

Mindful Journaling

The process described here is a self help tool that can be used by persons when under stress, and may help with a variety of problems in life, including problems with depression, anxiety, anger, chronic pain, and addiction. It is meant for persons to try on your own to see if it is valuable to focus on what is most meaningful in your life. Your therapist will be able to help you learn how to use it in the most optimal way.

How to do Mindful Journaling

You can do this with writing down what you are experiencing, or typing them in a computer. I'll refer to both below as writing.

Find a place to sit, preferably where you have privacy.

Simply make an effort to be aware of your experiences in the present moment, and write them down.

There are three types of experiences that people have, that you will be writing down.

1. Thoughts, or what you hear yourself think.
2. Feelings, or emotional states (such as worrying, annoyed, excitement, sadness).
3. Sensations, which are the five senses, what you notice seeing, hearing, smelling, touching sensation, and tasting.

I usually do this practice for a couple minutes when feeling some distress, but much longer when feeling more severe distress, and may also do it off and on throughout the day if I am really bothered by something.

Why this can help

1. You become more aware of what you are thinking, feeling, sensing.
2. Our thoughts are mostly forms of internalized speech, and are located in the audio channel of the brain. When we write down the thoughts, we then see them, and our visual brain is activated. We can process the thoughts with the visual channel of our brain.
3. Thoughts are quickly changing from one moment to the next (as in "racing thoughts"), and many times we are not aware of our thoughts, because they move around like fish quickly swimming in a pond.
4. When you make an effort to be in the present moment, aware of your experiences (thoughts, feelings, and sensations), you may become more aware of what you are thinking, like catching a fish quickly swimming around and around.
5. When you write down the experiences (that you have caught in your awareness net), you use your seeing brain to look at what you wrote down and study and reflect on what you are experiencing.
6. When you write down the experience, you become more of an observer of the experience, and not lost in it.

7. The thoughts in our head (audio channel of the brain) are fleeting, from one moment to the next). When we view the thoughts written down, they are more solidified, and we can reflect on the thoughts, study them, and focus on what they may mean.
8. When you write down the thoughts, you may discover thinking errors that are causing you internal distress. For example, if you notice thinking “I am a failure” (which can cause significant distress) you then write this down.
9. As you reflect on these thoughts with your visual brain, you can adjust your thoughts to be more reality based, and less stressful. For example, as you reflect on the written down thought “I am a failure”, you may be able to think of something that you did that you succeeded at, challenging the thought that you are a failure.
10. It may help to also write down challenges to the thinking error, such as the specific things you have done in life that were successful, challenging the “I am a failure” thinking error.
11. You become more aware of the relationship between your thoughts, feelings, and sensations (insight). For example, you may be aware that when you see or hear yourself making a mistake in what you do or say (sensation), that triggers the thought “I am a failure”, then you feel distress or depressed.
12. Patients report that when they write down the thoughts, they are no longer inside you causing distress, but outside of you, with you as an observer.