



## Information Sheet – Journaling

### What is Journaling?

Journaling is a tool you can introduce for your child and family as a way to process life experiences, make sense of the world, process and understand feelings, reflect on successes, explore challenges, problem solve and reinforce helpful skills and strategies.

Journaling helps children to develop their sense of identity and agency. It helps them to integrate their thoughts, feelings and experiences, lay down memories and make sense of the bigger picture.

Journaling can include drawings, words, collage, diagrams or writing.

### Why is it helpful?

- When we name our feelings and experiences – we ‘tame them’ – which allows us to learn and grow. Through journaling you can connect with and validate your child’s feelings and offer empathy for their experience. Through journaling, you can help your child make sense of their inner world, thoughts and feelings.
- Journaling helps develop the parts of the brain that help to make sense of the emotional world and manage anxiety – by giving meaning, words and context to feelings. Journaling helps develop emotional awareness and intelligence.
- When we re-tell stories and talk over our experiences – we learn to make sense of these and lay down memories. Reflecting and exploring challenges, allows children to understand what happened, think about what strategies helped them and see how things worked out. This supports them to remember this learning for the future and internalise their successes and capacity.
- Journaling painful experiences allows the child to use the ‘internal remote control of the mind’, which lets her pause, rewind, and fast-forward a story as she tells it, so she can maintain control over how much of it she views.
- Journaling is a tool to develop your child’s memory of their experiences and develop their sense of identity, belonging, connection and place in the world.
- Journaling can reduce stress and help children to let go and move on from big feelings.
- Develop perspective taking skills – i.e. understanding the thoughts and feelings of others.
- Develops narrative language skills – re-telling events.

### How can I use journaling at home?

- Journaling works best when used regularly. At least once a week is helpful to practice the skill.
- If your child is reluctant to do this with you – it can be helpful to establish this as a practice for both of you, or the whole family. Normalising that we all experience uncomfortable feelings, face challenges and need to manage our stress.
- If you are using this tool with a younger child – draw simple pictures to help make sense of experiences. You don’t have to be an amazing artist – stick figures and simple representations are fine! For an older child – you may help them write down their experiences.
- When journaling – this should be a safe space for the child to reflect and share. This is not a time for behavioural corrections and lectures. Empathy and connection is the focus.



- Work at your child's pace and within their comfort zone, gently stretching this with the support of your OT.
- Use journaling to:
  - Celebrate your child's successes and achievements e.g. their first excursion.
  - Explore their strengths and interests.
  - Explore feelings, how do they feel in the brain and body and how they can manage and bounce back from these.
  - Prepare for new events and experiences.
  - Reflect on challenges.
  - Share stories about challenges you had that may have been similar and how you managed these.
  - Reinforce achievements and use of strategies.
  - Explore friendships and social challenges.
  - Use and reinforce language introduced in therapy such as the Zones, the battery analogy, expected / unexpected behaviour and comfortable / uncomfortable thoughts.
  - Share your own experiences.

### **Don't...**

- Focus only on challenges and unexpected behaviour
- Force your child to participate in journaling if they are not ready.
- Create shame around their behaviour or challenges.
- Don't criticise and correct.
- Force the child to talk or reflect on an experience or incident if they are resistant – as this will cause more stress and will be counterproductive.

**Please talk to your OT if you have further questions about Journaling.**

### **References:**

Dan Siegel and Tina Bryson: The Whole Brain Child

<https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/benefits-of-journaling/#research-journaling>