

BEYOND SEPTEMBER GUIDE

How to Journal Your Way Back

Writing things down is one of the simplest, most researched self-help tools there is. Putting experience into words helps your brain process it instead of just reliving it. No special notebook, no rules, no audience. Just you and the page.

Why writing helps

Research on expressive writing — writing honestly about difficult experiences — has found it can improve mood and well-being for many people. Naming what you feel, in words, moves it out of the loop in your head. You don't have to write well. You just have to write true.

Ways to start (pick one)

- **The brain dump.** Set a timer for 10 minutes. Write everything in your head, unedited. Don't reread it today.
- **Three lines a day.** One line about what happened, one about what you felt, one about what you need tomorrow. That's the whole practice.
- **Letters you never send.** To the person you lost. To yourself on the worst day. To the version of you that survived.
- **Evidence log.** When your mind says 'nothing ever gets better,' write down one thing from today that argues back. Small counts.

Prompts for hard days

- What am I actually feeling right now — under the first answer?
- What would I say to a friend going through exactly this?
- What has carried me this far?
- What is one thing I can do in the next hour that future-me will be glad about?
- Who is safe to tell the truth to? Have I?

Keep it safe

- If writing drops you into a spiral, stop. Close the notebook. Ground yourself — feet on the floor, cold water, 5-4-3-2-1. You control the pen; it doesn't control you.
- Balance the heavy with the forward-looking: end sessions with one sentence about what comes next or what you're staying for.
- Your journal is private. It is evidence for you, not a performance for anyone.
- Journaling is a companion to support, not a replacement for it.

If the writing shows you things getting darker instead of lighter, that's information. Reach out — call or text 988 anytime, or bring what you've written to a counselor. Handing someone your journal is a legitimate way to start the conversation.

Sources & further reading

- NIMH — Caring for Your Mental Health: nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/caring-for-your-mental-health
- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: 988lifeline.org

Beyond September is an awareness and education initiative. This guide is general education — it is not medical, mental-health, or crisis care, and it is not a substitute for advice from a qualified professional. If you are struggling right now, call or text **988** or chat at 988lifeline.org. If you are in immediate danger, call 911.