



Group Psychoeducation  
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## A Practical Guide to Journaling for Recovery

### Why This Matters in Recovery

- \* Journaling is a focused, brief exercise (less than five minutes) using pen and paper to concentrate on aspects of your recovery. It is distinct from emotional writing or trauma dumping.
- \* It provides a structured way to reflect on your values, purpose, and goals, helping you to act from a stable foundation rather than fluctuating emotions.
- \* This practice is grounding. It helps you understand what you stand for and the direction you are moving in, building strength to cope with life's challenges.
- \* It encourages a focus on the positive elements of your life, which helps to create a life where addiction has no place.
- \* Regular journaling is a daily opportunity to actively think about and reinforce the positive aspects of your recovery journey.

### What's Happening in the Brain and Body

This was not covered in detail in the session.

### The Addiction Lens

Journaling provides a powerful tool to counteract addiction by:

- \* **Shifting Focus:** By defining your values, purpose, and goals (VPG), you create a clear vision for your life that leaves no room for addictive behaviours.
- \* **Building Resilience:** Focusing on positive goals, rather than negative ones (e.g., "I will not use"), helps you grow and develop the personal strategies needed to overcome stress and prevent relapse. "White-knuckling" avoidance does not lead to growth.
- \* **Managing Milestones:** Recovery is a lifelong journey without a final destination. Journaling helps you set and celebrate appropriate milestones that are not linked to substance use, avoiding complacency which can be a trigger for relapse.
- \* **Combating Anhedonia:** The practice of identifying daily joy helps counteract anhedonia (the inability to feel pleasure), a common symptom in mental health and addiction recovery.

### Core Model: The Daily Journaling Framework

The recommended framework is a daily, handwritten practice using a page-a-day diary, structured around four key areas:

1. **VPG:** Values, Purpose, Goals
2. **JGL:** Joy, Gratitude, Love
3. **AOK:** Acts of Kindness
4. **Tomorrow:** Challenges and Solutions

A "Letter to Self," detailing the negative consequences of active addiction, should be



handwritten and kept at the front of the journal to be read during moments of high relapse risk.

### What This Looks Like in Real Life

- \* **VPG:** "My value is reliability. My purpose is to be a present father. My goal today is to go to bed on time so I am refreshed for my children tomorrow."
- \* **JGL:** Finding joy in a sunrise; feeling gratitude for having a bed to sleep in; showing love by preparing a thoughtful lunch for a family member.
- \* **AOK:** Letting a car into traffic, giving someone a smile, or volunteering.
- \* **Tomorrow:** Writing down "I am worried about an upcoming work deadline" and listing a solution, such as "I will break the task into smaller steps and complete the first one tomorrow morning."

### Practical Strategies for Recovery

#### 1. VPG (Values, Purpose, Goals):

- \* **Values:** Identify your core values (e.g., kindness, reliability, courage). Ask: "What do I want people to say about me when I'm gone?"
- \* **Purpose:** Define your purpose based on your values (e.g., "To be a reliable person").
- \* **Goals:** Set specific, positive goals that align with your purpose and values (e.g., "I will work towards becoming debt-free," not "I won't spend recklessly"). Your goals must be your own, not someone else's.
- \* **Review:** Each night, ask: "How have I worked towards my VPG today?"

#### 2. JGL (Joy, Gratitude, Love):

- \* **Joy:** Write down one thing that brought you joy today.
- \* **Gratitude:** List three things you are grateful for. It can be as simple as a flushing toilet or a roof over your head.
- \* **Love:** Name someone you love (agape love: selfless, sacrificial). Ask: "What did I do today to show my love for this person?"

#### 3. AOK (Acts of Kindness):

- \* Record at least one act of kindness you performed. It can be small (opening a door) or significant (volunteering). Service to others is a cornerstone of recovery.

#### 4. Tomorrow's Challenges:

- \* List up to three potential worries or challenges for the next day.
- \* For each one, write down a potential solution. This helps to externalise the worry and prepare constructively.

### Common Pitfalls

**Negative Goals:** Focusing on what you don't\* want to do (e.g., "I don't want to drink") leads to stagnation and relapse. Focus on positive, growth-oriented goals.

\* **Inappropriate Milestones:** Celebrating sobriety milestones (e.g., 90 days) with substances is a common relapse trigger. Create new, healthy ways to celebrate achievements (e.g.,



buying something with money saved, enjoying an experience).

\* **Complacency:** Believing you have "arrived" or are "cured" is dangerous. Recovery is a lifelong journey of personal growth that requires ongoing effort.

### **Key Take-Home Messages**

- \* Journaling for recovery is a structured, positive, and forward-looking daily practice.
- \* It should be brief, handwritten, and focused on growth, not emotional dumping.
- \* Defining your VPG (Values, Purpose, Goals) provides a solid, grounding foundation for your life and recovery.
- \* Personal growth is the goal, and this journey has milestones but no final destination.
- \* If you cannot write, use art, recording, or another form of daily expression to engage in this reflective process.

### **Optional Reflection Questions**

- \* What are my core values, and do my daily actions reflect them?
- \* Is my primary goal for recovery a positive, action-oriented one, or a passive, negative one?
- \* How can I celebrate my achievements in recovery without using substances?
- \* What small act of kindness can I plan to do tomorrow?
- \* If I feel no joy, am I willing to seek professional help?