

How This Journal Works

Understanding what happened to you and feeling it resolve in your body are two different processes. This journal is built for the second one.

Good trauma work does more than give you language, it gives your nervous system real, repeated experience of safety, contact, and release, not just insight into what happened. This journal is not a replacement for that work. It is built to work alongside it, giving your nervous system more chances to practice that same experience in the space between sessions.

This journal is organized into four phases. They are not days on a calendar. They are stages of capacity, and you move through them at the pace your nervous system can actually hold.

Prompts are paired with an exercise designed to go with them, marked right on the prompt itself with the page it is on. These are meant to be done together.

1 **Stabilization and Resourcing**

Building the felt sense of safety and steadiness that everything after this depends on. No trauma content here, on purpose.

2 **Titrated Approach**

Moving toward the edge of what is difficult, without stepping fully into it. You are teaching your body that approach does not mean danger.

3 **Processing**

Direct contact with what happened. This phase is intended to be used alongside your therapist, not alone.

4 **Reconnection and Meaning**

Rebuilding identity, relationship, and future orientation once the earlier work has somewhere stable to stand on.

A Few Things to Know

A short list of what this journal is for, and what it is not for.

How to know when to move forward: you are ready for the next phase when the current one feels steady, not finished. If a prompt brings up more than you can hold, that is information, not failure. Return to Phase 1 and use it as often as you need to.

This journal does not replace therapy. It is designed to be used in the space between sessions, alongside your work with a licensed clinician. Phase 3 in particular is not intended for use without therapeutic support, especially if you are working through a specific traumatic memory.

A note on the exercises: this journal reflects countless hours over years of individual and group sessions that I created. The exercises in this journal are personal versions of techniques I use often in clinical treatment. Many of them have been modified for self-guided use and are not identical to how they are practiced in session where content can be personalized and deeper with direct support. Out of the 60 exercises in this journal, you are bound not to resonate with a few, or maybe even to hate some of them, and that is okay. If something does not fit for you, substitute your own way of doing it, or just do the journal prompt without the exercise. There is enough here for you to hold onto.

If something gets hard: hitting a hard spot or noticing distress increase during an exercise is information, not a sign to push through. Pushing through alone is not the same as sitting with someone who has a regulated nervous system and can help you titrate as you personally need. Bring what comes up to your therapist rather than working past it by yourself.

If you are in crisis or feel unsafe, this journal is not the right tool for that moment. Contact your therapist, call or text 988, or go to your nearest emergency room.

PHASE ONE

Stabilization and Resourcing

No content here. Just the felt sense of ground under you.

JOURNAL PROMPTS

- 1 What does calm or relaxation feel like in your body right now, even in a small way.
EXERCISE, PAGE 4
- 2 Notice what your senses are picking up around you right now, without judging any of it.
EXERCISE, PAGE 5
- 3 Where in your body do you feel the most steady today. EXERCISE, PAGE 6
- 4 What is one small thing that helped you feel safe this week. EXERCISE, PAGE 7
- 5 If your breath could tell you something true right now, what would it say. EXERCISE, PAGE 8
- 6 What does your body do when it starts to feel safe. Where do you notice it first.
EXERCISE, PAGE 9
- 7 Describe what happens in your body when you let it fully relax, even for a moment.
EXERCISE, PAGE 10
- 8 What sound, texture, or scent brings you back to the present moment. EXERCISE, PAGE 11
- 9 Name three things in your environment right now that are simply neutral.
EXERCISE, PAGE 12
- 10 What helps you know the difference between danger and discomfort. EXERCISE, PAGE 13
- 11 Describe an ordinary day in your life right now, without judging any of it. EXERCISE, PAGE 14
- 12 What is one resource, a person, a place, a memory, or an object, you can call on when you need steadiness. EXERCISE, PAGE 15
- 13 Notice your feet on the ground right now. What do you notice. EXERCISE, PAGE 16
- 14 What does it feel like when your nervous system settles, even slightly. EXERCISE, PAGE 17
- 15 What is something your body did well today, even something small. EXERCISE, PAGE 19

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Materials: none required, just a quiet space to sit or lie down

- 1 Find a comfortable position, seated or lying down. Let your eyes close if that feels alright, or soften your gaze downward.
- 2 Starting with your feet, tense the muscles as tightly as you can and hold for five seconds.
- 3 Release completely. Let the muscles go loose and notice the difference between the tension and what comes after it. Let that feeling fade fully before you move on, there is no need to rush it.
- 4 Move upward through the body, one muscle group at a time, tensing each for five seconds and then releasing before moving to the next.
- 5 Once you have moved through the whole body, stay still for a few moments and notice your body at rest, without needing to change anything further.
- 6 If it is hard to stay in that calm, relaxed state, repeat the sequence backwards, starting at your face and moving back down through your neck, shoulders, arms, hands, abdomen, glutes, thighs, calves, and feet.

MOVE THROUGH THE BODY IN THIS ORDER



Five seconds of tension, then a full release, before moving to the next group. If calm does not stay, run the same order in reverse, face back to feet.

What this is doing: if you do not have a reliable felt sense of what relaxed actually feels like, it is hard to aim for it. Deliberately tensing a muscle first gives your body a clear contrast to notice when it lets go, so relaxation becomes something you can recognize instead of something you have to guess at.

If any muscle group is injured, painful, or off limits for you, skip it and move to the next one. You do not need to tense a part of your body that does not want to be tensed right now.

5-4-3-2-1 Grounding

Materials: none required, just the space you are already in

- 1 Look around and name five things you can see. Take your time with each one before moving to the next.
- 2 Notice four things you can feel or touch. Your feet on the floor, the air on your skin, the fabric under your hands.
- 3 Notice three things you can hear right now, near or far, loud or barely there.
- 4 Notice or imagine two things you can smell.
- 5 Notice or imagine one thing you can taste, or simply whatever taste is already in your mouth right now.

COUNT DOWN THROUGH THE SENSES

5 See → 4 Touch → 3 Hear → 2 Smell → 1 Taste

Just notice and name each one. Nothing here needs to be meaningful or good, only present.

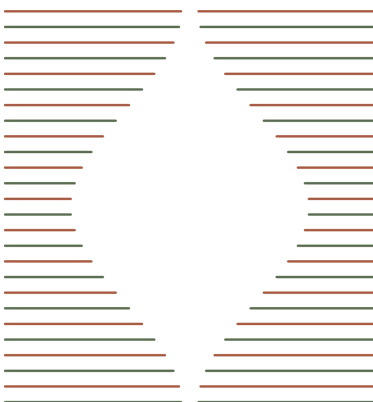
What this is doing: counting down through the senses gives an overactivated or dissociated nervous system something specific and external to land on. It is a way of returning to the present moment through the body's own input, without needing to think your way there.

If a sense is unavailable to you or difficult to access right now, skip it and move to the next. You do not need to remember the senses in order for this exercise to work, just focus on going through all of your 5 senses.

Breath Line Mapping

Materials: two markers or pens in different colors, one sheet of paper

- 1 Set your paper in front of you, either orientation. Pick a starting point on the left edge.
- 2 With your first color, draw a line moving toward the center for exactly as long as your inhale lasts. Start when the inhale starts, stop when it stops.
- 3 At the center point, switch to your second color. Draw a line moving toward the right edge for exactly as long as the exhale that follows. Start when the exhale starts, stop when it stops.
- 4 Move down slightly and begin the next pair of lines. Repeat, breath by breath, working your way down the page.
- 5 Keep going until the page is full, or until your body feels noticeably different than when you started.



What this is doing: pairing an internal rhythm with a visible mark gives your nervous system feedback it can track in real time. This exercise borrows the same left-right alternation used in bilateral approaches like EMDR, and putting breath on paper makes a process that is normally invisible concrete enough for your body to register as real. It is also an exercise in acceptance. Nothing has to change for you to do this. You are not trying to slow your breath or fix its rhythm, only to notice it and let it be exactly what it already is.

There is no correct shape here. Your lines will tell the story of your own breath and body to provide accurate data about where you are today.