SELFGROWTH.ORG

My Shadow Work Journal

Prompts that go from gentle to deeper. Work through one section per sitting, skip anything that feels like too much, and always finish with 'Coming back up'.

01 Check in before you start

How steady do I feel right now?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not steady at all — Very steady

If I scored 3 or lower, I'll stay with the gentle prompts today, or stop and go to 'Coming back up'. Today I'll do:

02 When to stop and get more support

Stop and reach out if a prompt brings up memories of abuse or trauma, if you feel panicky, numb or unsafe, or if you still feel worse days later. These prompts are for self-reflection, not therapy. A GP or family doctor, or a therapist, can help with what a journal can't hold. If you have any thoughts of harming yourself, please reach out now: call or text 988 in the US, call Samaritans on 116 123 in the UK and Ireland, or find a free helpline at findahelpline.com.

If this gets heavy, the person I'll talk to is:

Something that helps me feel calmer (a walk, music, a shower, a call):

---

03 Start gentle: how you come across

Easy questions first. These get you used to being honest on paper before anything harder.

When do I feel most like myself, and when do I feel like I'm playing a part?

What do I most want people to think about me? What would I hate them to think?

Which compliment do I brush off, and which criticism stays with me for days?

04 What gets under your skin

Strong reactions are the easiest way in. Pick real, recent moments, not your whole life story.

Who annoyed me recently, more than the moment deserved? What exactly did they do or say?

What trait in other people do I judge fastest? Where might a small, quiet version of it live in me?

When did I last get defensive? What was I trying to protect?

05 Rules you learned growing up

A little deeper. Many hidden parts started as rules you picked up as a child. Look for the rule, not someone to blame.

Growing up, which feelings were fine to show at home, and which weren't?

What did I get praised for as a child? What got me told off, or ignored?

Finish the sentence 'Good people don't...', then ask: who taught me that?

06 The parts you keep hidden

Go slowly here. If a question hits something raw, skip it. You can come back another day, or bring it to a therapist.

What do I envy in someone else's life? What does that tell me about what I want?

What part of me do I keep apologising for, or trying to make smaller?

What would I do, say or wear if I knew no one would judge me?

07 The good you buried

Your shadow isn't only the difficult stuff. You may also have hidden strengths that once felt like too much, such as ambition, confidence or playfulness.

Who do I admire so much it feels slightly uncomfortable? What quality do they have that I don't let myself show?

What did I love doing, or want to be, before I decided it 'wasn't me'?

08 Coming back up (end every session here)

Don't stop on the hardest question. Finish here, even if you only answered one prompt today.

If a friend had written what I wrote today, what would I say to them?

One small, kind thing I'll do for myself in the next hour:

One prompt I want to come back to, and when:

09 More prompts for another day: relationships

Tick one off each time you use it. One prompt is plenty for a sitting.

- [ ] What do I need from people that I find hard to ask for?
- [ ] What do I do when I feel left out or ignored?
- [ ] Who brings out a version of me I don't like, and what happens in me around them?
- [ ] What do I pretend not to mind, just to keep the peace?
- [ ] Who do I compare myself to, and what am I really measuring?
- [ ] What pattern keeps repeating in my relationships?

10 More prompts for another day: self-worth

- [ ] What do I believe I have to do before I'm allowed to rest?
- [ ] Which mistake do I still punish myself for?
- [ ] What do I fear people would find out if they really knew me?
- [ ] When do I feel 'not enough', and whose voice does that sound like?
- [ ] What would change if I liked myself a little more?
- [ ] What do I secretly hope is true about me?

11 More prompts for another day: your younger self

These can stir up old memories. Go gently, and leave anything that feels like trauma for a therapist rather than a journal.

- [ ] What did my younger self need to hear more often?
- [ ] What was I afraid of as a child that I'm still a bit afraid of now?
- [ ] What did I stop doing because someone laughed at it?
- [ ] Which role did I play in my family (the helper, the funny one, the quiet one), and do I still play it?
- [ ] What part of me still feels young, and what does it want?
- [ ] What would I want my younger self to know about how things turned out?

When you're done, a moment to reflect

- Which prompt was hardest to answer honestly, and what might that be telling you?
- Did anything surprise you about where a reaction came from?
- How do you feel now compared with when you started? If it's much worse, use your plan from section 2.

If things feel heavier than a worksheet can hold

These are self-reflection tools, not therapy. If you're struggling, especially if you have any thoughts of harming yourself, please reach out to someone now. In the US, call or text **988**. In the UK & Ireland, call **116 123** (Samaritans). Elsewhere, find a free helpline at **findahelpline.com**. If you're in immediate danger, call your local emergency number.