

A GENTLE STARTER JOURNAL

Ephphatha

Be Opened

Gentle reflections to notice how you are doing and take your first steps toward support

A FREE GIFT

Ephphatha Counselling Services

ephphathacounsellingservices.ca

A NOTE BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Welcome, friend

The word *Ephphatha* comes from an ancient language and means **"be opened."** It is the name of my practice because so much healing begins with an opening: opening up about what hurts, opening a door to support, or simply opening a journal and being honest with yourself for a few minutes.

Maybe you are thinking about counselling for the first time. Maybe you have booked a consultation, or you are still wondering whether it is for you. Wherever you are, this small journal is my gift to you. It will help you notice how you are really doing, name what matters to you, and feel a little more prepared for whatever step comes next.

There are no right answers here and no one is grading you. Write a lot or a little. Skip what does not fit. You are welcome to bring this journal to your first session if you would like, but it is yours to keep private, too.

Every honest word is a small step toward feeling better.

With warmth,

Onyi
Ephphatha Counselling Services

KNOWING WHAT TO EXPECT

What counselling is like

Not knowing what will happen can make reaching out feel harder. Research shows that people tend to get more out of counselling when they know what to expect from the start. Here is a simple picture of how it usually works.

Step	What usually happens
A first conversation	A short, free consultation to talk about what is going on, ask questions and see whether we are a good fit. There is no pressure to book.
Your first session	We get to know each other. I will explain how counselling works, how your information is kept private and the few legal limits to that privacy, and what you would like to focus on.
Working together	Sessions are a space to talk, understand and practise new ways of coping. You set the pace. We work on what matters most to you.
Checking in	From time to time we look at what is helping and what is not, and adjust. Your feedback is always welcome.

Things that are good to know

- It is normal to feel nervous before a first session. Many people do.
- You can ask your counsellor any question, including about their training and approach.
- You never have to share more than you are ready to share.
- Feeling a good connection with your counsellor matters. It is okay to talk about fit.
- Faith can be part of your sessions if you would like it to be, and it can be left out if you prefer.

An important note

This journal is for self-reflection. It is not a diagnosis or treatment and does not replace care from a doctor or mental health professional. If you ever feel unsafe or have thoughts of harming yourself, call or text **9-8-8** (Suicide Crisis Helpline, Canada, available 24/7) or call **911** in an emergency.

TAKING STOCK

Where I am right now

For each area of life, give a number from **1** (really struggling) to **10** (doing well). Go with your first instinct. This is a snapshot to help you notice, not a test.

Area of my life	1 to 10	A few words about it
Sleep and rest		
Mood and feelings		
Energy		
Body and health		
Relationships and family		
Work, school or daily tasks		
Friendship and connection		
Faith, meaning or purpose		
Joy and things I enjoy		

The area I would most like to feel better about is _____ because...

MY STORY

What brings me here

Take your time with these. You can write in full sentences, single words or even draw.

Lately, life has felt...

The things weighing on me most are...

This has been going on for about... and it affects my days by...

What I have already tried, and what helped even a little:

Something I have not told many people is...

WHAT IS ALREADY HELPING

My strengths and supports

When things are hard, it is easy to forget what is going right. Noticing your strengths is not pretending everything is fine. It is remembering what you have to work with.

Three things I am good at, or that others appreciate about me:

A hard time I got through before, and what helped me get through it:

People, places or practices that bring me comfort:

Who I can turn to	How they help

LOOKING AHEAD

What I hope for

You do not need big goals to begin. Small hopes are a wonderful place to start.

If counselling helped, a few months from now I might notice...

One small change that would make my days a little easier:

What I want to feel more of:

What I want to feel less of:

Questions I want to ask my counsellor

ONE WEEK

A gentle 7-day check-in

Each evening, take two minutes to fill in one row. Writing down a good thing each day, however small, is linked in research with feeling a little more positive over time.

Day	One word for today	What felt heavy	What helped	One good thing
Day 1				
Day 2				
Day 3				
Day 4				
Day 5				
Day 6				
Day 7				

Looking back over the week, I notice...

FOR HARD MOMENTS

Calm in a minute

When feelings rise quickly, these simple tools can help your body settle enough to think clearly again.

Slow breathing

Breathe in gently through your nose for a count of 4. Breathe out slowly for a count of 6, as if blowing on warm soup. Repeat five times. A longer out-breath helps tell your body it can slow down.

Find your feet

Press both feet into the floor. Notice the chair holding you. Look around and quietly name three things you can see and two sounds you can hear. Say to yourself: *I am here. Right now, I am okay.*

Write it out

Set a timer for five minutes and write whatever is on your mind without stopping or fixing it. Putting feelings into words can make them feel more manageable.

The tool I will try first is...

FOR THOSE WHO WISH

Be opened

The name of this practice comes from a moment in the Gospel of Mark, when Jesus heals a man who could not hear or speak clearly. If faith is part of your life, you may find comfort in reflecting on it. If not, feel free to skip this page.

"...and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened."

Mark 7:34 (KJV)

What in my life feels closed off or stuck right now?

What would it look like for that part of my life to open up?

A prayer, hope or intention for this new beginning:

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THIS WORKBOOK

Where these ideas come from

The ideas in this journal are written in our own words, guided by research on preparing for counselling, reflective writing, gratitude and calming the body.

Swift, J. K., Penix, E. A., & Li, A. (2023). A meta-analysis of the effects of role induction in psychotherapy. *Psychotherapy*.
Informs "What counselling is like": knowing what to expect is linked with fewer early dropouts and better results.

Pennebaker, J. W. (1997). Writing about emotional experiences as a therapeutic process. *Psychological Science, 8*(3), 162–166. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.1997.tb00403.x
Informs the reflection prompts and "Write it out".

Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84*(2), 377–389. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.84.2.377
Informs the "one good thing" column in the 7-day check-in.

Zaccaro, A., et al. (2018). How breath-control can change your life: A systematic review on psycho-physiological correlates of slow breathing. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience, 12*, 353. https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2018.00353
Informs "Slow breathing".

Every page of this journal (its explanations, prompts, check-ins and tools) was written originally for Ephphatha Counselling Services. The "Where I am right now" page is a simple self-reflection tool, not a standardized or clinical test. Scripture is quoted from the King James Version, which is in the public domain.

Your next step

Thank you for taking this time for yourself. Whatever you wrote here, it took courage. If you are ready to talk, I would be glad to hear from you.

Book your free 15-minute consultation

Trauma-focused counselling for adults, seniors, caregivers and newcomers, in person, in your home (Calgary, Airdrie, Okotoks and surrounding areas) or online across Canada.

Website: ephphathacounsellingservices.ca
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In a crisis? Call or text **9-8-8** (Suicide Crisis Helpline, Canada, 24/7) or call **911**.

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