

How to determine your stress signature: A journaling exercise

Chapter 01: The benefits of journaling

Journaling exercises can be extremely beneficial, as they can help us get into the nitty gritty of what we need to express and perhaps uncover things, which we may have not previously considered.

In this particular exercise, you will be guided to grow your own sense of self-awareness regarding your stress signature. For when we are more self-aware about what causes us stress and how we are likely to react to that stress, we can become increasingly conscious in our daily lives, and thus more equipped to know when to implement certain tricks and tools to help deal with stress in a more progressive and beneficial way.

Answering these questions doesn't have to take you a very long time, however I do encourage you to find a quiet place where you can truly reflect on your answers, and enough time to go into as much depth as you require.

And remember, you can come back to these journaling prompts whenever you need. As human beings we are forever changing and evolving, so what might be your stress signature today may change and develop over time.

Chapter 02: Questions to determine your stress signature

Answer the following questions: "I feel stressed when..." – for example, you feel time pressure, have to speak at a meeting. Write down whatever comes to mind.

“When I feel stressed I....” – for example, drink alcohol, smoke, take drugs, exercise excessively, withdraw, feel an increase in negative self-talk. How do you find you often react to the situations which you listed in the first question?

“After I undertake the coping strategy, I feel...” – how do you often feel after you partake in the coping strategies in the previous question? For example, the things you find you do in reaction to stress. An example of this may be feeling guilt or shame after smoking in response to stress.

Chapter 03: Your reflection

You can come back to these questions whenever you feel you would like to revisit, change or build upon your answers. They are designed to get you thinking about, and thus preempt, when stress is likely to occur and thus when you may need to implement self-awareness and self-regulation strategies.

In reflection, regarding the previous questions and how

you feel after you partake in your usual coping strategies for stress, can you list any strategies which would be more beneficial to you? For example, if you find that a common response to stress is smoking, then perhaps you could write an intention for this: next time I feel like smoking after stress, I will take five breaths before I decide whether or not to have a cigarette.