# **KEEPING A DAILY JOURNAL**



University

**Counseling** 

**Services** 

2<sup>nd</sup> Floor English/Counseling Services Bldg
KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
MANHATTAN, KS 66506

# **JOURNAL #1: TOP TEN STRESSORS**

There are many surveys, assessments, and questionnaires to help people Identify circumstances that cause stress and the Intensity of frustration that they create. But these questionnaires can be quite impersonal and, typically, they tell us what we already know-that indeed we do have stress. But oftentimes people are not aware of what the cause of their stress is because they don't take the time to examine it. More often than not, people ignore or avoid their stressors, hoping they will go away. Seldom, if ever, does this approach work, and usually these problems don't go away. In fact, they usually haunt us until we take some positive action.

The best way to start to get a handle on the cause of your stress is to pinpoint exactly what is bothering you. By writing down what is on your mind you begin to get a better idea of what it's all about. So take a moment to think about what is on your mind, what is troubling you, or what caused you to get angry or afraid of something lately. Make a list and then prioritize your top ten stressors from the most stressful to the least stressful. If you have fewer than ten, fine. Don't feel compelled to add more than you really have. Once you have made this list, describe each stressor in a couple of sentences so you have a really good focus on each one.



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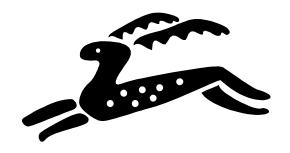
# **JOURNAL #2: HOW WAS YOUR DAY TODAY?**

The measure of mental health is the disposition to find good everywhere.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

"How was your day today?" This is a standard question that wives, husbands, parents, children, or any loved ones pose to the working force as they return home from the office, dock, school, factory, or road. Now it is time to ask it of yourself. To sum up your day is a way to unload your mind from sensory overload, as well as to help you Identify and come to terms with the major Issues and concerns experienced In the course of your day

So, how was your day? Good or bad? Did any significant events (positive or negative) occur? How do you feel about them?



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## JOURNAL #3: STRESS BAROMETER CHECK

Death is nature's way of saying £law' down.
Woody Allen

Weather reports, economic forecasts, news sound bites, and mail are all bits of the information we assemble to gain a clearer understanding of our collective environments. Heart rate, blood pressure, ventilation, and muscle tension are clinical vital signs used to determine an initial health status report. Monitored regularly, they too can help us understand how our bodies absorb the events of our lives.

Sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch are senses that help the mind gather and process the information that our environments send us. And too much information can overload the circuits. Figuratively speaking, this can blow a fuse. The result is stress-related disease and illness, from the common cold to coronary heart disease, and perhaps even cancer. Research now suggests that between 70 and 80 percent of all disease and illness is associated with stress. Therefore, it is a very good idea to monitor your stress levels periodically, as well as their potential repercussions on your body.

Take a moment to contemplate your mind-body relationship. Scope yourself top to bottom, head to toe, and check for any signs or symptoms that could be a result of too much wear and tear on the body from perceived stress. Are there any "hot spots"-some part of your body that Is the target of your perceived stress? Next, check your current level of sensory input (deprivation vs. overload). Both can cause stress. If either seems to be evident, what can you do to remedy this situation? Take a pen in hand and jot down what you find with your stress barometer check.

Mental imagery can be a powerful tool to heal the body. From the research of O. Carl Simonton, coauthor of the best seller *Getting Well again*, and Bernie Siegel, author of Love, *Medicine & Miracles*, we have learned that some cancer patients actually have had their tumors go into remission by thinking of metaphorical images to heal the body. Additional studies have shown that imagery can be used to assist in the healing processes of such health problems, including hypertension (imagining unclogged highways), ulcers (darning socks), tension headaches (Ironing wrinkled clothes), you name it. All it takes is a little creativity-generating an idea and implementing the idea. If you have a hot spot or a manifestation of stress in your body, can you think of a metaphorical Image to initiate the healing process? Give it a try. You may even want to map out this hot spot on an image of your body and write out a mental Image to heal it.

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#### **JOURNAL #4: CONFRONTATION OF A STRESSOR**

It happens to us all the time. Someone or something gets us frustrated, and we literally or figuratively head for the hills, either avoiding the person or thing altogether or Ignoring the situation in the hope that it will go away. But when we ignore situations like this, they typically come back to haunt us. In the short run, avoidance looks appealing, even safe. But in the long run, it is bad policy. Really bad policy. We avoid confrontation because we want to avoid the emotional pain associated with it, the pain our ego suffers. Handled creatively, diplomatically, and rationally, the pain is minimal, and it often helps our spirits grow. After all, this is what life is all about: to achieve our full human potential.

The art of peaceful confrontation involves a strategy of creativity, diplomacy, and grace to ensure that you come out the victor, not the victim. In this sense, confrontation doesn't mean a physical battle but rather a mental, emotional, or spiritual battle. Unlike a physical battle where knights wear armor, this confrontation requires that you set aside the shield of your ego long enough to resolve the fear or anger associated with the stressor. The weapons of this confrontation are self-assertiveness, self-reliance, and faith. There is no malice, spite, or deceit involved. Coping mechanisms that aid the confrontation process include, but are not limited to, the following strategies: communication, information seeking, cognitive reappraisal, social engineering, and values assessment and clarification.

We all encounter stressors that we tend to run away from. Now it is time to gather your Internal resources and make a plan to success fully confront your stressor. When you initiate this confrontation plan, you come out the victor with a positive resolution and a feeling of accomplishment. First, reexamine the list of your top ten stressors. Then, select a major stressor to confront and resolve. Prepare a plan of action, and then carry it out. When you return, write about it: what the stressor was, what your strategy was, how it worked, how you felt about the outcome, and perhaps most importantly, what you learned from this experience.



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## **JOURNAL #5: EMOTIONAL WELLBEING**

Emotional wellbeing is best described as "the ability to feel and express the entire range of human emotions and to control them, not be controlled by them." Sounds like a pretty tall order, huh? Well, it doesn't have to be.

What is the range of human emotions? Everything from anger to love, and all that's in between. No emotion is excluded, meaning it is perfectly all right to feel angry, jealous, giddy, sad, depressed, light-hearted, and silly. All of these feelings comprise the total human experience.

A well-accepted theory suggests that early in our development we spend the greatest amount of time trying on and exploring emotions. But If you are like most people, you were told at an early age, "Wipe that smile off your face," "Big boys don't cry," "Don't you ever talk back to me," or "I'll give you something to cry about." Perhaps our parents had good intentions, or perhaps they were just at wit's end. Regardless of what prompts such comments, most youngsters interpret the message altogether differently than intended. Instead of relating only to the moment, most children take the meaning of such messages globally and think it is never OK to laugh or to cry.

If we hear these messages enough, we begin to deny some of our feelings by stuffing them down into our unconscious minds, only to meet them head-on later in life.

The second half of the emotional wellbeing equation says that to be emotionally well we must control our feelings, not ~et them control us. Our feelings do control us when we refuse to feel and express them or when we linger too long in the moods of anger, anxiety, depression, grief, or boredom. The result is stagnation, not dynamic living.

Here are some questions to ponder about your own sense of emotional wellbeing:

- 1. What is your least favorite emotion, one that you don't like to feel or perhaps would rather avoid feeling? Can you explain why?
- 2. Combing your memory. Can you remember a time (or times) when you were told not to act or feel a certain way (e.g., "Big boys don't cry')? Take a moment to describe this incident.
- 3. What is your favorite emotion? Why? How often would you say you feel this throughout the day?
- 4. If you feel you may be the kind of person who doesn't acknowledge or express your emotions, can you think of a way (or ways) to change your behavior and begin to gain a sense of emotional balance?

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## Journal #6: BOUNDARIES AND BARRIERS

Ego boundaries must be hardened before they can be softened.

M. Scott Peck

There is a part of the human condition that begs for boundaries, and we learn this at an early age. "That's mine," we say. "You cannot have that." As we get older, boundaries contain the parameters of our lives, and they are made manifest by our property and the rules and guidelines we establish to help govern our lives. Like other members of the animal kingdom, we mark and stake our territory and then spend the better part of our lives defending it. Granted, there are times when we tread across other people's boundaries and there are times when feel our space is invaded by others. Each time boundaries are violated, we feel threatened, and stress ensues.

The violation of boundaries is a significant stressor to many people. Although boundaries can be trespassed under any circumstance, boundary violations happen most frequently through the involvement of intimate relationships, where love gives way to dominance and control. As the expression goes, "The reason you start a relationship isn't the reason you stay in it." In an effort to please a significant other, we relax our boundaries. The result is an invitation to enter; however, eventually boundaries must be reestablished. This is where problems arise. Inevitably, boundaries need to be reestablished. If the other person chooses not to leave, tension will certainly arise and feelings of victimization will ensue. For example, she would prefer not to get intimate; he forces himself upon her. She asks him not to call after 11 p.m.; he frequently calls after midnight. He asks not to be called at work; she calls four to five times a day. The majority of problems in intimate relationships come down to boundary issues and boundary violations. Each deals with the issue of control. As an adult, defending your boundaries requires assertiveness, not aggression.

This journal theme asks you to look at boundaries from two vantage points: your own and those of significant people in your life. First, what are your boundaries? How aware are you of the parameters you have established in your life to help guide you through the course of your life and maintain a sense of control? If you are not sure of what your boundaries are, begin to identify the rules and guidelines you have established for yourself, such as the time you go to bed, how late you take phone calls, when it's appropriate for people to visit, or when you decide to treat someone to lunch or dinner.

Next, ask yourself how often you feel your boundaries are violated and by whom.

After you have looked at boundaries from inside the comfort of your mind, take a look at those people whose lives are intertwined with your won: friends, husband, wife, significant other, parents, children, co-workers and perhaps even your boss. Now let's turn the tables for a moment. Are you a boundary violator?

# **JOURNAL #7: HEALTHY PLEASURES**

In the book *Healthy Pleasures*, authors Robert Ornstein and David Sobel recommend that, in order to create a sense of balance In our lives, we should remember to pat ourselves on the back, take responsibility for our moments of happiness, and engage in a host of behaviors that bring a sense of joy and satisfaction to our lives.

Now you may say, "Hey, I already do this!" But by and large, most people don't, especially after they get out of college and get caught up in making money, paying bills, raising kids, and taking care of parents.

Healthy pleasures are just that—healthy. They don't cost much either. To look at a sunset, to take an early morning walk in the woods, to treat yourself to an Ice cream cone-these are healthy pleasures. How quickly they are forgotten when our world seems stressed!

This journal entry asks you to list twenty-five healthy pleasures that you participate in on a regular basis. If you cannot come up with twenty-five, then list some healthy pleasures that you intend to do soon.



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#### JOURNAL #8: BEHAVIORS I'D LIKE TO CHANGE

If one desires change, one muse be that change first before that change can take place.

Gita Bellin

If you are like most people, you seek some type of self-improvement on a regular basis. Perhaps it's to correct something you notice yourself doing. More likely, it may be a response to a friendly suggestion from a friend, or worse, someone you aren't particularly fond of. The most recognized time to make behavioral changes is January 1, when the year is new, the slate is clean, and the winds of change are in the air. Another time that we are reminded to make changes is on or around our birthday-again a clean slate.

Two types of personalities and the respective behaviors linked with stress have now become household words. Type A and Codependent. Type A behaviors include compulsive actions related to time urgency, super-competitiveness, and hostile aggression. These characteristics, primarily feelings of unresolved hostility, are thought to be closely associated with coronary heart disease. Codependent behaviors include perfectionism, super over-achievement, ardent approval seeking, control of others, inability to express anger and other feelings, ardent loyalty to loved ones, and overreacting. These types of behavior are now strongly linked to cancer.

Sometimes we are aware of our behaviors, but many times we are not. Specific actions can become so ingrained in our being that they become second nature and we seldom consider them. It is only at those times when something we do is pointed out to us, or in an unguarded moment, that we see ourselves as perhaps others see us.

Behavioral psychologists have come to agree that changes are made first through awareness and then through motivation to change. But changing several habits at one time, which people usually try to do at the start of each new year, is very difficult, if not impossible. What is now commonly suggested is to try to change one behavior at a time. This way there is a greater chance of accomplishment. There is a progression of steps that, when taken, augments this behavior change process.

- 1. Become aware of your current behavior (i.g., biting your fingernails).
- 2. Think of a new mind frame to precede the new behavior you want to introduce (biting my nails Is bad, and I need to stop doing this).
- 3. Substitute a new and more desirable behavior in place of the old one (in the act of biting nails, stop and take a few deep breaths to relax).

4. Reevaluate the outcome of trying the new behavior and see what you think (conscious breathing helped, especially on that date last night; let's keep trying this).

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	ge? What are y	ge? What are your option	ge? What are your options? Sketch the	ge? What are your options? Sketch them out her	elps to write it down. Do you have any behaviors that yo ge? What are your options? Sketch them out here!

#### **JOURNAL #9: MY BODYS RHYTHMS**

The body has an internal clock that runs on a 24- to 25-hour day. If you were to lock yourself away from all the natural elements (sunlight, temperature fluctuations, etc.) and the grips of technology (e.g., TVs, radios, and computers), as some people have for research purposes, you would find that your body falls into a natural rhythm.

This natural rhythm Is called a *circadian rhythm-based* on a 24+ hour day, and to a large extent, this rhythm is based on and Is strongly Influenced by the elements of the natural world: the earth's rotation, the gravitational pull, the earth's axis and several other Influences we are probably not even aware of.

There are other types of rhythms that influence our body as well: *infradian rhythm*~ (less than 24-hour cycles), such as rapid eye movement cycles and stomach contractions caused by hunger; and *ultradian rhythms* (more than 24-hour cycles), such as menstrual periods and red blood cell formation.

It has been said that as we continue to embrace the achievements of high technology and separate ourselves even further from the reaches of nature we throw off our body'5 rhythms. When these rhythms are thrown off for too long, we begin to see various organs that are dependent on the regularity of these rhythms go into a state of dysfunction.

A rushed life (e.g., college life) is not structured with a particular order for body rhythms. You can eat dinner one day at 6:00 p.m. and the next day at 9:30p.m. We won't even talk about sleep! Perhaps at a young age your body can rebound from these cyclical misgivings. More likely than not though, regular disruptions in the body's rhythms will manifest quickly in various ways, like Irritability, fatigue, lack of hunger, restless sleep, and insomnia.

- 1. What is your general sense of your body's rhythms?
- 2. Do you keep to a regular schedule with regard to eating, sleeping, and exercise, or does your time for these vary from day to day?
- 3. If you are a female, how regular are your menstrual periods? Can you identify a pattern with your nutritional habits, stress levels, and other daily rituals that may Influence your menses?
- 4. How closely are you connected with nature? Do you spend time outdoors every day? Do you find yourself more tired, perhaps even more Irritable, as we shift from fall into winter?



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## **JOURNAL #10: PERSONAL REACTIONLOGS**

#### IDEAS FOR MAINTAINING DAILY LOG ENTRIES:

- Collect ideas, main points of emphasis, particular bits of knowledge that struck you as important from the class session. Put the idea or thought into your own words that make it easy to remember...like an adage, phrase, motto (for example from Poor Richard's Almanac "A stitch in time saves nine").
- Maintain an awareness of yourself while involved in class activities or outside of class data that might apply to ideas about stress and the concepts talked about in class. For example how did you react (physically, emotionally, behavioral) to others, the topic, the demonstration, or even thoughts that may stay with you from something else going on in your life. Record these reactions as in a diary (for example "I felt really anxious when I was asked to demonstrate on the temperature machine" or "I seem tired and distracted today, I keep thinking about something that happened last night.") Your heightened awareness may then lead you to make some personal assessment about what stresses or relaxes you in everyday life. Reflect upon any insights you might get about yourself.
- Maintain a recording of all biofeedback practice activities including a description
  of the strategy (ex. Relaxation tape), physiological measures (biofeedback
  indicators such as skin temperature) at the beginning, during and after the strategy.
  Note the progress and reactions you are having to the training.
- Try to make connections and applications about ideas, concepts of the class; personal reactions you are becoming aware of about yourself and how this could be useful to you in aspects of your own life. What are the stressors of your life (conflicts, pressures, tensions, people, etc.)? How do your behaviors or habits affect you for better or worse (health and wellness factors including nutrition, exercise, social support, recreation and relaxation, spiritual)? What could you do about it (enhance, change, create, decide, etc)?
- Ideas from these individual logs can be helpful in developing your integrative paper due at the end of this class. Logs will be reviewed by the instructors after Thursday's session and again on the following Tuesday.

# PRACTICE LOG

# University Counseling Services Kansas Sate University

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Date	Time	Beg. Temp.	End. Temp.	Chng. Temp.	What were the physical sensations as you went through today's practice? What were your feelings? What were your thoughts? Were they in words or images, or both?

# THERMAL BIOFEEDBACK - PRACTICE ROUTINE

1.	Practice fifteen or twenty minutes each day, using one or more of the methods in your handout.
2.	Begin by taping a thermometer on the index finger of your non-dominant hand
3.	Sit comfortably in a chair, feet flat on the floor, back straight, hands in lap, palms up.
4.	Record starting temperature on log sheet.
5.	Record ending temperature and note the difference between your starting and ending temperatures on log sheet.
6.	Use mini-stress management methods throughout the day.
7.	Follow this routine for at least one week before making any changes.

# Practice on Relaxation/Biofeedback

Observations from Relaxation Practices (both in class and home practice) from beginning of class (Jan. 3) until present.

1.	Identify the types of strategies you have practiced:
2.	Your observations from trying out strategies (make comparisons, note preferences between strategies, differences in locations of practice, etc.):
3.	Biofeedback results (changes in temperature, stress dots) during practice.
4.	Effects of practice session. Have you seen improvements or other results in managing stressors or reducing stress symptoms (headaches, sleep problems, etc.)?
	Have you had specific difficulties in doing stress management? If so, identify and discuss any possible reasons why there have been problems?
6.	What situations and future applications do you see for continuing relaxation training, stress management procedures, or biofeedback training in the future?