

Ten Practical Techniques for Using

Put Your Worries Here With Teen Clients, Students, and Patients

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While *Put Your Worries Here* is set up to be of benefit to the average teen wanting to manage an average amount of daily life anxiety on their own, the journal is also consciously designed and intended to be used as a clinical tool. Use of this journal as an adjunct to therapy can help to engage, encourage, and empower teen clients, providing a boost to their progress, confidence, and motivation for managing anxiety. Whether used by the teen alone or as an adjunct to therapy, a main goal of the book is to help teens relieve anxiety *in the moment*. While completing the prompts, the teen will also learn various skills—such as breathwork and cognitive change—that can be used for future anxious situations as well.

Journaling prompts are grounded in the evidence-based clinical practices of: cognitive behavioral therapy, dialectical behavioral therapy, mindfulness-based stress reduction, experiential therapies, and neuroscience.

The following techniques offer specific suggestions for ways this journal can be used to aid or enhance traditional therapy and counseling. *(Please note that when choosing specific journal prompts for use with clients, each individual's unique needs, strengths, personal history, and current issues should be considered to find exercises that will*

work in their best interest, and these criteria should take precedence over any suggestions made here.)

1. ***When a teen is feeling a high level of anxiety during a counseling session,*** sometimes they can't continue using talk therapy until that anxiety is released. They may not know how to do that appropriately or feel comfortable doing it. Bringing out the journal and suggesting they try releasing it through a prompt can give them a tool for structuring the release. The bit of direction that the prompt offers can reduce shame or embarrassment about the teen's emotion and also give them a concrete way to let it out. Switching from talking about their anxiety to physically expressing it on paper can help to reduce its intensity.

Possible helpful prompt: *List the top three things you feel anxious about. Write about one until you have nothing left to say. Close this book and move on.* (pages 32–33)

2. ***When a teen is answering "I don't know"*** to all the questions you're asking about their anxiety—whether that's because they truly don't have the answer, because they're uncomfortable expressing it verbally, or because they're feeling overwhelmed or just tired of thinking about the topic—using a journaling prompt can help you both get more information about what the teen is feeling and why. Because the prompts avoid the direct questioning format, they can increase the

teen's comfort level, bypass defenses, and tap into more unconscious material. Often, information comes up in writing or drawing that is not available to the conscious mind during traditional talk therapy methods.

Possible helpful prompt: *This crystal ball shows your peaceful future. Fill it with everything that will be better one year from today.* (pages 184–185)

3. ***When the conversation or climate of the session has gotten too “heavy”*** or emotionally tense for your client and you can sense their anxiety level is rising and they need a break, switching from talk to a journaling prompt can help to lighten the emotional load and simultaneously teach the teen an effective coping skill. Switching gears in session can teach a teen to self-monitor and recognize the value and importance of taking breaks during long or arduous emotional tasks—or during life tasks in general. When they learn to do this with guidance, the coping skill can generalize to their daily life, empowering them to better manage their anxiety all by themselves.

Possible helpful prompt: *Draw a peace garden.* (pages 28–29)

4. ***When either you or your teen client are sensing that therapy is “stuck,”*** using the guided journal can help get things moving forward again. Maybe you've gone over the same concepts, stories, or issues time and again and don't seem

to be getting anywhere. Either one or both of you has stopped seeing progress or forward movement, and may be beginning to feel frustrated or perplexed. At these times, trying the more experiential approach that journal prompts offer can help you view the same material from a new angle and bring increased energy and insights into the therapeutic process.

Possible helpful prompt: *You are walking in a gentle rain and it rinses off all your anxiety. What's left?* (pages 130–131)

5. ***Therapy sessions may induce a feeling of overwhelm*** for teens if they are holding or processing too many (or a too intense level of) thoughts or emotions at one time. When this happens, the use of journal prompts allows them to put emotional content outside themselves and can help them shift from an abstract to a more concrete focus, gain a clarity of perspective, and create a greater sense of order to their thoughts and feelings. With direction, they can learn to break challenges down into smaller, more manageable parts. This practical process of relieving overwhelm can help build confidence and empowerment in the client.

Possible helpful prompt: *“When eating an elephant, take one bite at a time.”—General Creighton W. Abrams. What’s overwhelming you? Break it down into smaller steps and write them in the shapes.* (pages 111–112)

6. ***When a teen client is feeling like a victim***, or feeling discouraged about their progress or ability to manage anxiety, using journaling prompts can help them regain a sense of empowerment, building their confidence in their ability to grow and to manage their emotional state. When they complete a prompt and feel any sense of relief or lessening of anxiety, it's important to point out that this is not a random occurrence, but a direct result of what they did on (or to) the page. Reinforcing their own skill for decreasing their anxiety, even by a small amount, helps give them hope and builds their confidence in their own abilities.

Possible helpful prompt: *Break up with your anxiety. Write it a Dear John letter.* (pages 38–39)

7. ***When a teen's defenses are blocking therapeutic progress***, you may need to find an intervention that helps the client feel more safe or comfortable. Any client may unconsciously block affect or other material more easily in talk therapy if their brain has learned to defend against this mode of communication. At these times, approaching the same topic in a new arena, or using a new vehicle such as writing or drawing, can help take the brain by surprise and open new territory. Using journaling prompts can provide this new angle and allow defenses to drop enough to make new progress.

Possible helpful prompt: *Tape a picture of your Peace House here. What is your room like? What would it be like for you to live here?* (pages 136–137)

8. The connection between teen and counselor or therapist can be significant in creating a trusting environment for the teen to open up and grow. ***When you feel a need to strengthen the therapeutic relationship***, the use of journaling prompts can provide a common ground from which to start. Using the guided journal gives you a vehicle to share a new experience together. When a counselor actively views the teen’s writing or drawing and listens—without judgment—to the story the teen tells about it, the relationship is positively affected and can develop and progress.

Possible helpful prompt: *This is your Anxiety Free Zone. What’s in it?* (pages 12–13)

9. Journaling prompts in *Put Your Worries Here* are designed to reduce a teen’s anxiety in the moment, but also to simultaneously teach anxiety management skills. ***When the teen needs to learn or strengthen a particular skill***, or when the clinician needs a vehicle to illustrate a skill, the journaling prompts can help. Sharing specific prompts with the teen client can help demonstrate or clarify the

skill in question. For example, when teaching anxiety management through the use of breathwork, mindfulness, or identifying cognitive distortions, the clinician might have the teen client follow prompts that use these skills.

Possible helpful prompts: *Breathe peacefully...and randomly connect the dots.* (pages 22–23) or *Write your anxious thoughts that include words like “never,” “always,” “everyone,” or “no one.” Circle those you can prove are 100% true.* (pages 66–67)

10. *When the teen client needs to reinforce the concepts discussed in session,* or when they need additional help between sessions, journaling prompts (or use of the journal in general) can be assigned as homework. This gives the client a concrete method for practicing and reinforcing skills, as well as helping them relieve anxiety on their own. Specific prompts that are appropriate to the client’s personal situation and needs can be assigned purposefully, and/or the client can be directed to use the journaling prompts that they deem helpful at the time.

Possible helpful prompts: Since the journal is designed for a teen to be able to use on their own as well as with a professional, any of the prompts could be used between sessions—as long as the therapist deems this safe and appropriate for the client. One of the most general ways to direct use of the journal is simply to

suggest that when the teen feels anxious they open the journal and complete a prompt that appeals to them as a means of reducing their anxiety in that moment.

Note on group work: This journal can be used effectively with groups as one might use any group exercise or activity. In a group setting, members can benefit from sharing their journal expressions, getting positive feedback or insights from other group members, relieving the sense of being alone in their experience of anxiety, and helping to form positive relationship connections.

To learn more about the use of journaling as an adjunct to therapy and earn continuing education credits, find Lisa Schab's professional training courses, "Writing It Out: Journaling as an Adjunct to Therapy," and "Journaling II: Directed Exercises in Journaling," through Professional Development Resources at <https://www.pdresources.org/> or by calling 800-979-9899.