

Journaling for Wellness



Maintaining a journal has been used for centuries to support emotional wellness, but also can benefit many of the other dimensions of wellness.

While our lifestyles have changed journaling may be helpful as a new habit in your life. There are many ways to use journaling in your life. One common way people use a journal is to jot down thoughts or events that occur during the day. Another, which some identify as spanning the emotional and spiritual dimensions, is a gratitude journal, with daily entries of the things we did, received, or encountered during the day that make them us grateful. This can be helpful if negative mood gets in the way of daily activities and limits enjoyment or satisfaction. This is important now since our world has been turned upside down.

Journaling about topics that interest or inspire you can contribute to your intellectual wellness. You can keep a record of what you read, movies you watch, what you observe and experience. Shifting from pen and paper journals to computer files simplifies record-keeping for some people and

makes it easier to search past journal entries for key bits of information. Many of our readers throughout the years have shared how journaling has been so very helpful for their wellness impacting many wellness dimensions. You can find lots of suggestions for journaling on the web. Consider starting with our workbook, *Journaling—A Wellness Tool*, available at <https://www.center4healthandsdc.org/integrated-health--mental-health.html>

Social Wellness

Strong and growing evidence supports the value of social relationships on wellness in general, mental health, and healthy aging. Right now, when so many people are staying home to stay healthy, maintaining your social connections is critically important for your well-being.

Try reaching out to one or two people every day. A short phone call, a quick text message, a brief email—these can make a big difference in someone's day and week. Check in more often with people who may be at risk (either at high risk for getting sick or for health complications if they get sick). *Connecting with others to offer and receive support is really important for our overall wellness.* Reach out to family, friends, colleagues, and neighbors, even if for a very quick Hello!



Music Soothes the Soul

Music is common source of comfort that has the power to reach into our hearts and touch us in ways that heal. Many readers have shared how music is helping them especially.

You are not the only one adjusting to stay-at-home restrictions! Professional musicians have cancelled concerts and tours. For some, this will cause a significant financial hardship. Rather than sink under the weight of their worries, they are reaching out with virtual concerts (some live) and creative projects.

The cellist YoYo Ma has started a project called #SongsOfComfort. You can hear him on his YouTube channel. People everywhere are submitting musical videos on Twitter (you can find them through your search engine). Sing, dance, laugh, and cry along.

National Poetry Month

Read or listen to a poem a day at The National Poetry Foundation. Use poems to spark thoughts for your journaling. Find poems to share with your friends, family, and co-workers.

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/podcasts>

Virtual Tours

Visit the Monterey Bay Aquarium:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCnM5iMGiKsZg-iOIO2ZkdQ>

Check out our fabulous National Parks:

<https://www.nps.gov/planyourvisit/getaways.htm>

Explore the many museums of the Smithsonian Institution at <https://www.si.edu/>

Live Web Cams

Go to the beach, see inside a bird's nest, watch animals play (or sleep). You never know what you'll find at <https://explore.org/livecams>

Get Creative!

Not sure where to start? Try Lunch Doodles:
<https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/mo-willems/>

Meditate

Join a daily free meditation session:
<https://www.copperbeechinstitute.org/online-offerings>

Cook Something Delicious

Professional chefs are patching together things from their home pantries while they are social distancing. You can find recipes from The Quarantine Edition of the TV cooking show *The Kitchen* on their website:

<https://www.foodnetwork.com/shows/the-kitchen/episodes/quarantine-edition-pantry-pulls>

Do a Science Experiment at Home

Be careful and be safe but have fun. Here's an experiment you can do at home with a few simple ingredients you may have on hand:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hPFwDaR1g70>

Play Games Together

It may be hard to play a board game or card game over Zoom or Skype, but what about some old fashioned "parlor games" that don't require equipment? Have you ever played 20 questions? Or what about "pictionary" or "fictionary"? Think of other games you could adapt and play at a distance. Check out this list:

<https://www.deepfun.com/parlor-games/>

April is
**national
poetry month**

Life Skills for Tough Times

When faced with a short-term crisis, most people find a way to get through it. However, when faced with a long-term stressor, like our current situation, we may need to build and strengthen our self-management skills to manage over the long haul. We can all learn from techniques that are effective for people with severe problems with emotion regulation. One set of techniques was developed by Dr. Marsha Linehan as part of Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT). These techniques and skills help people be more aware and present, how to tolerate distress in difficult situations, how to effectively ask for what you need, and how to change the emotions you want to change.

Here is a brief summary of three DBT skill sets that may be especially helpful for you now.

Wise Mind ACCEPTS

When you can't make a tough situation better, there are ways to accept it in an adaptive way.

Activities that take your mind off the challenges of the moment occupy your mind and body.

Contributing by helping others adds meaning to your day and helps you feel productive.

Comparisons to people who are struggling more than you are can help you feel grateful.

Emotions can be shifted by doing things that draw out different and more positive feelings.

Pushing away means mentally setting aside the current crisis for a defined time, like avoiding the endless news cycle.

Thoughts, like feelings, can be shifted by doing a mental activity that prevents worry.

Sensations, like hot or cold shower, may help you turn off or control difficult thoughts and feelings.

IMPROVE the moment

Imagery provides a place to go in your mind that gives you a sense of safety and peace.

Meaning is drawing value from the difficulty, such as recognizing what's most important to you.

Prayer is not just a religious practice but is a way of opening your heart and asking for strength.

Relaxation is important, whether you use a formal relaxation method or simply taking deep breaths.

One thing at a time is a reminder to be mindful and present, focused only on the moment.

Vacation doesn't need to involve traveling but is giving yourself time off, however short.

Encourage yourself by treating yourself with the same kindness you would give to others.

PLEASE take care of yourself

Physical illnesses need to be treated and managed so that you are as healthy as can be.

Eat well and consistently, in a balanced way. Don't skip meals and choose foods wisely.

Avoid mind-altering drugs and alcohol, since long-term use causes problems and health risks.

Sleep is a necessity for handling stress well—not too much and not too little.

Exercise is a challenge for many people who are staying home to stay safe, but is one of the best ways to reduce stress and anxiety, to relax, and to stay physically well.

You can learn more about these skills from Dr. Shireen Rizvi in a video series created by Jesse Finkelstein for the Dialectical Behavior Therapy Clinic at Rutgers University.

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7IKAPBLpZzXk3AZbG_BAQQ/videos

Virtual Supports

Many of us rely on face-to-face connections for our recovery. Now that most people are staying home to stay well, many recovery supports are offering online or phone support and groups, as well as national broadcast events. Check out the websites for support and for other recovery-focused organizations. Here is a sample:

SMART Recovery <https://www.smartrecovery.org/covid-19-smart-recovery-face-to-face-meetings/>

Alcoholics Anonymous (national): <https://www.aa.org/>

Narcotics Anonymous (national): <https://www.na.org/>

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance:
<https://www.dbsalliance.org/>

Recovery International: <https://recoveryinternational.org/>

Schizophrenia Alliance: <https://sardaa.org/>



You also can call the SAMHA National Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357). The National Helpline is a free, confidential, 24/7, 365-day-a-year treatment referral and information service (in English and Spanish) for individuals and families facing mental and/or substance use disorders.

References and Resources

- Enjoy National Poetry Month! Learn more at www.poets.org (the Academy of American poets), where you can sign up for a poem a day or download a booklet on “Poem in Your Pocket Day” (April 30, 2020). Find poems at the National Poetry Foundation website, like “Good Morning Dear Students” by Kenn Nesbit, which will bring you a smile: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47154/good-morning-dear-students>
- For research summaries on journaling, see Pascoe, P. E. (2017). Using patient writings in psychotherapy: Review of evidence for expressive writing and cognitive-behavioral writing therapy. *The American Journal of Psychiatry Residents' Journal*, 11(93), 3-6 AND Smyth, J. M. et al. (2018). Online positive affect journaling in the improvement of mental distress and well-being in general medical patients with elevated anxiety symptoms: A preliminary randomized controlled trial. *JMIR Mental Health*, 5(4), e11290.
- Social connection tips: <https://experiencelife.com/article/how-to-stay-connected-while-practicing-social-distancing/>
- For more on DBT, see <https://behavioraltech.org/>
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Correction:

The sleep information website mentioned in the recent special issue should have been www.sleep.org

