

Lesson 8

Journaling Your Anxieties Away

Introduction

Journaling can help you explore the relationship between your thoughts, feelings and behaviours and therefore makes you more self-aware.

If you feel like you want a better balance, journaling can help you summon up your personal resources and provide an account of good things that have happened in your day, which serves as a reminder that your day is made up of more than just one emotion.

Reflecting on your day allows you to process and make sense of your emotions.

Recording your emotional responses to situations can reduce anxiety, as it processes your feelings and prompts you to reframe your thoughts in a more positive light.

The science

Studies show that journaling in a structured way is an effective tool to understanding your emotions. It can also help you change your feelings; help you work through problems; set goals; and come to terms with challenging situations.

The best results of journaling are found when it's done consistently, for instance, daily; however, even 'dabbling' with it can help relieve anxiety.

Journaling:

- Decreases symptoms of a range of health conditions
- Improves memory and processing
- Boosts your immune system
- Reduces procrastination and avoidance behaviours
- Helps you view a situation from different perspectives

Why this helps

Journaling can help you detect and deal with unhealthy thinking patterns and behaviours that you're not always aware of.

It gives you that sense of control back over your life that has been absent for far too long. The anxiety might have crept up on you so gradually that before you knew it, it had taken hold of you, affecting you from the moment you wake up to the moment you go to sleep.

Constant worrying can affect your sleep, and it makes sense that by getting your worries out of your head and into a journal, you'll be able to break the cycle that

tends to result in a broken night's sleep. What's more, your journal can be available to you whenever you need it.

Exercise

Follow this exercise to start journaling your way from anxious to calm.

Simply spouting out words on a page is unlikely to lead to the desired change in your levels of anxiety, and a more constructive approach is necessary. There are things to consider before putting pen to paper:

- Write in a private space, free from distractions
- Write at least once a day
- Take time to reflect after writing
- Structure the writing however you feel
- If you're using journaling to overcome trauma, don't feel that you have to write the details down, just write what feels ok for you
- As well as writing your negative thoughts down, you can also record your positive ones too, e.g. any achievements that day, what you'd like to achieve tomorrow, and what you're grateful for
- Keep your journal private and to yourself

Record your emotional responses to events that have happened today, both positive and negative. Positive experiences will allow you to re-live those feelings, whereas negative ones will enable processing of them.

If you're struggling to start, try and call to mind any situations today that made you feel particularly happy, sad, angry, confused, scared, or embarrassed.

BASIC EMOTIONS JOURNAL

Here's an example journal prompt of a positive feeling:

*'I had a *good feeling when.....*

I felt (describe).....(describe)I was (location) and I recall noticing (seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, tasting).....

..... (I was doing).....

I was (on my own or with?)

***'It's nice to remember this feeling' and I am comforted to know that I can have more of these feelings from now on.*

Use a similar prompt for a negative feeling, replacing * with a 'bad' feeling and lastly, ** *'It was helpful to have worked through that situation as I've processed that emotion, accepted it, and re-framed my thoughts on it.'*

Journal to banish anxiety

What is going on in your life? What are your current thoughts and feelings? What is your main concern? What are you worried about right now?

- Reflect on it. Take a moment to relax, be still, breathe, and focus. Start sentences with "I" statements like "I feel...", "I want...", "I have ... and, "I think..." Try to use the present tense, e.g. "Today...", "Right now...", or "At the moment..."
- Explore your thoughts and feelings in your writing. If your mind wanders off the subject, take time to refocus, read what you have just written, and continue.
- Aim to write for at least 5 minutes.
- Summarise your writing by reading it over and being introspective about it, starting with the statement, e.g. 'As I read this, I notice...' and if you have any actions that stem from your writing, jot them down here.

Bonus Tips

1. Choose a time to do your journaling every day.
2. Use the simple prompts in the forms provided to get you started.

What have you learnt?

Taking time to journal about your thoughts, feelings and behaviours helps you become more self-aware, experience more balanced feelings, problem solve, set goals, understand your emotions, and better manage tricky situations. It has a range of physical health benefits and is also good for your memory.

What next?

We hope you have enjoyed these lessons and are now feeling more calm than anxious.

Naturally, there'll be times when you're anxious, but this is normal. You've learned many ways of handling this better and this will bring a sense of calm to your life.