

Keeping a Personal Journal

“Putting words on paper allows us to express our painful feelings rather than . . . carrying them around inside of us. We can pour our hearts out in a journal anytime we feel like it. Our journals are always there to receive our thoughts and feelings.” K. Porterfield

The purpose of journal writing is to afford you the opportunity to reflect upon the meaning and the significance of events in your life as they apply to your inner self.

The focus of journal writing is on your unfolding awareness of the new meanings, values, and interrelationships you are discovering in yourself and the world.

The value of journal writing. The act of presenting your ideas on paper forces you to formulate and clarify your thoughts and their accompanying feelings, thus enhancing the power and precision of your thinking.

When you make the move from simply thinking something to actually writing it down you are increasing your commitment to your own personal growth. Once you record your ideas on paper you do not have to be preoccupied with thoughts of losing them. The writing makes room for new avenues of thinking that you may not have had time to previously consider.

Writing is an effective way of “letting off steam” by providing you with a fully accepting “friend” who allows you to discharge your tensions and to vent all of your powerful emotions.

The themes and categories for journal writing. In addition to the narrative written material about your own thoughts, feelings, and observations you may also choose to include:

- Drawings or other visual materials, i.e. dreams, fantasies, symbols, or diagrams that are useful in clarifying or expressing your ideas;
- Illustrations from magazines or newspapers which capture the thought or image you are writing about;
- Personally meaningful quotations you may have read or heard;
- A section entitled “Bright Ideas” may help you to “brainstorm” about all the possible alternatives to your problems; and
- An inner dialogue or imaginary conversation between yourself and any other significant person in your life will help you to clarify your relationships, and to develop understanding and insight about your problems.

The outcome of journal writing. In time you will find that your writing has been effective not only in helping you to define specific problem areas, but also in helping you to work through your problems and in bringing about resolution and personal growth.

Keeping a Personal Journal

For future use, your journal presents you with a fine document which can be referred to when you encounter similar problems in your life.

Ideas for Journal Writing

You may find it helpful to clarify your thoughts about your loved one by recording your feelings in the form of a letter. Write a letter to the person who died, expressing your thoughts and feelings about the following issues:

- A special memory that I have about you
- What I miss the most about you and our relationship
- What I wish I'd said or hadn't said
- What I wish we'd done or hadn't done
- What I've had the hardest time dealing with
- Ways in which you will continue to live on in me
- Special ways I have for keeping my memories of you alive

Choose one or several ideas that have significance for you or start at the top and work your way down. These topics may serve to help you come up with your own ideas specific to your situation and relationship.

Miller, Sara Unobskey. "Keeping a Psychological Journal." Psychosynthesis Workbook 1, (2): 109-114 (1975).

Journaling Resources

A Passage through Grief: A Recovery Guide. Barbara Baumgardner. Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002.

Angel Catcher: A Journal of Loss & Remembrance. Kathy and Amy Eldon. Chronicle Books, 1998. (Specific to child loss.)

Angel Catcher for Kids. Amy Eldon. Chronicle Books, 2002. (Reading level ages 9-12.)

Fire in My Heart, Ice in My Veins: A Journal for Teenagers Experiencing a Loss. Enid Samuel Traisman. Centering Corporation, 1992.

Journal to the Soul: The Art of Sacred Journal Keeping. Rose Offner. Gibbs Smith, 1996.

Writing to Heal the Soul: Transforming Grief and Loss through Writing. Susan Zimmerman. Three Rivers Press, 2002.