What is Journaling?

Journal writing is an effective and simple tool for getting to know yourself better and one of the most powerful ways of gaining a greater understanding of who you are, how you came to be that way and where you are heading at any one point in your life. Keeping a track of thoughts, feelings and events makes the process of journaling a very honest and revealing art, since it is a way for you to hear yourself, record and then re-approach your problems or difficult situations with greater clarity. Journaling can therefore be a way for you to affirm and challenge your beliefs about yourself. Famous journals include: “Journals” by Kurt Cobain and “Andy Warhol Diaries” by Pat Hackett.

Journals are not diaries!

There is a difference.

Some people confuse the concepts of journals and diaries. Most of us are familiar with the “Dear Diary...” exercises. Journaling is very different in its approach, since it does not simply detail external events and situations. The journal can take on many forms including words, pictures or drawings and is based on revealing the
shown that journaling boosts health in a positive outlooks and greater physical performance at work and school.

The inherent value of a journal as a tool to affirm and challenge your beliefs about yourself, and reflect on them in the written form. Often you may not be consciously aware of the way you feel about yourself or others until you slow these thoughts down and reflect on them in the written form.

Studies with individuals who were encouraged to journal their distressing life experiences have revealed these individuals have improved moods, more positive outlooks and greater physical health. Subsequent experiments have shown that journaling boosts health in a myriad of other ways including strengthened immune function, a decreased reliance upon pain medication and improved performance at work and school.

Reasons to keep a journal
- To achieve clarity and new perspectives.
- As an outlet for your angst. In much the same way physical exercise helps release pent up energy, journaling can release your mind and emotions.
- To track and remove blocks and brainstorm ideas for problem solving.
- To uncover ideas and dreams, which can re-connect you with your passion and purpose.

How do I use one?
Don’t be misguided into thinking that it has to be an exercise of perfection or beauty because if that is the case you may never start one! Journals may be started in many ways including: writing about the first thing you think of, your thoughts around words such as love, peace, conflict etc., an event that happened in your childhood, something that happened yesterday or something that you can’t stop thinking about. Pictures, colour and drawings in your journal may enhance your ability to bring out your deeper emotions and thoughts.

- Try to write in your journal each day, even for just a few minutes.
- Encourage enjoyment by using a journal with an attractive cover and high-quality paper, or a special pen.
- Don’t underestimate the emotional energy involved in writing about traumatic events. Plan to do a transition activity, such as watering the plants or reading a magazine, before resuming normal duties.
- Beware the temptation to use writing as a substitute for action.
- Don’t use your journal as a forum for uncensored complaining. Blindly venting anger may make you feel angrier.

Should I share my journal with others?
This is an individual decision, although I would suggest that because journals are often intensely private and personal journeys, writing them with the knowledge of others viewing them may subconsciously cause you to censor your thoughts and be less open about how you feel.

Journal Guides to help you get started
- The Journal Wheel and Guidebook. Deborah Bouziden
- Writing Down the Bones. Natalie Goldberg
- How to Keep a Spiritual Journal. Ronald Klug
- Living Words: Journal Writing for self-discovery, insight and creativity. Stephanie Dowrick

Online Journals
These are becoming very popular at the moment, with many websites allowing you to post your journal entries or store them online. Some professionals suggest that something may be “lost” when keeping a journal electronically. When you personalise your thoughts with your own unique handwriting style using pen and paper it then challenges you to “own” those thoughts more honestly and brands them as uniquely yours.

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Please note that this tip-sheet provides information and guidance only - it is not a substitute for professional counselling and support.