

# **Journal Therapy**

*Presented by Kathleen Adams, LPC & adapted by Julie Honeycutt for Christians.*

## **Why does Journaling work?**

- A journal literally lets us read our minds.
- Journaling helps increase tolerance for ambiguity and paradox.
- This results in training the pathway between the frontal lobe and the limbic system to stay open longer when you are experiencing stress and stress related chemical release in the body.
- Journaling brings clarity to paradox helping you see that your opposing feelings can coexist.
- Journaling helps you develop authentic voice and increase core Self.
- Journaling helps develop a coherent, consistent narrative – it connects us to our story.
- Journaling allows you to have a companion to their process at all times.

## **Writing Tips to Increase the Therapeutic Quality of Writing**

- Forget the rules. Penmanship, grammar, spelling are not important.
- Don't write everyday, unless doing a specific exercise instructing to do so.
- Date every entry.
- Allows trends and patterns to be revealed during annual re-reads.
- Keep what you write OR Destroy with intention.
- Do not get rid of journals or specific entries out of fear, shame or defensiveness.
- Consider what you want to have happen to your journals upon death. ie. Living will
- Pace: stand up, take deep breaths, stop when overwhelm or fatigue sets in.
- If journaling feels like a large task, use containment techniques such as:
- Limit writing time to 20 min. or 3 pages.
- Draw a box on page and write inside of it.
- If English is a second language, encourage writing in whatever language holds the most written fluency.
- Flip Out Rule: If you think you're going to flip out, don't write.
- Write what you don't know. Journaling is the transitional space between not knowing and knowing.
- Periodically read your journals from previous years.
- Journal positive experiences as well.

## **Privacy Tips**

- For sensitive entries, write on only one side of page and fold it toward the middle of the journal and fasten it with a staple or paper clip.
- Put a rubber band around journal so it can't accidentally open.
- Write "Private Journal, Please Do Not Read; If found, please call \_\_\_ or mail to \_\_\_." On the page it naturally opens up to. On second page "Really, don't read this."
- Desk drawer with lock
- Keep journal on computer with a password or on a flash drive.
- Email account
- Discreet looking notebook
- Keep among the cookbooks
- Write in shorthand or code.

## Journal Techniques

1. Sentence Stems:
  - a. When I think of God I feel...
  - b. When I think of \_\_\_\_\_ part, I feel...
  - c. When I feel worthless, I believe this about myself...
  - d. If I spoke my truth I would say...
  - e. My body is teaching me...
  - f. What I learned from my last hijacking (of an emotion)...
2. Clustering:
  - Visual free-association around a specific part or Spirit/Self quality.
  - Great way to get a map of a cluster of parts that react to a specific part. Ex. Critic
  - Facilitates objectivity and detachment (differentiation) from volatile themes or triggers.
  - Great way to capture a hectic day for those who're having trouble sleeping due to racing thoughts.
  - Facilitates objectivity and detachment (differentiation) from volatile themes or triggers.
  - Allows free association bring unconscious burdens to the surface.
  1. Begin with a blank page and in the center write the word you want to start with. Then draw a circle around the word or phrase.
    - a. From here you can proceed with one of the following:
      1. Write down any and all words associated with your chosen word. If a theme arises begin a new page with that word and continue until you sense completion or experience an epiphany.
      2. Ask yourself "How do I feel toward chosen word?" Repeat this question and write down your responses all around the word until you either reach a sense of completion or find your responses being consistently positive (8C's).
      3. Repeat the exercise on three separate occasions using the same word each time. \*This is useful for constructs that feel stuck or deeply engrained.
3. Unsent letter:
  - a. This is a great technique to help you witness your anger that you have toward someone whom you find it difficult to fully feel your anger due to other parts interrupting.
  - b. Also useful as an inner dialogue to fully witness what a part is feeling and thinking.
4. Character Sketch: A written portrait of:
  - a. Personality trait personified
  - b. Emotions personified
  - c. Of oneself at various ages (Exiles)
    - i. Useful to write as if God were describing how He sees any of the above.
5. Dialogue: Imaginary conversation on paper so it looks like a script.
  - a. Can be done between you and parent or difficult relationship.
    1. Helpful to use after unsent letter has been formulated.
  - b. Can be done between two parts of you; ideally between parts that are polarized or where there is internal tension.

- c. Can be done between your core self and a body part ie. A part of body they don't like.
- d. Can be done with Jesus, a patron saint, a biblical character.

6. Perspectives:

- a. Date the entry in past and pretend to write as if you were back there.
- b. Date the entry in the future and pretend to write as if in future. (builds core Self)
- c. What would so and so (someone you admire) say about this/that? (builds Self)

7. Affirmations of Truth:

- a. Take any affirmation/ truth you want to work with to become part of your core, not just your intellect or mind.

Write it 10 or 20 times in succession on a piece of paper. Use your name, and try writing it in the first, second, and third persons. (For example: I, John, am a gifted singer and songwriter. John, you are a gifted singer and songwriter. John is a gifted singer and songwriter.)

Don't just write it by rote; *really think about (meditate)* the meaning of the words as you are writing them down. Notice whether you feel any resistance, doubts, or negative thoughts about what you are writing. Whenever you do (even a slight one) turn the paper over and on the back write out the negative thought, the reason why the affirmation can't be true, can't work or whatever. (For example: "I'm really not good enough" "I'm too old" "This isn't going to work.") Then go back to writing the affirmation.

When you are finished, take a look at the back of the paper. If you have been honest, you will have a good look at the reasons why you keep yourself from knowing how God views you or what's keeping you from connecting with God more deeply.

**Example of Christ Centered Affirmations**

I am a radiant expression of God. My mind and body now manifest divine perfection.

I am empty of my fleshly desires. I am full of Christ's compassion.

I am adored and cherished by my Creator God.