

Facilitator Guide: Journaling

Introduction: Why Journaling Matters

You Say:

"Journaling is a powerful tool for self-reflection and personal growth. It helps us process emotions, track progress, and gain clarity on challenges and successes. Many people in SMART Recovery use journaling as a way to reinforce their commitment to change and recognize patterns in their thoughts and behaviors.

Today, we'll explore how journaling can support recovery and discuss different ways to approach it. While we won't be journaling during the meeting, this will give you ideas for getting started."

Key points to highlight:

- Journaling is **private** and for **self-reflection**—it's not about writing well, just about expressing thoughts honestly.
- It can **help track progress, process emotions, and identify patterns** in urges, behaviors, and successes.
- There is **no "right way" to journal**—it can be structured (like prompts) or freeform (stream-of-consciousness writing).

Step 1: Group Brainstorming – How Can Journaling Help Recovery?

You Say: "Before we explore different ways to journal, let's discuss how writing things down might be useful. Have you ever written in a journal or used writing to work through emotions? What benefits did you notice?"

Encourage participants to share their thoughts. Examples might include:

- "Writing things down helps me organize my thoughts."
- "I notice patterns in my urges when I track them."
- "It's a way to vent without feeling judged."

Facilitator's Role:

- Normalize different experiences. ("Some people love journaling, and for others, it takes practice. Some like to put pen to paper, others journal on their phone, tablet, or computer.")
- Reflect & summarize without offering solutions. ("It sounds like journaling can help process emotions and recognize progress.")
- Encourage **self-exploration** rather than "fixing." ("Journaling isn't for everyone, so like all SMART tools, if this one doesn't resonate with you, feel free to try something else.")

Step 2: Introducing the SMART Journaling Tool**You Say:**

"Journaling can take many forms, and SMART Recovery encourages people to use it in a way that works best for them. Here are some simple approaches you can try."

Journaling Styles & Prompts:

Structured Journaling – Using prompts or a format to guide reflection.

Examples:

- "What is one challenge I faced today, and how did I handle it?"
- "What is something I'm proud of today?"
- "What emotions came up for me today, and how did I manage them?"

Thought & Urge Tracking – Noting patterns in thoughts, feelings, and urges.

Examples:

- "What triggered my urge today?"
- "What helped me cope with it?"
- "What was the outcome of my response?"

Gratitude Journaling – Focusing on positive moments to shift perspective.

Examples:

- "What are three things I'm grateful for today?"

- "Who or what made a positive impact on me this week?"

Free Writing – Writing whatever comes to mind without structure or judgment.

Prompt: "Set a timer for 5 minutes and write whatever is on your mind. Don't edit—just let it flow."

Step 3: Encouraging Participants to Try Journaling

You Say: "Journaling is most helpful when it becomes a habit. You don't have to write every day—just when it feels useful. The key is to experiment and find what works for you. Let's talk about how you might get started."

Discussion Questions:

1. **What type of journaling do you think might work best for you?**
2. **What barriers have made it hard to journal in the past?**
3. **If you've journaled before, what has helped you stick with it?**

Facilitator's Role:

- Guide participants to **set realistic expectations** (e.g., "Start small—just a few sentences is enough").
- Redirect if participants feel overwhelmed (e.g., "Journaling isn't about perfection, just self-reflection").
- Keep the focus on **personal choice**, not everyone will journal the same way.

Closing the Exercise

You Say: "Journaling is a tool that can help you understand yourself better, track your progress, and navigate challenges. The best way to see if it works for you is to try it. If you're interested, pick a simple prompt and write for a few minutes this week."

Optional Reflection Questions:

- What type of journaling feels most appealing to you?
- What's one thing you could try writing about this week?
- How could journaling support your recovery journey?

Facilitator Quick Tips:

- Keep it **participant-driven**—let them explore different approaches.
- Gently **redirect negative self-talk** (e.g., "I'm bad at writing" → "Journaling isn't about writing well, just about reflection.").
- Encourage **realistic, small steps** toward integrating journaling into daily life.

Summary

Journaling is a flexible tool that supports **self-reflection, emotional processing, and behavior tracking**. Participants can experiment with **structured prompts, urge tracking, gratitude lists, or free writing** to find what works for them.

Encourage ongoing practice, even occasional journaling can provide valuable insights and reinforce positive change!