Journaling- A Wellness Tool!

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Institute for Wellness and Recovery Initiatives
Collaborative Support Programs of New Jersey

www.welltacc.org
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Record one thing you are grateful for ...

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Journaling

Journaling is a method of recording your thoughts, experiences, and emotions in a notebook or other medium. Journaling can involve reflecting on steps toward one’s life ambitions, challenging negative thought patterns, and even showing your appreciation for small positive things in your life. Expressive writing can benefit your mind by allowing you to work through challenging situations, express inner emotions, and find an outlet for your creativity.

Have you ever used a journal or a diary? If so, what did use your journal or diary for? What did you get out of the experience? If not, have you ever thought of journaling before, and what has stopped you from doing so?

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Benefits of Journaling

There are a number of benefits associated with journaling. Research shows some of the benefits correlated with Journaling/Expressive Writing are:\(^1\)

- Fewer visits to the doctor, primarily stress related
- Improved immune system, liver, and lung functioning
  - A reduction in blood pressure
  - Reduced absenteeism from work
  - After a job loss, faster re-employment
  - Better mood and feelings of well-being
  - A reduction in depressive symptoms
- Improvements in memory and grade point averages
  - Reduction in post-traumatic symptoms

There are also benefits related specifically to our Wellness Dimensions which include:

Physical Wellness
- Increased performance with sports
- Increased effectiveness with diet and exercise
- Help keep track of medical needs, appointments, and tracking medication/treatment effects

Social Wellness
- Increased ability to work through challenging social situations
- Reduce anxiety in public by having a journal to write in

Mental/Emotional Wellness
- Process emotions and think through actions related to personal challenges
- Reflect on positive experiences and develop sense of gratitude

Occupational Wellness
- Track career achievements and new knowledge learned
- Reflect on professional growth and set career goals

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**Environmental Wellness**
- Provide an escape from difficult environments
- Help develop a sense of gratitude for nature

**Financial Wellness**
- Help track where your money is going
- Journaling about things you are saving for can be a great way to motivate your effort

**Intellectual Wellness**
- Help track progress toward academic goals
- Help you to reflect on things you have learned and process how you can use them in your personal/professional life

**Spiritual**
- Journaling can be a way to connect with a higher power
- Can assist in prayer, reflecting on spiritual writings, and developing a sense of appreciation

What do you see as the benefits of journaling and expressive writing?

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There are several different types of journaling including:

- Stream of Consciousness
- Thought Provoking
- Illustrative Discovery Journaling
  - Gratitude Journaling
  - Reflective Journaling

Stream of Consciousness

Stream of Consciousness writing is when you use your journal to write down anything that you are feeling. This type of writing is most helpful in working through something you are struggling with including emotional, social, and health challenges. Stream of Consciousness writing usually involves fast, easy and non-stop writing. Sometimes this is where the real truth lies when you are writing without censoring.

**Exercise:** Write about a problem, issue, or anything at all that you are currently facing. Start with five minutes and increase time as you go, try not to let the pen stop.

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Thought Provoking Journaling

Thought Provoking Journaling is a slow thoughtful writing and takes time to record what you want to say. This type of journaling begins with a subject matter in mind, and you write about that issue or experience. Some people find it helpful to read a quote and write about how that quote is relevant in their life right now. You can use this type of journaling to record personal goals or special projects you are working on. You can also write down personal successes already accomplished. You can also listen to music or look at a picture and discuss how that art pertains to your life.

Exercise: Write about a goal that you are working on. Describe where you are with this goal, how it makes you feel to have accomplished even the smallest steps, and where you hope to be a year from now with that goal.
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“How you look at a situation is very important, because how you think about a problem may defeat you before you ever do anything about it. When you get discouraged or depressed, try changing your attitude from negative to positive and see how life can change for you. Remember, your attitude toward a situation can help you to change it... you create the very atmosphere for defeat or victory.”
-Franco Harris

Illustrative Discovery Journaling

Not everyone connects with writing or enjoys the writing process. Some of us are more visual in the way we learn and express ourselves. Illustrative discovery journaling is a method which uses visual pictures to record emotions and thoughts. Illustrative discovery journaling can benefit those with a more visual learning style by using images, drawings, magazine cutouts, and other visually creative ways to express themselves.
Reflective Journaling

Reflective Journaling is similar to using a diary, except you are not writing to “the diary” you are recording your thoughts to yourself. Reflective journaling can help you in finding your true beliefs and explore spirituality in a personal way. Record dreams, moods and feelings at the moment and write them in detail with this journaling technique. Music, your favorite beverage, or scented candles may help to make this writing even more enjoyable. Some people find it helpful to reflect on past memories and why they are important.

**Exercise:** Write about a positive memory that you can think of. Why is this memory important to you, and how do you feel when you think about it? What did you learn from this situation?
Gratitude Journaling

Gratitude journaling is a method of journaling which utilizes self-reflection to take notice of and find value in daily achievements and “life’s gifts,” both big and small. Negative thinking can be overwhelming, and may be detrimental to one’s personal recovery and wellness plan. It can be helpful to create a separate journal which only contains things you are grateful for. Some people have found it helpful to establish a time each day to write in this journal, such as before bed, to make sure to always appreciate daily success. Another option could be to try to write at least 5-10 things you are grateful for each day. One approach that seems to work for people is to do timed gratitude writing, where you write everything you are grateful for over the course of 5 minutes. Some people have even tried to write 100 things they are grateful for each day; even small thing like shoes and a pencil could be worth your gratitude.

**Exercise:** Write about something you are grateful for from this week. Describe why you are grateful for it, how it makes you feel, and why it is important to you.
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Journaling Strategies

When considering how to start journaling, it can be important to choose the medium that best suits your needs such as a notebook, computer, mobile device/smart-phone, etc. You may also want to choose the type of journal (gratitude, illustrative discovery journal, reflective journal). You can also consider what type of writing instrument (type of pen, pencil) works best for you. It can be helpful to consider reading a few books on journaling to get ideas about how you could enhance your own journaling. Since a journal is deeply personal, you may want to consider if you will share your journal with anyone. Some people never share their journal because it is too personal while others benefit from sharing their writing with close friends, family, and even therapists. Some people join a “journal club” to discuss their own process with others, and work on strategies to keep journaling going. It may also be helpful to have a time each day to journal so as to condition yourself to the routine of writing.

What are five strategies you can use?

1)  
2)  
3)  
4)  
5)  

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Electronic Journaling

Electronic journaling is the wave of the future for many. Most social media websites, such as Facebook and Twitter, are based on the concept that people enjoy sharing their lives publically. There are other websites, such as LiveJournal, which allow the user to privately or publically post content into their journal and control to whom they want to provide access. A growing trend has been with the usage of SmartPhones and journaling. For phones like the iPhone, there are applications that allow you to journal and keep a private website. Here are some general resources:

- My Diary. www.my-diary.org/
  - Free website which offers a space for journaling online. You can share your journal entries with others and read other public entries from other users.
- Live Journal: www.livejournal.com
  - Online journaling site which allows you to post your journal online. There is also a social networking capacity to this medium so that only designated “friends” can comment on your posting.
- Myspace: www.myspace.com
  - Social media platform which allows you to post diaries publically for others to read.
- Facebook: www.facebook.com
  - Most popular social media site which allows you to post short updates regarding your life. You can post pictures, videos, and text for others to read.
- iPhone applications for personal journals- these applications can be used on your smartphone to track your journal. This can be a convenient way to write, even while you are traveling.
  - Kemba
    - www.appshouter.com/kemba-personal-journal-iphone-app-review/
  - iDiary
    - www.triplecreeks.com/idiaryiphone.aspx
  - Momento App-
    - www.momentoapp.com
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