

Journaling for Health. It's Not Just a Diary.

The practice of writing out our thoughts has been used for years in the mental health industry. It is a beneficial practice to sort out feelings, to vent feelings, and to learn from your thoughts. However, some people view journaling as the same as keeping a diary. There is a difference. Having a diary reflects the practice of writing about one's daily activities, writing about incidences that are important to them, or writing about things they want to track like the status of their mood each day. This is a valuable activity.

A journal can be used as a mechanism to vent but if this is a continued practice, the person may become disillusioned with the negativity of their writing and feel it is without merit because it keeps their focus on the negatives in life.

When we journal purposely, it combines the activity of venting about your feelings and situations you have encountered that day with a later review of your writing through a different lens. The first time is purposeful to get all your feelings out on paper. The second time is purposeful because you are evaluating what you wrote by asking, "Is what I am saying *really* true?" Or am I angered and exaggerating what the person said or did? Sometimes we are able to recognize how we show up in other's lives when conflict occurs. Perhaps we learn that we often project a negative intention onto the person rather than being fully open to hearing what they are saying. Perhaps we exaggerate what they said by attributing "always" or "never" to the situation. It can illuminate whether or not you are struggling with trusting others, projecting things onto others, or not listening well.

The next step is to decide what you will begin doing differently in relationships in the future based on what you discovered about yourself through your review. For instance, let's say your journal entry looks something like this...

"He is such a jerk. I can't believe he thinks it's okay for him to go out and spend \$300 on taking Joey fishing but he has a fit about me spending \$50 on a pair of shoes. It's not like I don't work full-time too! He is the most selfish person I've ever met. I can't believe I chose to marry such a jerk. I should have known. How could I have been so stupid! I hate feeling this way. I am so angry!!!!!"



Then later you go back and look at what you've written while asking, "is what I wrote *really* true?" What is true?

- ◆ *It's true he spent \$300 for him and Joey.*
- ◆ *It's true that he enjoys spending time with our son and I love that they enjoy fishing.*
- ◆ *It's true that he should have checked with me first since we agreed we wouldn't spend over \$100 while we are trying to pay off the cars, but they didn't have cell reception.*
- ◆ *It's true that he asked about the \$50 purchase for my shoes, but he really didn't have a fit-he just asked about it.*
- ◆ *It's true that I felt guilty because I should not have bought the shoes. I have plenty of shoes, so I was extra sensitive.*
- ◆ *He isn't selfish because he spent it on him and Joey and normally, he doesn't spend much money at all.*
- ◆ *He isn't selfish because he is super committed to paying off the credit cards I brought into the marriage and has never said a word.*



Then, write out how you want to be different next time.

I want to take a deep breath before saying anything when my husband tells me something about money. I need to put it into perspective and not just see whatever he says as negative. I don't have any evidence that he is intentionally trying to make me mad over money issues. I will apologize and think through why I may be extra sensitive about money.

It is possible to learn a lot about yourself and your interactions with others through this process. And it is possible to commit to healthy change and track your progress on making those changes. I encourage you to try it out!

