



STEP-BY-STEP JOURNALLING

This strategy is suggested in the 11-14 lesson: **My changing brain**

About the strategy

Step-by-step (or 'reflective') journalling is the process of writing about your experiences, thoughts, feelings and what you have learned from them. It encourages young people to think about what happened, what could have been improved and what they can do differently in the future.

The scientific evidence behind the strategy

International research into reflective journalling on young people's mental health has suggested promising results, but more studies need to be done before it can be regarded as a guaranteed intervention for young people's emotional wellbeing:

This study found that journalling enhanced psychological wellbeing, but only for participants with average or higher baseline levels of self-reflection. Furthermore, it importantly highlighted the need to direct self-reflection toward positive prompts in order to avoid the distress often linked with unguided rumination:

- MacIsaac, A., et al. (2023). *Self-Reflection Moderates the Effect of a Smartphone App-Based Journaling Intervention on Psychological Wellbeing across Time*. Behaviour Change. 2023;40(4):297-313.

This study from the UAE with first year undergraduate students found that reflective journalling can be a valuable tool for supporting student wellbeing:

- Shim, J.Y., et al. (2025). *The Impact of Reflective Journaling on Student Well-being: A Case Study*. English Scholars Beyond Borders, 11(1), pp. 20–35.

This study, examining adolescents aged 10–18, found that expressive writing produced small but significant improvements in areas such as emotional wellbeing, social adjustment and school participation:

- Travagin, G., et al. (2015). *How effective are expressive writing interventions for adolescents? A meta-analytic review*. Clinical Psychology Review. 2015 Mar;36:42-55.

This Chinese study showed that 'positive expressive writing' as a school-based intervention significantly reduced depression and social anxiety symptoms during Covid:

- Hu, C.S., et al. (2025). *Efficacy of positive expressive writing in reducing depression and social anxiety symptoms among schoolchildren during COVID-19: A randomized controlled trial*. Journal of Health Psychology. 2025;30(10):2516-2528.

Further reading

This article expands on the benefits of all types of journalling for mental health:

<https://www.northernhealthcare.org.uk/news-resources/the-mental-health-benefits-of-journalling/>

This BBC Bitesize article can be shared with young people to encourage them to use journalling:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/z3hshcw>