



Teaching Healthy Parenting Skills Through Journaling

© 2016 Susan Fee, M.Ed., PCC
Professional Clinical Counselor

Instructions

Please download and read the text and complete the prepared test questions at the end. Reading the text and taking the test must take 1 hour in order to receive 1 clock hour credit. Please print out the finished test and payment method (the last two pages) and mail to Lakeshore Educational & Counseling Services. Once received, Lakeshore will grade the test and if passed, Lakeshore will e-mail you a certificate. The cost for one CEU is \$15.00. Tests will not be graded until payment is received.

Mail to:

Lakeshore Educational & Counseling Services
Att: Distance Learning Workshop
5475 Liberty Avenue
Vermilion, Ohio 44089

Please complete all the information requested. This information serves as the sign-in form. Questions may be directed to Lakeshore Educational & Counseling Services at 440-963-0402.

Thank you for your participation.

Introduction

Raising children is one of the most rewarding and challenging things a person can do. At times, it can feel like a child's sole purpose is to expose a parent's greatest weaknesses. As much as that hurts, it can serve as a catalyst for growth, benefiting both parent and child. For all its significance, (raising a *human being!*) we receive surprisingly little training before becoming parents. Having once been a child ourselves seems like it would offer some sort of reliable road map, until we learn that being a kid and raising one couldn't be more at odds.

Coaching parents in their skills is a sensitive area. There's a fine line between helping and implied judgment. For this reason, journaling is an excellent resource to use when counseling parents in all situations: single, married, divorced, blended family, or grandparent. It's a safe way to encourage dialogue, examine beliefs, and promote healthy choices.

Educational Objectives

After taking this course, participants will learn how to:

1. Incorporate journaling exercises into parent counseling sessions
2. Discuss parenting styles and outcomes
3. Strengthen parent-child relationships

Let's Get Started!

What is Journaling?

People who have never tried journaling before may find the thought of it intimidating. It helps to be able to explain what this special type of writing is and is not. First, journaling is not the same as keeping a diary. Nor is it a recounting of what the event did that day or a list of goals. It is not necessary to be a "good" writer. What is written is for the writer's eyes only, so spelling, grammar, and punctuation don't count. This is far from a graded exercise.

Journaling helps clients to explore feelings about certain issues, revealing deeper and more complex truths. If a married couple is seeking counseling together to improve their parenting approach, encourage each individual to complete their own journaling exercises. Whether their responses are similar or reveal differences, the discussion can be enlightening. Have each person promise that neither will read the other's journal.

As helpful as journaling can be, it's not for everyone. Sometimes the resistance is just an aversion to writing. It's not enjoyable or easy for everyone. Even though there are no rules, many clients will associate it with past negative academic experiences. Another reason for resistance is that clients know a truth deep down, but may not be ready to acknowledge it in writing. Still others will decline because they perceive journaling as "reliving" bad memories and it would be too painful. (The goal is to resolve uncomfortable feelings and find new meaning.) If journaling is met

with resistance, don't push it – just explain what it is and how it can be helpful, and then let the client decide.

How To Journal?

There are many ways to get started journaling. Some clients are able to “free write” meaning they can just start writing without any prompts or direction. Most likely, these clients have used journaling in the past and feel comfortable doing so. Other clients will need more direction and encouragement. The journaling exercises in this course are specifically designed to help clients explore parenting goals and develop healthy strategies to achieve them. They can be used in groups, as couples, or individually. Writing prompts are just a place to start. If the journaling ends up going in an entirely different direction – that's exactly what the client needed to explore. So, there are no rules and no wrong answers.

The actual writing can be done free hand in a notebook or typing on a computer, whichever the client prefers. Clients who are concerned about someone else discovering and reading their journal should consider what form of writing would feel the most secure. Writing on a shared computer may leave them feeling exposed. In the same vein, an expensive leather-bound book that says “My Private Journal” on the front is also not the best choice for privacy. An affordable and convenient choice is a spiral-bound notebook. This option is portable and readily accessible whenever a client feels like journaling.

There's no specific amount of time or frequency that needs to be spent journaling, just whatever it takes to fully explore a prompt. Sometimes a client will stay on the surface of a topic and not write enough. In these cases, the exercise can be changed to writing for 15-minutes without stopping – forcing a client to keep writing about anything, just as long as the writing is continuous. Or, the exercise could be to write 1-3 full pages on one subject. This can encourage a breakthrough to deeper thoughts and emotions.

Scheduling time to journal first thing in the morning ensures it will get done and allows the client to consider any insights throughout the day. Some clients prefer journaling before bed to release their thoughts from the day. As long as the journaling doesn't stir emotions that prevent rest, this is also a viable option. What matters most is that the client chooses a time free of interruptions and distractions.

It's important to discuss the process of journaling with clients, explaining these phases:

Before You Begin

- Choose a location and time of day free of interruptions and distractions
- Quiet yourself by taking a few deep, cleansing breaths
- Date every entry at the top of the page (this helps to track progress and monitor patterns)

During

- Write quickly, without censoring

- Keep writing – don't stop to think or edit
- Tell the truth

Ending

- STOP if you feel yourself becoming overwhelmed
- Close your journal and put it in a safe place
- Take a few deep, cleansing breaths
- Move in some way by stretching, walking, or changing environments

How to Use the Journaling Exercises In Session

The following journaling exercises will help clients examine their underlying beliefs about parenting and practice building healthier parent-child bonds. The subject of each exercise is listed first. Choose the best journaling prompt or prompts to address your client's needs.

The discussion/reflection portion can be used one of two ways. The first option is to discuss the topic with an individual, couple or group while in session, and then assign the journaling prompt. The second option is to give the client or couple the reflection to process privately before journaling. Each exercise concludes with an action step designed to support healthier choices in the subject area.

These assignments can be given between sessions so that insights can be processed at the next session. Note: clients don't have to share their personal writing, just talk about what they gained or realized from the experience. They may want to read portions of their writing out loud, but it's not necessary. They may ask the clinician to read their writing, but it's more powerful to ask the client to read it out loud.

It's common for parenting struggles to trigger a client's own childhood trauma. A clinician should be prepared for the discussion to center on healing the adult's own childhood wounds. When coaching two parents, the journaling exercises can reveal conflict between their core values and approaches. Again, the counseling may be centered on the adult relationship more than it is on parenting at first. But, children ultimately benefit from healthy adult relationships.

17 Journaling Exercises to Teach Parenting Skills

1. Subject: Parent with the End in Mind

Discussion/Reflection: Parenting is a long-term investment that needs a long-term plan. Start with the end in mind. Rather than parenting for today and hoping your child magically "gets it" by age 18, determine your values and start teaching them now with age-appropriate lessons. What skills or characteristics do you hope your child will have internalized by young adulthood? Establish three to five parenting goals and streamline your feedback to support them. A clear mission allows you to parent purposefully rather than haphazardly and makes daily decisions far less stressful because you're making them with the big picture in mind.

Journaling Prompt: What skills, values, or characteristics do you want your child to have by age 18? How are you teaching these lessons today?

Action Step: Today, give praise and/or corrective feedback only for those values you have mindfully chosen as being important.

2. Heal Your Past

Discussion/Reflection: As a parent, you want the best for your child. However, beware of trying to accomplish this by providing the childhood you wanted, but never had. There's a tendency to over-correct and give too much of the thing you missed because you're acting in your own best interests and not your child's. Raising kids as if they are an extension of you rather than unique beings can create emotional handicaps you never intended, making kids resentful, dependent, or ungrateful. Instead, be the parent your child needs today, not the one you wished you had as a child.

Journaling Prompt: What are some positive or painful memories from your childhood? How do these affect your parenting style?

Action Step: Become aware of the times you say, "I never had _____ when I was growing up, so my kid will." Be mindful of over-correcting for your past.

3. Know Your Role

Discussion/Reflection: Your job is to be your child's parent, not their friend. Among other things, a parent is a leader, teacher, and disciplinarian. Trying to be friends with your child blurs the lines. Friends don't make household rules or give corrective feedback. As a parent, you won't always be liked, but don't confuse this with what your child really needs. As much as they may protest, kids find comfort in knowing you're in charge and love them enough to care about safe boundaries. They don't want to be your social companion, offer advice, or make you look "cool." Peers make great friends; what your child needs is a parent.

Journaling Prompt: As a child, what was your relationship like with your parents? How did they define their roles?

Action Step: Ask your child if he or she perceives you more as a responsible parent or as a friend/peer. If necessary, clarify your role.

4. Recognize Your Style

Discussion/Reflection: There are three main parenting styles: helicopter, drill sergeant, and consultant. The helicopter parent is overly involved, hovering and worrying over a child's every move. This parent confuses over-protection with love. The result is an unequipped, dependent,

sometimes anxious child. The other extreme is the drill sergeant parent who barks orders in an overly strict regime. The drill sergeant relies on intimidation and harsh punishments. Children typically respond with fear or rebellion. The goal is to be a consultative parent who presents choices and consequences, teaches skills, and allows children to solve their own problems. The result is capable, confident kids.

Journaling Prompt: Based on the descriptions above, what is your parenting style? How did you develop it?

Action Step: Ask your child to complete a task by offering options and consequences. For example, “Please clean your room. You can do it before or after dinner. If you need me to teach you what I consider to be clean, let me know. Otherwise, I’ll assume you know my standards.” If your request is ignored, then he has chosen a consequence by default. Do not yell, threaten or complete the chore yourself.

5. Love One Another

Discussion/Reflection: The most loving thing you can do for your child is to love and respect the other parent. It may sound selfish to put your marriage first and kids second, but the reverse order hurts the entire family. Part of your job as a parent is to model how to have a healthy relationship. Kids learn how to love by watching you. There is no greater lesson. Even in cases of divorce, refrain from saying anything negative about your ex. If you say to your child, “You’re just like your mother/father,” make sure it’s a compliment because shaming the parent equals shaming the child. He is the product of two people so respecting both of them helps him to respect himself.

Journaling Prompt: What messages are you sending to your child about his mother/father?

Action Step: Sincerely compliment your child’s other parent in the presence of your child.

6. Build Self-Worth

Discussion/Reflection: How do you express love to your child? As poet Toni Morrison asks, “Do your eyes light up when she enters the room?” Children are not more (or less) worthy of love based on behavior, but worthy merely because of their existence. Separating love from performance means your child knows that your love is consistent and not regulated by grades, popularity, capabilities, appearance, or anything else. While you might disapprove of behavior or choices, don’t make your love something that has to be earned. Your child will ultimately align her life and choices based on her feelings of self-worth.

Journaling Prompt: What has shaped your feelings of self-worth? How does that affect your parenting?

Action Step: Surprise your child with a handwritten note saying how much you love her. Place it underneath her pillow, in a coat pocket, or in a school lunch for her to discover.

7. Control the Right Things

Discussion/Reflection: There are many things within a parent’s control, but children are not one of them. The more you attempt to control them, the more they rebel. Even if you gain momentary victory, it probably came by use of anger, threats, or intimidation – in other words you lost control. What you *do* have control over is their environment, boundaries, and consequences. Consistent rules are necessary, but you can’t force kids to follow them. Doing so will only lead to frustration. Accepting that you cannot control your child’s actions will allow you to focus on what really matters.

Journaling Prompt: Think about a time when you attempted to control your child. What was the result? How did you feel?

Action Step: Keep rules focused on your children’s environment, boundaries, and the consequences if they choose not to follow the rules.

8. Balance Freedom with Responsibility

Discussion/Reflection: Determining how much freedom and responsibility your kids can manage is tricky. But, when the two are not offered in equal measure, the signs are obvious. When kids have too much freedom and not enough responsibility, they become immature. But, too much responsibility and not enough freedom can make a child rebellious. Think of this like a “V” with toddlers starting at the base with limited options. As children mature, more should be expected of them as they in turn earn more freedom, eventually becoming totally independent.

Journaling Prompt: What opportunities are you offering your child to earn freedom and responsibility? If you recognize they are out of balance, which do you need to increase or decrease?

Action Step: Make a list of age-appropriate responsibilities and freedoms and share them with your children.

9. Encourage Independence

Discussion/Reflection: Doing things for your child that he should be doing for himself undermines self-confidence by robbing him of the opportunity to learn necessary skills. Many parents say they do this out of love. However, it’s not loving to raise a child to be dependent and unable to cope without you. The underlying message you’re sending is that you don’t believe your child is capable. Self-confidence increases with the knowledge that we can take care of ourselves in any circumstance. Equip your child for life by training him to perform the skills he’s capable of and providing ample opportunities to practice.

Journaling Prompt: What are you doing for your child that he should be doing for himself? What keeps you doing it?

Action Step: Turn over responsibility for a task that your child could be doing for himself on a regular basis.

10. Allow Failure

Discussion/Reflection: There will be times when you turn responsibility over to your child and she fails, either through lack of experience or poor judgment. With failure comes pain. You're not doing your child any favors by fixing her problems. In fact, you're delaying the solution. The best lessons come from experiencing the natural consequences of our choices. Eventually, kids will learn to be accountable for their actions. If you intervene, they will learn to blame you when things don't turn out well. A little suffering now leads to better choices later.

Journaling Prompt: When are you most tempted to save your child from failing because of her choices? What would naturally occur if you didn't intervene?

Action Step: Share your expectations of responsibility with your child, including what she can expect of you. Be clear and upfront about the fact that you will allow her to experience the natural consequences of her choices, both positive and negative.

11. Ask Empowering Questions

Discussion/Reflection: When children struggle (and they will), it's tempting to start fixing or lecturing, neither of which are helpful. Instead, seize the opportunity to teach resiliency and critical thinking skills by asking empowering questions. Ask kids what part of the situation they control? What do they want to do about their problem? Help them explore options and understand the pros and cons of each decision without telling them what to do. Ask what skills you can help them learn to manage better? If they don't have immediate answers, let them think about it. The questions alone imply your faith in their capabilities. Providing answers suggests the opposite.

Journaling Prompt: How do you typically respond when your child is upset or struggling?

Action Step: Respond to your child's problems by offering empathy followed by an empowering question. Resist giving advice or fixing it.

12. Provide Specific Feedback

Discussion/Reflection: The feedback you give your child helps shape him. While it may sound positive to say, "Good job!" in response to everything he does, it actually causes more harm than good. First, it's training him to perform for your approval rather than his own satisfaction. Second, he never learns what he did that was so good. How does he know what to repeat? Children aren't always seeking praise; they just want to be noticed. You can simply state what you see them doing.

For example, “You climbed to the top of the jungle gym!” If his actions, words, or choices are truly praiseworthy, give specific feedback.

Journaling Prompt: What was the most significant feedback you received as a child? How did it shape you?

Action Step: Give your child specific feedback without saying, “Good job!”

13. Ask for Feedback

Discussion/Reflection: It’s easier to deliver feedback than to receive it! Giving your kids a chance to speak up shows them how to respect the opinions of others, even when they’re hard to hear. It’s also a good reminder about how vulnerable your kids probably feel every time you give them feedback. Here are two fun exercises: Use metaphors by asking, “If I was a color, what color would I be and why?” Do the same with “instrument” and “animal.” Another option is called Start, Stop, and Continue.

Ask, “What do you want me to start doing? Stop doing? Continue doing?” Listen to their answers without correcting, minimizing, or defending.

Journaling Prompt: What feedback do you anticipate hearing from your kids? What would surprise you?

Action Step: Ask your kids for feedback using either metaphors or Start, Stop, and Continue. Respectfully listen to their comments the same way you want them to receive your feedback.

14. Make the Most of Mistakes

Discussion/Reflection: There’s no such thing as the perfect parent. As a work-in-progress, mistakes are part of the journey. The only danger in making mistakes is not acknowledging them. Attempting to hide your flaws will leave you feeling guilty and humiliated. Instead, embrace them! Each one is perfectly designed to offer an insight, lesson, and opportunity to self-correct. Admit mistakes to your children. Sincerely apologize for your actions without blaming or making excuses. Acknowledge how your actions affected others and commit to behaving differently. Realizing your own imperfections will help you to extend grace to your children when they need it.

Journaling Prompt: What’s the biggest lesson you’ve learned from a past mistake? How does it affect the way you parent today?

Action Step: When you’re wrong, apologize to your children without blaming, minimizing, or justifying.

15. Play

Discussion/Reflection: The work of childhood is play and children are delighted when you are willing to enter their world. Whether it's pretend, video games, crafts, or sports, kids want to know that you care about what interests them. Moreover, they want to teach you something. Allow them to be the authority while you become the student. Resist trying to improve their play or guide it in another direction. Follow your child's lead and a great thing will happen: he will reveal himself to you. During free play, protective walls come down giving you a chance to connect in ways that structured activities don't offer.

Journaling Prompt: As a kid, did your parents play or take part in your interests? How did it make you feel?

Action: Schedule a date with your child in which he gets to choose the activity.

16. Learn their Language

Discussion/Reflection: Author Gary Chapman states that there are five ways to show love: words of affirmation, quality time, gifts, acts of service, and physical touch. All of us have a dominant love language and by age five your child will have developed her preference. The tendency is to give love the way we want to receive it, regardless of whether or not others appreciate our efforts. Respectfully loving others requires flexibility. Pay attention to your child's needs and love her the way she's communicating to you that she needs to be loved, even if it's different than the way you want to show her.

Journaling Prompt: What's your preferred way of being loved? How do you show love to others?

Action: Observe how your child responds to each love language and speak her language.

17. Adapt to Changing Needs

Discussion/Reflection: As your child matures, your parenting role should change with them. For the first part of his life, you'll be parenting a dependent child who relies on you to meet most of his needs. The next phase requires you to be a teacher of skills, demonstrating and assisting him in accomplishing new goals. As he gains independence, your role evolves into being his coach. You're no longer doing the work for him, but coaching him in how to do it for himself. Finally, as a young adult, he'll need you to be a mentor, offering guidance on navigating larger life decisions. Children will never need you less, just differently.

Journaling Prompt: How do you think each stage of parenting has been or will be different?

Action: Match your parenting to your child's current maturity stage and needs.

In Conclusion

It's been said that when the student is ready, the teacher appears. Most parents don't expect their most important teacher would arrive in the form of a child. Becoming a parent peels back the layers of the soul, teaching about strengths, weaknesses, and resolve like no other experience ever could. Journaling can be a helpful tool to help adults explore these insights so that they can make mindful choices while parenting.

Growth and change start with self-awareness. By incorporating appropriate journaling exercises into counseling sessions, clinicians can use the exercises provided to enhance the client's parenting skills and application.

TEST

Teaching Healthy Parenting Skills Through Journaling

Complete the test below and follow the instructions provided on page 1 to receive your certificate. Remember to include the Payment Method form when you mail the test in. Please complete the information below to serve as the sign in form. Please PRINT clearly.

Name: _____

Phone: () _____

E-mail Address: _____

Circle the correct answer:

1. The healthiest parenting style is:

- a) Helicopter
- b) Friend
- c) Consultant

2. When both parents attend counseling and use journaling, they should:

- a) Journal individually
- b) Write together
- c) Avoid journaling

3. Journaling helps clients to:

- a) Practice grammar skills
- b) Gain insight
- c) Review past mistakes

4. Parenting struggles can often trigger the parent's own:

- a) Allergies
- b) Childhood trauma
- c) Cooperation

5. If a client journals about something other than the suggested prompt, the clinician should reject it.

- a) True
- b) False

I read and completed the test questions for 1 hour of credit.

Signature _____ Date _____

Payment Method

Payments
<p>1 CEU is \$15.00</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If paying by check, please make checks payable to Lakeshore. Mail in check with this test. • If paying by credit card, please check the box that applies. If you are calling the office with credit card information, please call the office <i>AFTER</i> you have mailed in the test. <p>Please mail this form with the test. Tests will not be grades and approval will not be granted until after the payment is received.</p>

Method of Payment: (Please check) <input type="checkbox"/> Check (enclosed) or <input type="checkbox"/> Credit Card
Credit Card: (Please check) <input type="checkbox"/> Calling the Lakeshore office to give credit card information. <input type="checkbox"/> Leaving the credit card information below.
Credit Card Number:
Exp. date:
CVC code:
Name on credit card:
Billing Address: _____
City/ State/Zip code