads to corrective action and/or constructive, positive change.
9. Helps you avoid the following pitfalls of the thinking process when faced with making major decisions:
 - Exaggerating the importance of making the decision.
 - Believing there is only one right answer.
 - Fearing that you will make a mistake.
 - Not wanting responsibility for the outcome.
10. Provides an outlet for anger so you can explode without risking your job or relationship.
11. Provides a place to note significant events so that in the future you can relive an event and your feelings about it.

The following guidelines can help make journaling beneficial

1. Select a loose-leaf notebook or decorative cloth-covered book. Use a special pen if you choose.
2. Write whenever you feel you need to. If possible, set aside a few minutes each day to write in your journal. Creating this special time, when you are alone with your thoughts and feelings, will help make journal writing a habit.
3. Try to write when and where you won't be interrupted too often.
4. To begin your journal, write about the issues you are currently dealing with. Write about what is happening in your life and how you feel about it.
5. Don't try to write a masterpiece. Your journal is for you to read, and writing is most effective when it flows without excessive mental editing.
6. Date entries in your journal so you can reread them to learn about how you deal with your problems.
7. Be sure to record what you are grateful for. People who write only about problems, hassles, or neutral events don't receive the same benefits. People who write about what they are thankful for feel better, happier, and more optimistic. Gratitude:
 - Buffers you from physically and psychologically harmful emotions such as envy, resentment, and regret.
 - Helps you feel connected and nourished.
 - Keeps your happiness momentum going.
8. About once a week look back at your journal and search for relationships between events and mood changes. Reread your entries to help you recognize patterns, themes, self-destructive behavior, and areas of growth.
9. Keep your journal for yourself. If you plan to show your writing to someone else, you tend to orient your writing to that person. Explain on the cover or first page that this book is not to be read without your permission.

The overwhelming majority of people report feelings of relief, happiness, and contentment soon after they write in their journal. Some people feel sad or depressed immediately after writing, but these feelings usually go away in an hour or so.

Ideally, journaling should bring a measure of distance and perspective to your life.

Topics some people have used for journaling include:

1. What's Going In My Life Right Now?
2. Where Is My Life Taking Me?
3. Why Am I Feeling the Way I'm Feeling?
4. Choices Made and Not Made
5. The Best or Worst Thing That Ever Happened to Me
6. What I Did Today
7. My Goals
8. People and/or Events Important to Me
9. What Would My Body Say If It Could Talk?
10. What I Am Grateful For