

I am grateful for



A JOURNALING WORKBOOK FOR PEOPLE WITH ACQUIRED BRAIN INJURY

My name is:

This is my personal journal.
Please don't read it without my knowledge and permission.

If found, please call:

Forward from Brain Injury Canada

BEFORE YOU START:

Before you begin this workbook, we recommend reading our Introduction to Journaling book, which you can find on www.braininjurycanada.ca.

When journaling, you may visit past or current trauma, difficult memories, and complex emotions. The purpose of journaling is to connect more deeply with your emotions and experiences, and there may be parts of the journaling process that make you uncomfortable. In this discomfort, you may be able to work through and find other emotions and memories that can help you cope with trauma. While we encourage people not to shy away from prompts that may bring those experiences to the surface, we recommend that if at any point you get overwhelmed, you take a break by either stepping back or moving to another section of the workbook. If/when you are ready to revisit any prompts that may be more challenging for you, do so at a slower pace in an environment where you feel safe and secure. Your journal can be private, but if having someone with you is helpful, you should choose what is right for you.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

Make sure you have a pen/pencil and a blank notebook, or whatever tools you use for journaling. This workbook is meant to guide you and you can write your thoughts and responses in a notebook.

“To name the world in your own terms, to tell your own story, is an act of authority and power. When you write, you are saying, in effect, ‘I have a voice. I have a story. This is what I have to say.’”

~ Rebecca McClanahan, *Write Your Heart Out*



Journaling and strong emotions

We want you to be comfortable and at ease within this workbook. However, we know telling the story of your brain injury may sometimes be upsetting or bring up strong feelings. Therefore, this journal workbook strives to help you recognize and be aware of how you feel while journaling. And importantly, we provide you with suggested actions that you can take when you feel strong emotions.

Emotional responses when journaling

Journaling is an emotional process, and in the case of brain injury, there may be aspects of your story that are traumatic or bring up bad feelings.

These feelings can often be brought on by people, words, smells, or even sounds that remind us of a time when we were scared, hurt, or angry – just to name a few examples. Having reactions to memories or your environment is completely normal.

Some of the prompts in this journal may bring up memories that are traumatic or feel bad. This can be difficult. But while you shouldn't journal when you're distressed, it's normal for journaling to make you a little uncomfortable – it's a tough thing to do! The important thing is you do your best, and don't shy away from discomfort.

Identifying what may make you feel strong emotions

Exploring your memories can be incredibly tough, particularly if they are traumatic. You may experience anxiety, panic, discouragement, despair, negative self-talk, indigestion, headaches, or body aches and pains as a reaction to particularly strong emotions such as anger, rage, sadness, and fear.

Some examples of things that can cause strong emotions

There are several things that can make some feel strong, overwhelming emotions – particularly if they are associated with your brain injury. These include:

- > Certain words
- > A person
- > Aggressive-sounding noises
- > Ambulance siren
- > Accessing feelings
- > Bright lights
- > The end of a relationship
- > Being alone
- > Being judged, criticized, or teased
- > Financial problems
- > Exposure to environmental situations that make you feel uncomfortable
- > Certain smells, tastes, or noises
- > Anything specifically related to how your brain injury happened
- > Trying to be positive

Journaling support plan

You may already know that there are some things that make you uncomfortable or that you find difficult to think about. Here, in the front of the workbook, we're providing you with a place where you can write down the things that you know cause these feelings, or things you discover as you journal.

It's important to do your best to move through your discomfort and find a way to cope with those feelings while journaling. That's why we have included a place for you to write out a way to support yourself if you experience those strong emotions. We have included some methods you can use to support yourself through your journal.

Methods for coping with discomfort while journaling

STOP AND BREATHE.

Stop journaling, place your hands on your lap, get comfortable, close your eyes, and just breathe. Put all your focus on your breath. Imagine breathing in 'calm' through your nose and exhaling any bad feelings out of your mouth. Repeat this until you're in a better place mentally and emotionally.

WRITE IN THE THIRD PERSON.

If you struggle to write in any section of this journal because the topic is upsetting or overwhelming, this technique will make thinking and writing much easier. Instead of writing "I," use the other pronoun you identify with (she/her he/him, they/them). Writing your journal entry in the third person as an observer, will remove you from the personal reality and help you gain a different perspective.

SKIP TO ANOTHER SECTION OF THE WORKBOOK.

Return when you can to the section that was uncomfortable.

PUT THE WORKBOOK DOWN.

Sometimes you just have to walk away and give yourself a break for a while. There's no deadline to finish any section. However, you will gain the most benefits from doing the exercises in every section at some point.

James Pennebaker's tells us ⁽⁵⁾ that the shift in pronouns in personal writing predict improvement in the writers' health. This shifting of pronouns demonstrates that the writers are changing the ways that are thinking about themselves relative to others.



Use your notebook to answer the following questions:

- > ***What causes strong emotions or discomfort?***
- > ***How I will support myself through discomfort?***

Journaling and privacy

Your journal is yours – that means that if you would like to keep it private, it is 100% your right to do so.

Suggestions to protect your privacy:

- Please get in the habit of storing your journal in its own special place where others aren't tempted to read it. If you have trouble with remembering where you keep your journal, leave yourself a note on your phone or a notepad
- On the first page of your journal, write your name and phone number and this: This is my personal journal. Please don't read it without my knowledge and permission. Thank you for respecting my privacy
- Ask the people you live with to respect your privacy
- Encourage others (especially children) living with you to begin journaling, too. Once they understand the need for privacy that a journal requires, they will be less tempted to read anyone else's
- You can use a password-protected digital journal, a notebook with a lock, or a locked drawer for extra privacy protection
- Use abbreviations or shorthand when you need to. If you write about a particularly negative situation or thought, use first initials or code words to portray the people involved

Please remember that if it is easier for you to journal with someone than to write, type, or speak out loud, that's okay! You can communicate your way with a trusted family member or friend who will keep your journal private.

Before you journal

Before you start journaling, if you can, set up a comfortable atmosphere. Get your favourite drink, light a candle, play some instrumental music, and find a comfortable place to write. No matter when or where you journal, it's always good to close your eyes and pay attention to your breathing for a couple of minutes to relax before beginning.

REMEMBER:

Use your own notebook, devices, or our workbook of extra sheets if you need more room.

Part one

Getting started

“And suddenly, you just know it’s time to start something new and trust the magic of beginnings.”

~ Anonymous

The 5-minute sprint

The 5-minute sprint is a journaling technique that works as a warm-up or a full-on journaling session.

As a warm-up, select a journaling prompt or a single word (you can find several at the back of this workbook). Start by writing the first thing that comes to mind and write non-stop for five minutes. Use a timer to track yourself (smartphones, tablets, and ovens or microwaves all have timers). Should you get stuck, just repeat the last word you journaled (like stuttering) until you become unstuck. You can write in full sentences or bullet points.

For a full journaling session, set a timer and, without a prompt, journal for five minutes about anything that's on your mind, in your heart, or what you're experiencing physically. A common five-minute sprint is the Self-Check-In. Start with "I think," "I feel," or "I am," and write about the state of your mind, body, and soul at that very moment in time.



Do a five-minute journaling sprint on each of the following prompts or words.

Today I ...

Start writing the first thing that comes to mind and keep writing for five minutes. Go with where your mind takes you. Sometimes it reveals subconscious thoughts.

Joy

Start writing the first thing that comes to mind related to the word 'joy' and keep writing for five minutes. Let your mind take you where it will. It will usually surprise you.

Right now, life is...

Start writing the first thing that comes to mind and keep writing for five minutes. Let your mind take you. Try to end on a positive note.

"Gratitude is the healthiest of all human emotions. The more you express gratitude for what you have, the more likely you will have even more to express gratitude for."

~ Zig Ziglar

Gratitude journaling: Your powerful tool for change and health

Gratitude may be one of the most overlooked tools we all have access to every day. According to research, practicing gratitude even for a short amount of time can lead to higher levels of well-being. Research shows that gratitude can have these benefits:

GRATITUDE BUILDS RESILIENCE

Some people experience profound life losses yet find themselves capable of moving forward and finding happiness again. They find the people and passions in their lives that make them happy and focus on them. A 2003 study published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology found that gratitude was a major contributor to resilience following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Recognizing all you have to be thankful for, even during the worst times of your life, helps create resilience.

GRATITUDE IMPROVES PHYSICAL HEALTH

Grateful people experience fewer aches and pains and report feeling healthier than other people, according to a 2012 study published in Personality and Individual Differences. Grateful people are also more likely to take care of their health.

GRATITUDE IMPROVES MENTAL HEALTH

Gratitude reduces toxic emotions, from envy and resentment to frustration and regret. Robert A. Emmons, Ph.D., the world's leading scientific expert on gratitude and the founding editor-in-chief of The Journal of Positive Psychology, has conducted multiple studies on the link between gratitude and well-being. His research confirms that gratitude effectively increases happiness and reduces depression.

GRATITUDE REDUCES STRESS

Gratitude and other positive emotions are among the strongest relaxants known to man. Gratitude may be just as or even more effective than relaxation methods such as deep breathing.

GRATITUDE HELPS OVERCOME TRAUMA

A 2006 study published in Behavior Research and Therapy found that Vietnam war veterans with higher levels of gratitude experienced lower rates of PTSD. Gratitude has also been shown to lead to positive outcomes following traumatic events (Vieselmeyer, 2017: The Role of Resilience and Gratitude in Post-traumatic Stress and Growth Following a Campus Shooting) as well as following negative life experiences (Chen, 2017: Does gratitude promote recovery from substance misuse?)

IMPROVED RECOVERY RESEARCH shows that those who engage in gratitude practices feel less pain, go to the doctor less often, have lower blood pressure, and are less likely to develop a mental disorder. (2012 study published in Personality and Individual Differences). Grateful people tend to cope, manage, and recover faster from certain medical procedures.

GRATITUDE IMPROVES SELF-ESTEEM

A 2014 study published in the Journal of Applied Sports Psychology found that gratitude increased athletes' self-esteem, which is an essential component to optimal performance. Other studies have shown that gratitude reduces social comparisons. Rather than becoming resentful toward people who have more money or better jobs, grateful people can appreciate other people's accomplishments.



I am grateful for...

Journaling technique: List of 100

Most of us make lists—for groceries, to-dos, gift lists, etc. We use them for time management or to help with our memory. But journaling using lists? That’s a little different, and it can be incredibly insightful.

What is a List of 100?

Just what it says! 100 entries are enough to wear out the conscious mind and get the subconscious mind to come forward. 100 breaks nicely into percentages when your grouping your list into themes as well.

You can use this technique to:

- Better understand a current issue that’s bothering you
- Clarify your thoughts
- Identify patterns and problems
- Brainstorming solutions
- Get past the obvious
- Gather a lot of information quickly
- Focus your attention on what’s really going on (because it may not be what you think!)

Tips

- It’s okay to repeat yourself. Repetition is a valid, important part of the List 100 technique – these are hints from your subconscious mind
- Write as fast as you can
- Usually once you’re warmed up, ideas & thoughts will come a little faster and it won’t seem so hard
- You don’t have to write in complete sentences
- Use ditto marks (“”), single words, phrases, abbreviations
- Your entries don’t have to make sense
- You’ll have thoughts not connected with the list - write them and keep going!

You’ll notice the first part of your list will be what you expect...the stuff that’s clamouring to get out. The second part of your list is where repetition usually begins, and themes start to develop. The last part of your list is where subconscious material begins to present itself.

You can make a list of 100 about anything that you want to. Here, we offer the suggestion of a list of 100 things that you are grateful for because gratefulness supports and encourages positivity and optimism, both of which can make life more manageable and pleasant.



Your list of 100 things for which you are grateful

Part two

Once upon a time

“We cannot process experience without story.”

~ Christina Baldwin

The story of brain injury begins

Here, we start at the beginning: the day your brain injury happened. If you remember that day and the injury taking place, here you will write your story of what happened. If you can't remember the day or event, journal about what you were told.



- › **Describe the day that your brain injury happened before your injury, or the last day you remember before your injury (remember to include as much detail as possible, even the weather)**
- › **Describe the incident that caused your brain injury (as you remember it or describe what was told to you)...**
- › **Following the incident that caused my brain injury, the next thing that I remember is...**
- › **What I remember feeling at first was...**
- › **What I remember feeling in my body at first was...**
- › **What I worried about most at first was...**

The worst part

In *After Brain Injury: Telling Your Story* (2) by Barbara Stahura and Susan Schuster, they write,

"The 'worst part' can be the physical damage to the brain itself, the cause of the injury, a negative change in your life, or anything else that might have happened. ...After undergoing trauma, many people find it difficult to explain or explore the worst parts of the experience. They may feel confused or frightened about what happened, embarrassed or ashamed (even though the event might not have been their fault), or they may simply not know how to begin."

If you're up to it and can give yourself permission to explore the worst part of your injury, try one of these two prompts. Stop if it's too upsetting and come back here again another time.

Remember to visit our tips for coping with strong emotional responses to journaling.



- › **If I could tell the story about the worst part of my brain injury, I would say...**
- › **How I've dealt with the worst part of brain injury is...**
- › **When I remember and write about this, I feel ...**
- › **When I remember and write about this, I feel in my body is...**

Recovery begins

"I find my journal to be a companion. If I am having a difficult day or struggling with an ongoing issue, I find that I learn from myself through my writing."

~ Ruthanne (Rufus) Collinson, poet laureate



- > *After my injury, the first place I was taken was...*
- > *My first impression(s) of that facility were...*
- > *What I remember most about that place is...*
- > *The first thing I remember happening to me there was...*
- > *I remember feeling...Tell the story of how long you were in the facility and what happened to you while you were there. You can use bullet points if it's easier or go ahead and free-write if you'd like.*

NOTE: Using bullet points is a great Journaling technique to get information down quickly or if you feel you can't put something down in full sentences.

- > *Some other things I remember feeling while I was there were (bullet points) ...*
- > *What was on my mind most while I was there was...*
- > *I was most grateful for...*

Acknowledgement & Acceptance

Many people with acquired brain injury find it difficult to accept what happened to them because they think acceptance means giving up hope of further recovery. They think that if they accept where they are today, they will never again move forward.

Please know acceptance does not mean giving up. Not in the least. Accepting what happened simply means that you realize your situation is now different than it used to be. You sustained a brain injury, and you have changed as a result.

When you refuse to accept what happened to you, it can drain your energy by denying that something happened. Once you accept that the injury happened, you have the energy you need to move forward in your recovery.

Let's do some journaling around acceptance and acknowledgment.

Example

Some of the changes I am aware of after the brain injury are that my memory and attention need work, but I'm getting there. I got a daily planner. It goes everywhere with me. I haven't missed one appointment this past week. I know the score of the basketball game. I don't want to use the planner. I don't like it. But it's better than having to ask others to repeat everything. I feel I'm am on my own that way. I have also learned I need to do one thing at a time now. No TV while I'm talking to someone. A list and shopping early in the morning. I have one place for my glasses—haven't lost them this past week. Same for my cell phone. Getting back on track ~ Roy



- > ***Some of the changes I became aware of after my brain injury are...***
- > ***After my brain injury, I remember becoming aware of changes in me or in my life when...***
- > ***The awareness felt...***
- > ***I'm aware that my brain injury has affected my family and friends in this way...***
- > ***I'm aware that my brain injury will affect my (job or schooling) by...***
- > ***What I accept about my brain injury is....***
- > ***I still haven't been able to accept the changes my brain injury caused because...***
- > ***I don't want to accept the change that happened after my brain injury because...***
- > ***Maybe I can start to accept some of the changes if...***
- > ***Instead of using the word "accept" I can use the word _____.***
- > ***Because...***
- > ***I accepted the changes caused by my brain injury when...***
- > ***I now accept that my life...***
- > ***I now accept that I...***

Accommodations

Like people who are near-sighted use glasses, and people who need help walking use canes or wheelchairs, people with acquired brain injury can use different strategies and things to accommodate some losses and enhance their remaining skills, abilities, and strengths. What kind of accommodations have you or can you make?



- > ***I can't do _____ any longer, but instead I can...***
- > ***Some strategies I've learned for improving my strengths are...***
- > ***It's very hard to adjust to...***
- > ***Even though I understand it might be necessary to make certain changes because of my brain injury, I'm still resisting because...***
At first, after my injury, I refused to use _____, but now I use it because...
It's exciting to find new methods that let me...
To move ahead in my recovery, I choose to adapt to...

Part three

Here and now

“The meeting of two eternities, the past and future...is precisely the present moment.”

~ Henry David Thoreau

What else happened to me

Journal any part of your story that you haven't written about yet.



> *My awareness of my situation now is...*

Friends and loved ones



- > *Who helped me and how?*
- > *I am disappointed in (insert name) because...*
- > *Maybe the lesson in this is...*
- > *The person who surprised me the most, in a good way, has been...*
- > *This is what surprised me and why...*
- > *The lesson I learned was...*

Journaling technique: The Unsent Letter

When you have issues with a person, it's helpful to express your thoughts and emotions without worrying about how that person would react. The Unsent Letters can help you do this in a structured way.

The Unsent Letter is the honest draft. The idea is to dig down deep and write your truth—whatever it is—from your mind and heart. Don't worry about form, spelling, or punctuation. Don't worry about how it comes out or how horrified people would be if they knew you thought these things. Do your best to write without censoring yourself. The goal is to get all your feelings into the letter in its roughest form.

Let this letter sit for a day or two, and then visit it again to make sure you've expressed everything you want or need to.

The most important thing of all is that this letter remains **UNSENT**. When we express to someone that we are unhappy or disappointed, it must be done in a constructive and respectful way so there is a productive dialogue.

The purpose of the unsent letter is to express and release our thoughts and feelings and help us gain perspective.

Try an Unsent Letter about whomever you need to write about:

Now that you've finished your Unsent Letter, remember to let it sit a day or two and then come back to it to make sure you expressed everything on your mind and in your heart that needs to be processed. After you've completed your unsent, you can cut it up, burn it, scrunch it and put it in the garbage, or keep it (somewhere safe!). It's up to you how you take the final step to let go.

Journaling technique: Perspectives

"One's destination is never a place but rather a new way of looking at things."

~ Henry Miller

As the name implies, this technique involves journaling about the same event from different perspectives.

This technique can help you work through relationship issues or internal conflicts, see the lessons in misunderstandings and challenges, and understand how they can help you grow.

One of the best ways to get a new perspective is to journal about a problem or issue in the third person. This means to consciously shift the perspective from first person singular (I) to third person (she or he or they).

In first-person, everything comes from within you, the storyteller. First-person narrative will almost always include your emotions and reactions. Everything happens to you.

The third-person narrative is called the objective voice because there's no personal point of view. And no personal point of view gives us a new perspective.

In third-person (he/her/they), you become the narrator and see everything as an overview. The event is still visible but distant—and often easier to journal about. We see more of the picture and less of ourselves. It takes the sting out of the experience because, at last, it isn't just all about us.



- > **Try taking something about your brain injury journey and journaling about it here in the third person.**
- > **What new perspective did you gain from this journaling technique?**

Asking for help

“Don’t be shy about asking for help. It doesn’t mean you’re weak, it only means you’re wise.”

~ Anonymous



- > ***I have asked for help when...***
- > ***I feel uncomfortable asking for help when...***
- > ***What could make me more comfortable asking for help would be...***
- > ***When I’ve asked for help, people’s reactions made me feel...***
- > ***I am most grateful for...***

Loss and gain

“The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of those depths.”

~ Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

In *After Brain Injury: Telling Your Story*, authors Barbara and Susan Schuster share:

“Your brain injury might have happened in an instant, as with a fall, a vehicle crash, or an explosion. It might have taken place over time, from a brain tumor or an infection in the brain. Yet regardless of how long it took, you were changed, and your life was altered. These changes can be small or enormous, and they can be short-lived or permanent. Sometimes they can be overcome. Other times, not. In general, a brain injury causes loss of some kind, and that can be devastating.

Because of your losses, you also might have lost your sense of Self, those qualities and elements that make you YOU. Included here could be things you cannot name or cannot quite identify, but which you sense are missing and know are important.”



- > ***Consider what you have lost because of your brain injury and make a Loss List.***

Remember to visit our tips for coping with strong emotional responses to journaling.

Feelings list

“We all suffered in our past, and we all became wiser for it. In writing about past suffering, we can put that acquired wisdom to work, along with the story of how we emerged from it.”

~ Robert Yehling, *The Write Time*

It's common and normal to have many different feelings after an acquired brain injury. You may have experienced or are experiencing anger, intense sadness, fear, regret, and hopelessness. These are all part of the grieving process—a deep sorrow that we feel when we lose anything important to us.

EXAMPLE:

I feel angry about what has happened to my brain. Important parts of it – parts I used all the time and need are so messed up. It's hard to read now, and I used to read all the time. I have trouble concentrating or focusing on anything for very long. I love to paint, and that's very hard for me now. That's what used to be my peace. I'm I'll regain some of this stuff. That drunk driver took more from me than he'll ever know.
~ANONYMOUS



Express your feelings related to the losses you listed. Remember to visit our tips for coping with strong emotional responses to journaling. The following prompts may help you with expressing what you feel:

- > ***The honest story of my anger***
- > ***What I feel most angry about is...***
- > ***As I wrote about my anger, this is what I felt in my body***
- > ***Now I know the real source of my anger is...***
- > ***When I feel anger coming on, I will...***
- > ***The honest story of my grief***
- > ***What I feel grief about most is...***
- > ***As I wrote about my grief, this is what I felt in my body***
- > ***Now I know the real source of my grief is...***
- > ***When I feel grief coming on, I will...***
- > ***The honest story of my shame***
- > ***What I feel shame about most is...***
- > ***As I wrote about my shame, this is what I felt in my body***
- > ***Now I know the real source of my shame is...***
- > ***When I feel shame coming on, I will...***

Explaining your injury

Sometimes the effects of your brain injury aren't obvious to people and sometimes they can have a hard time understanding. Either way, it may mean you have to explain things. Here is the place for you to practice what you tell people to try and help them understand.



- > *What shows and what doesn't as a result of your brain injury?*
- > *Here's how I explain it to people...*
- > *How I feel when I explain it to people...*
- > *My favourite reaction from someone was...*
- > *The silliest reaction from someone was...*
- > *What I still have...*
- > *What I've gained...*
- > *What I've learned so far about myself is...*
- > *What I've learned so far about my injury is...*
- > *What I've learned so far about my medical team...*
- > *What I've learned so far about the people who support me...*
- > *What I don't understand right now is...*



Journaling technique: Dialogue

The Dialogue Journaling technique is a flexible form of journaling that is a key tool for depth and insight.

The technique is easy, although it can feel uncomfortable or weird at first. The idea is to have a written dialogue with an issue, subject, emotion, or a person, and you journal both sides of the conversation.

People turn to this journaling technique over and over again when they need clarity about a situation.

Some key things we can dialogue with include:

- > Your body
- > Your emotions/feelings
- > An event or circumstance you have experienced
- > A material object/possession

This journaling technique has lots of benefits, but for you, having an acquired brain injury, one of the most important benefits is that it will help you connect with your body on a deeper level and explore your emotions.

How it works

Pick a subject, emotion, or person with whom you may be having an issue and spend some time in silence thinking about the topic. When you're ready, begin writing by asking a question. Use a "what" rather than "why" for your first question. When you begin the dialogue with a question, you're prompting your inner self to provide you with an answer, and thus begins the two-way dialogue.

Try to give yourself at least 25 minutes with this technique with no interruptions. A quiet space, a lit candle, and a warm environment helps make this technique easier.



Here are three things you can dialogue with for starters:

- > ***The incident that caused your brain injury (for example, the accident, the tumour, the concussion, the infection, the stroke, etc.)***
 - > ***Example starter question: What do you need me to learn?***
- > ***Your brain as it is now***
 - > ***Example starter question: What do you need me to do for you?***



Part four

Moving forward from here

“Keeping a journal of what’s going on in your life is a good way to help you distill what’s important and what’s not.”

~ Martina Navratilova

What I'm going to need going forward



- > **What am I going to need from myself going forward from today?
(use bullet points here)**
- > **Because...**
- > **The character traits that I'll need most going forward are...**
- > **Because...**
- > **From my professional team, I'm going to need...**
- > **Because...**
- > **From my supporters/caregivers, I'm going to need...**
- > **Because...**
- > **Friends and family, I'm going to need...**

Considering expectations

"I can shake off everything as I write; my sorrows disappear,
my courage is reborn."

~ Anne Frank



- > **Write down four things that you expect from yourself at this point in your journey**
- > **Explain why you expect each of these four things from yourself**

The reality check

What we expect and what's realistic are not always the same thing. It's better to under plan and overachieve. Remember, most great things are achieved one small step at a time. Please reread the expectations of yourself that you Journalled and weigh if they are realistic. Write your thoughts and opinion here.

EXAMPLE:

"Okay, so I reread what I expect of myself. Maybe it is a lot. But I still have a long way to go. I feel like if I don't go for it, I'll disappoint everybody. But people keep telling me small steps are the best plan. Little wins add up. Okay. I'm going to cut my list down."



➤ **Journal about what you expect from your medical team, family, and friends. Then use the reality check to review what you wrote about each.**

Chunk it | Plan

Here is the place to break your next goals up into achievable steps. List the next five things you'd like to achieve (mentally, emotionally, or physically) here and give yourself a realistic time frame.

EXAMPLE:

"I need to work on my attitude. Get more positive. That's not easy for me, but that'll help the rest. At least that's what my buddies keep telling me. What's a realistic timeframe for this? To be honest, I'm always going to have to work on this from now on, I think. Then it's the physical therapy and listening to what they want me to do. I need to stop fighting them. Timeframe for that one – starts tomorrow."



- **Goal:**
- **Time frame:**
- **Goal:**
- **Time frame:**
- **Goal:**
- **Time frame:**

Self-Talk

The most important stories you will ever tell are the ones you tell yourself.

Things you say to yourself every minute, every hour, every day are called self-talk. This ongoing, often persistent, internal dialogue is the most important conversation you ever have—because what you say to yourself about yourself ultimately determines how you behave, what you are, who you are, and how you relate to the world.

It only stands to reason that the kinder and more compassionate you are toward yourself, the more patient and positive your self-talk will be.

On the flip side, if you believe your self-talk is too negative, or if you want to emphasize positive self-talk, you can learn to shift that inner dialogue.

Positive self-talk and a more optimistic outlook can have health benefits, including:

- > increased vitality
- > greater life satisfaction
- > improved immune function
- > reduced pain
- > better cardiovascular health
- > better physical well-being
- > reduced risk for death
- > less stress and distress

It's not clear why optimists and individuals with more positive self-talk experience these benefits. However, research suggests people with positive self-talk may be more efficient at coping with hardships or challenges.

How it works

Before you can learn to practice more positive self-talk, you must first identify negative thinking. This type of thinking and self-talk generally falls into four categories:

> **PERSONALIZING.**

You blame yourself for everything.

> **MAGNIFYING.**

You focus on the negative aspects of a situation, ignoring the positive.

> **CATASTROPHIZING.**

You expect the worst, and you rarely let logic or reason persuade you otherwise.

> **POLARIZING.**

You see the world in black and white, or good and bad. There's no middle ground for processing life events.

When you begin to recognize your types of negative thinking, you can work to turn them into positive thinking. This task requires practice and time and doesn't develop overnight—but journaling can be of great help.

These scenarios are examples of when and how to turn negative self-talk into positive self-talk. Again, it takes practice. Recognizing some of your own negative self-talk in these scenarios may help you flip the thought when it occurs.

- ➖ **Negative: I failed and embarrassed myself.**
- ➕ **Positive:** I'm proud of myself for even trying. That took courage.
- ➖ **Negative: I let everyone on my team down when I didn't score.**
- ➕ **Positive:** Sports are a team event. We win and lose together.
- ➖ **Negative: I've never done this before, and I'll be bad at it.**
- ➕ **Positive:** This is a wonderful opportunity for me to learn from others and grow.
- ➖ **Negative: There's just no way this will work.**
- ➕ **Positive:** I can and will give it my all to make it work.

How do I use this daily?

Positive self-talk takes practice if it's not your natural instinct. You can learn to shift your inner dialogue to be more encouraging and uplifting.

However, forming a new habit takes time and effort. Over time, your thoughts can shift, and positive self-talk can become your norm. *These tips can help:*

➤ IDENTIFY NEGATIVE SELF-TALK TRAPS.

Certain situations may increase your self-doubt and lead to more negative self-talk. Finding when you experience the most negative self-talk can help you get ahead of it.

➤ CHECK-IN WITH YOUR FEELINGS.

Take a break during events or bad days and evaluate your self-talk. Is it negative? How can you turn it around?

➤ FIND THE HUMOUR.

Laughter can help relieve stress and tension. When you need a boost for positive self-talk, try finding something funny about your situation or reaction to it.

➤ GIVE YOURSELF POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS.

Sometimes, seeing positive words or inspiring images can be enough to redirect your thoughts. Post small reminders around you.

Let's take a look at your self-talk.



- *I often find that I'm telling myself...*
- *Something I hear over and over inside my head since the accident is...*
- *When things get hard, I usually tell myself*
- *When I wake up in the morning, the first thing I say to myself is...*
- *When someone from my medical team comes into my room, I (used to) think to myself...*

Draw a table as below to list negative self-talk on the left and, on the right, find something positive you can realistically say to yourself instead.

➖ My negative self-talk ➖	➕ What I will change this to ➕

Gratitude list

“The most powerful weapon against your daily battles is finding the courage to be grateful anyway.”

~ Unknown

After all of the journaling you have done in this workbook, let’s make sure to end on an ‘up’ note.



> ***Make a list of everything you are grateful for in your life right now. Revisit this list any time you need to be reminded of these things.***

Well done!

Thank you for completing this journaling workbook. Please remember that your journaling journey doesn’t have to end here. You can use this book as a guide for future journaling as many times as you want. You can also keep reading for more journaling prompts.

More journaling prompts

The following are some other journaling prompts that you might want to try, Choose the ones that you feel like writing about.

- > The brain injury has left me with an empty space that used to be filled with...
- > Returning to my job after my injury...
- > Returning to school after my injury...
- > Being intimate after my injury...
- > Even if I can't resume all of the activities I used to do, I can still...
- > A new activity that I would like to try now is...
- > One of my best stories about myself is...
- > Something that I now refuse to believe about myself is...
- > One thing that no one will ever be able to take away from me is...
- > One thing that I still love about myself is...
- > I have total faith in...
- > My mentor through all this has been...
- > My hero through all this has been...
- > The person I look up to the most now is...
- > The best advice someone gave me since my accident is...
- > The person I've been able to count on the most is...
- > What I'm most proud of myself for is...
- > Advice that I would give someone with an acquired brain injury is...
- > The best thing that I've done since my brain injury is...
- > I won't ever again...
- > From now on, I will always...
- > I forgive...
- > Something I've never told anyone is...
- > Today I accomplished...
- > My temper is...
- > When I get really frustrated or mad, I...
- > When I want to give up, I...
- > It embarrasses people around me when...
- > When I'm alone, and it's quiet, what I think about is...
- > Since my brain injury, I dream about...
- > What makes me feel the loneliest is...?
- > When I feel lonely I have to remind myself...

About Brain Injury Canada

Brain Injury Canada is a non-profit organization established in 2004 to support the brain injury community on a national level. ***Our mission is to advance awareness, education, opportunities, and support by:***

- Advocating at a national level on issues important to the brain injury community
- Establishing meaningful connections and collaborations with stakeholders
- Educating and empowering people living with acquired brain injury, families/caregivers, healthcare workers, researchers, and the public

Our vision is for a better quality of life for all people affected by acquired brain injury in Canada.

You can find more resources at the following websites:

- www.braininjurycanada.ca – our brain injury resource website
- www.braininjurycanadaconnect.ca – a growing directory of services and supports for the brain injury community

About the author

Jill Grumbache founded Holistic Journaling Ink (HJI) in 2012 to help champion & share the self-enlightening & healing properties of Journaling.

Jill is a long-life Journaler & award-winning writer. Before founding HJI, she had focused her previous career on Communications in its many forms. When ready to make the leap to living her true passions, she enrolled in the Center for Journal Therapy in Denver, Colorado. There she attained certification as a Journaling Facilitator (CJF). At CJT, she was taught & mentored by its founder, pioneer, author, & primary Journal therapy theorist Kathleen Adams, LPC.

First trained & certified to teach Kay's Journal to the Self & Leia Francisco's Journaling Through Transitions, Jill has since developed several original courses exclusive to Holistic Journaling Ink. These include the much loved and lauded Hallelujah! Letting Go! and what's been called the Ph.D. of Journaling, SelfSIght. Jill facilitates HJI's group courses, workshops, and private classes and does public speaking.

Jill is also an artist, writer, editor, and student of Buddhism. She has two grown & glorious daughters & one awesome son-in-law, and one astounding granddaughter. She resides in Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

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