

**UIC Solutions Suite Webinar Series**  
**Transcript for webinar on Journaling: A Wellness Tool**  
Recorded by Pat Nemec

**Slide 1:**

Thank you for visiting the University of Illinois at Chicago's Health & Recovery Solutions Suite. The following recording comes to you from the UIC Center on Integrated Health Care and Self-Directed Recovery. Visit our online Solutions Suite to obtain free tools that promote health, self-direction, and employment for the behavioral health field.

**Slide 2:**

Hello. My name is Pat Nemec. I am a consultant with the UIC Center on Integrated Health Care and Self-Directed Recovery. Our Center offers a Solutions Suite of free health, self-direction, and employment tools for the behavioral health field. You can visit the Solutions Suite on the web site where you found this webinar, at [www.center4healthandsdc.org](http://www.center4healthandsdc.org). That's www DOT center, the number 4, Health, and S-D-C DOT org.

Today, I'll be describing how to use one of the tools found in our Solutions Suite, called *Journaling: A Wellness Tool*, which was created by my colleagues at Collaborative Support Programs of New Jersey. This workbook introduces several methods of journaling and explains how they can be useful in increasing wellness in many dimensions.

**Slide 3:**

There are several learning objectives for this webinar. You will learn about the activity of journaling and about the purpose and format of this 18-page workbook. I will explain several types of journaling and how they can benefit you. You will learn about how you can use the workbook for your own wellness, as well as how the workbook can be used in a group.

**Slide 4:**

Journaling is an activity used by many people to write or record their thoughts, experiences, and emotions. You may think of a journal as similar to a diary, but a journal can be used in different ways, such as for reflection, challenging unhealthy thought patterns, or keeping track of life's little gifts. *Journaling: A Wellness Tool* is a workbook that people can use to try out journaling and to decide if it is a useful wellness activity to add to their routines. The 18-page workbook has color enhancements, but it can be printed in black and white. To get started, all that you need is either a pen or a pencil, since you can write directly in the workbook.

**Slide 5:**

The *Journaling Wellness Tool* can be used by anyone who wants to begin to use this activity to improve his or her personal wellness. As we describe in *Journaling: A Wellness Tool*, there are many benefits to journaling. The benefits cross over many wellness dimensions. For example, you can use a journal as a way to track progress in certain areas, like exercising or saving money. Using a journal that involves reflecting on your experiences can help you process emotions, deepen a spiritual connection, or guide your professional development. Part of using the *Journaling Wellness Tool* is thinking through what unique benefits you want from keeping a journal.

**Slide 6:**

The *Journaling Wellness Tool* describes five different types of journals, although there are more. These five are called stream of consciousness journaling, thought-provoking journaling, illustrative discovery journaling, gratitude journaling, and reflective journaling. The *Journaling Wellness Tool* describes each type of journal and includes a practice exercise to experience that type of journaling. During the next

segment of this webinar, I will explain each type of journal. You may want to have the workbook in front of you to follow along.

**Slide 7:**

The idea behind “stream of consciousness journaling” is that you just let your thoughts and feelings flow and then capture them in writing. This type of writing tends to go quickly, putting your ideas and emotions on the page as they occur to you. You do not judge your thoughts and feelings, but just write them down. You can stop naturally, when you feel ready. Or, you can set a timer for yourself, whether for 5 minutes or 30 minutes, or even longer. Reading over what you wrote can help give you insight into your experiences. Many people find stream of consciousness journaling beneficial for understanding and resolving emotional, social, or health challenges because it helps them get to the root of what’s troubling them. In *Journaling: A Wellness Tool*, you will find a practice exercise for trying this stream of consciousness approach to journaling.

**Slide 8:**

“Thought-provoking journaling” uses a slower and more deliberate process. This approach to journaling begins with a prompt or inspiration. This can be a quote, or a defined topic, or a specific idea, experience, or object. Once you have identified your starting point, you use your journal to record specific ideas or reactions. This is a focused process, where you limit what you write to a fairly narrow subject, in contrast to stream of consciousness journaling, where you write whatever comes to mind. The section on thought-provoking journaling in the workbook includes an exercise focused on writing about a personal goal, progress made on that goal, and related plans and hopes for the future. If you use thought-provoking journaling over time, you can limit the journal to a topic, such as working on a long-term goal, or you can use different aspects of a single subject, such as different poems, pieces of music, or art works, for inspiration. Of course, how you use the journal is up to you, so if you want to focus on completely different ideas, experiences, or objects each time, that works, too.

**Slide 9:**

Many people have not heard of “illustrative discovery journaling.” This process involves using pictures to record and reflect on thoughts and feelings. People might use drawings, magazine cutouts, or other expressive approaches. Although there is no specific exercise for this type of journaling in our workbook, it shows a picture made out of construction paper cut-outs as an example. Often the process of putting together a picture gives a person a chance to think about recent experiences, and the person may find that the creative process relieves stress.

**Slide 10:**

Next, I will talk about “reflective journaling.” This type of journaling focuses on you. As described in *Journaling: A Wellness Tool*, reflective journaling is similar to using a diary. However, instead of addressing your “Dear Diary,” you are recording your thoughts to yourself. Another difference is that many diaries focus mostly on the events of the day, while reflective journaling focuses on the meaning of your experiences, whether they be recent or past. Reflective journaling can help you in finding your true beliefs and explore your spirituality in a personal way. Some people like to record their dreams, moods, and feelings or to reflect on past memories and why they are important.

**Slide 11:**

“Gratitude journaling” focuses specifically on the positive. The idea behind this type of journal can be summarized as “counting your blessings.” Keeping a gratitude journal helps you notice the gifts that come to you in your everyday life. You might write about something very significant to you in your life, such as the love and support you get from a close friend, or a tiny gift on a particular day, like seeing a beautiful garden as you ride by on the bus. Many people have a tendency to dwell on the negative – what went wrong, what they want but don’t have, or some nasty remark from another person. Thinking about those

negatives over and over can contribute to a bad mood or even long-term depression. Gratitude journaling reverses that tendency by helping you dwell on the positive. Some people set themselves a goal of listing a certain number of items every day, such as 5 things you are grateful for. Other people set a time limit, such as 5 minutes, and write as many things as they can in that time. If you set a time limit, you may find that the list of things you are grateful for is longer on some days than others – that’s OK, since you are still spending the time thinking about what’s right, instead of what’s wrong.

**Slide 12:**

Some people find that journaling flows better when they create a special environment for themselves. For example, using a special pen, lighting a scented candle, or playing peaceful music may set the stage for getting your thoughts and feelings on paper.

**Slide 13:**

Once someone decides to keep a journal, and has some idea of what to put in it, there are other questions that need to be answered. The first question is what will you use to keep your journal? Many people keep their journals on paper or in a notebook, writing out their thoughts by hand. Others prefer a “virtual” journal kept on a computer, phone, or online site. Handwriting is slower than typing for some people, which may be an advantage for reflective journaling or thought-provoking journaling. Of course, illustrative discovery journaling may not use any writing, typing, or even words. Instead, you use whatever expressive medium you like. You may need to experiment with what process works best for you, keeping your mind open to trying different methods as well as different types of journaling.

**Slide 14:**

Another important decision for you is how public to make your journal. Of course, your journal can be completely private – something that you expect you will never share. You may decide, at some point, that some or all of your journal entries are worth sharing with one person, with a group, or even worth publishing somewhere. If you do plan to share your journal, in print, online, or through a podcast or video, be sure you think through this decision carefully. Once you go public, it can be hard to reverse that decision.

**Slide 15:**

Most people get the greatest benefit from journaling by making it a habit. Building journaling into your daily or weekly routine allows you to get into the flow of recording your thoughts and experiences. One important benefit of journaling is to be able to review your entries over time, to see how your ideas and feelings have evolved. People who keep journals over many years may choose to look back at where they were on the same date a year or two before.

**Slide 16:**

Next, I will describe how to use this tool in a group.

**Slide 17:**

*Journaling: A Wellness Tool* has been used in workshops and by people who want to start a wellness journaling group or project. When working in a group, this *Wellness Tool* provides group members with a guide to practice. The group works together to discuss the process and experience of journaling and to provide support to one another.

**Slide 18:**

Our workbook can be used in a group where people go through it together, with different sections being completed during each group session. Another option is to share *Journaling: A Wellness Tool* with group members, but to offer a journaling group that is not directly based on the content and flow of the workbook. If you are not going to use the workbook to structure the group, you will need to decide

whether everyone will use the same journaling type or topic. For example, you may consider a 6-week group that uses thought-provoking journaling. Each week would involve presenting an item for people in the group to react to, such as a poem, quote, or piece of artwork. During the group time, members would make journal entries about that item and then, if they choose, share them with each other. A very different option would be to have more of a free-for-all group, where each person keeps a unique journal, but comes to the group prepared to share their journaling experience or entries.

**Slide 19:**

A journaling group can be formatted either as a self-help group, where all of the group members take turns as leaders, or with one or two group leaders who are consistent throughout the life of the group. In general, we recommend using co-leaders, with at least one group leader being a person in recovery from a mental health condition.

**Slide 20**

If you use a self-help group format, the group members will need to work together to set guidelines and ground rules for how the group will proceed. If there are consistent leaders, the leaders can set the guidelines or develop them with the group. Guidelines should include maintaining confidentiality, the right to decide not to share a particular journal entry, and ground rules that will ensure everyone in the group has equal time for participation. Other decisions may need to be made, too, like whether the group has a closed membership or whether drop-ins are allowed.

**Slide 21:**

If the journaling group will have a consistent group leader or co-leaders, the group leaders should have experience leading groups, but do not need any specific training or certification. In addition, the group leaders should have experience keeping a journal. When there is a group leader, any guidelines and ground rules may be set in advance, along with specifying the length of group – how long for each session, how often the group will get together, and the total length of time the group will meet, whether weeks or months.

**Slide 22:**

We hope you have found this webinar useful! You may decide to try just one or two of the exercises in *Journaling: A Wellness Tool*. You may decide to try journaling on your own or to start or join a journaling group. Whatever your choice, we wish you a positive experience.

**Slide 23:**

If you still have questions after participating in this webinar, you can request free technical assistance, which we offer on a time-limited basis. Call us at 312.355.1696 or click on the “free technical assistance” button on the *Journaling* page of our web site to learn more.

**Slide 24:**

Thank you for listening. You can obtain additional Solutions Suite recordings, or download a transcript, by visiting the Center’s web site.