

Dysregulated Journaling

A grounding guide for journaling when emotions feel overwhelming



When you're dysregulated, your nervous system is in survival mode.

Journaling at this moment is not about insight, problem-solving, or fixing yourself. It's about:

- Slowing your body down
- Getting thoughts out of your head
- Creating a little space between you and the emotion

If journaling makes things feel worse, it's okay to stop.

- Dysregulated journaling is not for trauma processing.
- Avoid rereading or analyzing what you wrote.
- Insight can come later, when you're regulated.
- Stopping early is a skill, not avoidance.

Step 1: Name your Level of Activation

- High activation (anxious, panicked, angry, overwhelmed)
- Low activation (numb, shut down, hopeless, exhausted)
- Mixed / unsure

This helps you choose how to journal—not how well you're doing.

Step 2: Regulate Before (or While) You Write

- Take 5 slow breaths (longer exhales)
- Press your feet firmly into the floor
- Place a hand on your chest or stomach
- Look around and name 3 things you see
- Stretch or change positions

You can pause and return to this step at any time.

Step 3: Choose the Right Type of Journaling

- If activation is HIGH, Use externalizing journaling:
 - Bullet points
 - Short phrases
 - Messy writing
 - No rereading
- If activation is LOW, Use gentle journaling:
 - One/two sentences only
 - Focus on sensation, not story
- If activation is MIXED/UNCLEAR, Use containment journaling:
 - Write for 2–5 minutes
 - Then intentionally stop

Step 4: Close the Journal

- Write one neutral statement (e.g., "I'm sitting in a chair and breathing.")
- Circle one word that feels slightly calmer
- Stretch or stand up

This helps your nervous system know the task is finished.