Going Through An Existential Crisis

Workbook

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What Is An Existential Crisis

An existential crisis can be defined as a period of re-examining the meaning, purpose, and value of our lives. Often during these times people begin to feel uneasiness about meaning, choice, and freedom in life. Ultimately, the concern is that life has become pointless and that existence has lost meaning due to various limits and/or boundaries placed on it.

A person of any age can be impacted by an existential crisis, but some people diagnosed with certain health conditions may be more susceptible to experiencing an existential crisis. Also, many people tend to experience existential crises when they are presented with a challenging situation or find themselves struggling to succeed in the midst of a situation.

Major trauma, major loss, or major life events can often be a trigger in these instances.

- Loss of a loved one
- Career change
- Feelings of guilt
- Diagnosis of a serious illness
- Pent up emotions
- Having children
- Displeasure with self
- Marriage or divorce
- Lack of social fulfillment
- Entering major age categories 40s, 50s, 60s

Freedom can also create a stress and crisis in that we must be fully responsible for our actions and decisions when we are given ultimate freedom to act, think, and speak as we please. There can also be the realization that we can never fully know or understand someone which can lead to feelings of being alone and a desire or need to isolate from others.

Finally, can come a series of disappointments which can create a sense of meaninglessness where people feel as though they have no purpose or belonging and therefore cannot see a path forward.

Existential Crisis Exercises

Exercise 1: Alter Your Perspective

Our viewpoint plays a significant role in an existential crisis. What we choose to focus on will shape our perspective and lead us closer to or further away from an existential crisis.

| List those things or thoughts that for you are positive and mean something good |
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| List all your accomplishments | | |

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Exercise 2: Find Meaning

| What brings meaning to your life? | | | | |
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| What acts do you find meaningful? | | | | |
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| What activities make you feel fulfilled? | |
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What do you find meaning in?

| Much time spent stuck in an existential crisis is spent trying to find the meaning "of" something. |
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| However, it may be far more productive to find the meaning "in" it instead. This is a practice of |
| shifting focus and attention away from one that can cause mental strain and disdain, to one that |
| can bring joy and gratitude. |
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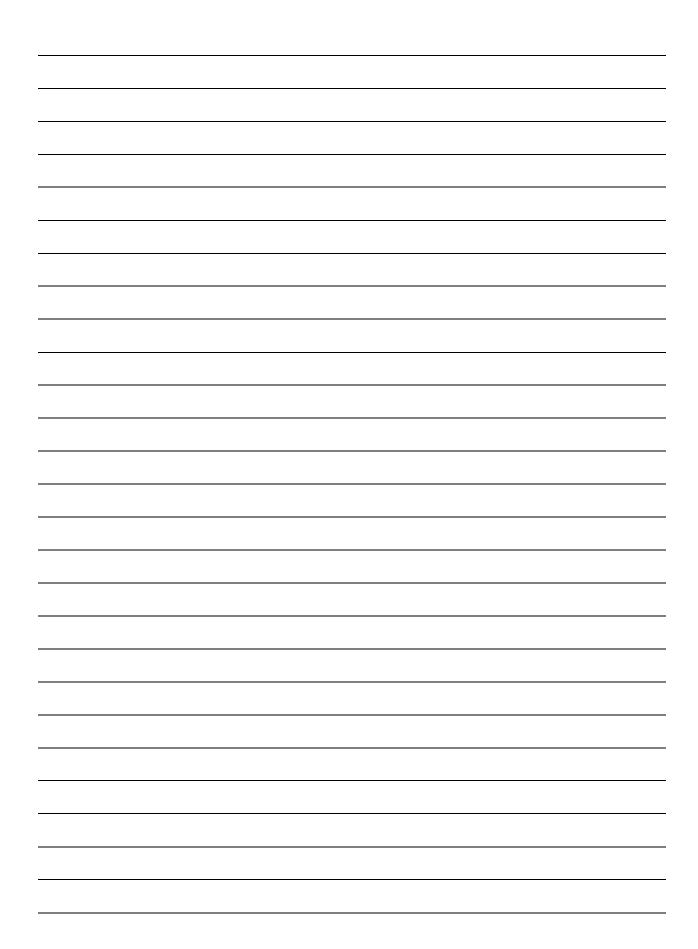
Exercise 3: Gratitude Journal

When in the midst of an existential crisis there is often a struggle to identify meaning in life. A gratitude journal can help significantly in establishing or reestablishing that sense of meaning.

List all that you are grateful for in your life

| Consider people, places, things, work, social, family, health, etc. | | | | |
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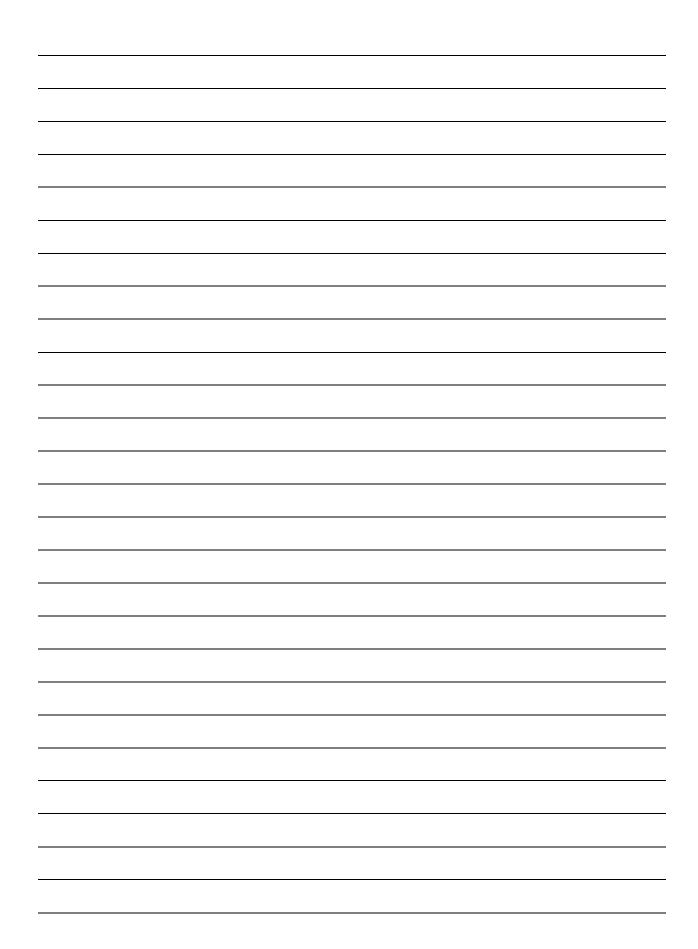
| Write a thank you letter for all that you are grateful for and how the objects of your gratitude impact your life and your wellbeing | | | | |
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Exercise 3: Maintain Meaningful Relationships

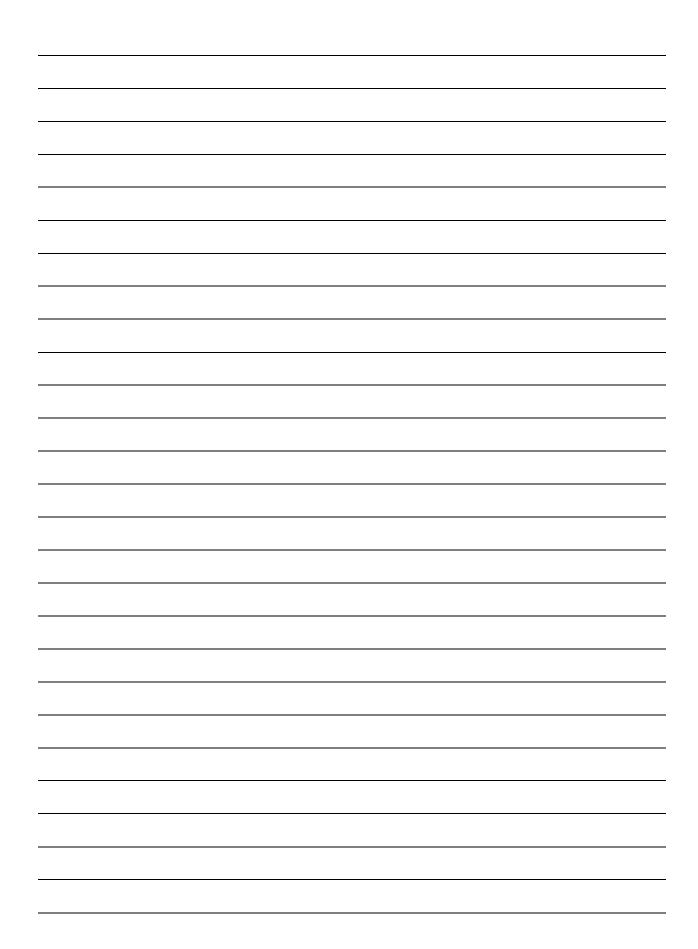
A major existential crisis can occur when there is a feeling of loneliness and isolation. Thus, being intentional about pursuing and maintaining meaningful relationships is of great value.

| List your meaningful relationships |
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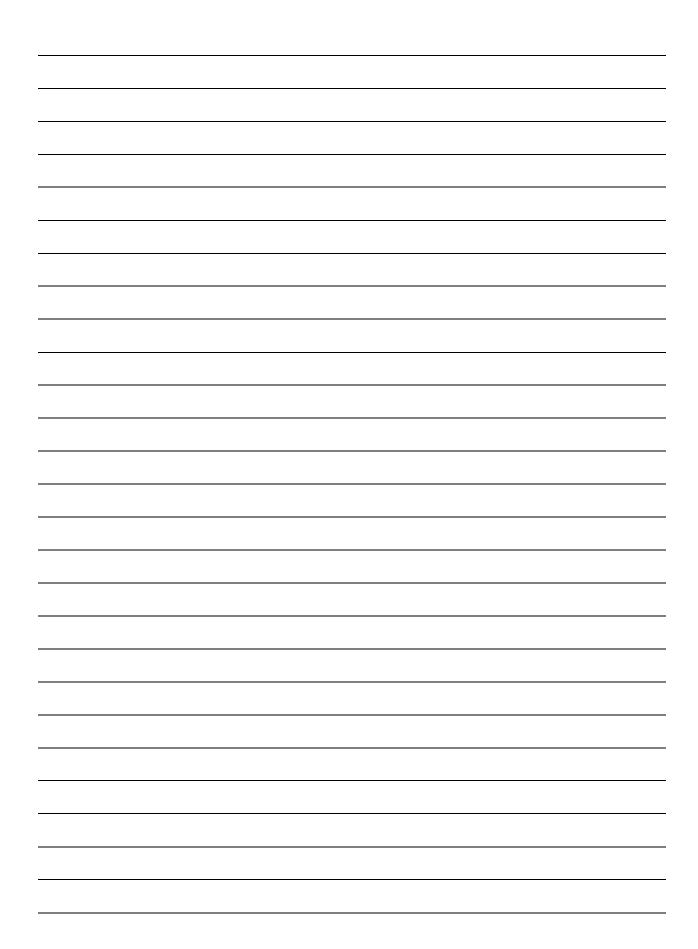
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Exercise 4: Embrace Uncertainty

What is uncertain in your life?

| Major events and trauma can trigger lots of uncertainty about life which can bring about an existential crisis. Learning to embrace the uncertainty and unknowns builds resilience and helps us learn to adapt to the changes and cope with life. The burden of constantly thinking about what might be or what could become is lifted and we experience freedom to simply live and exist. |
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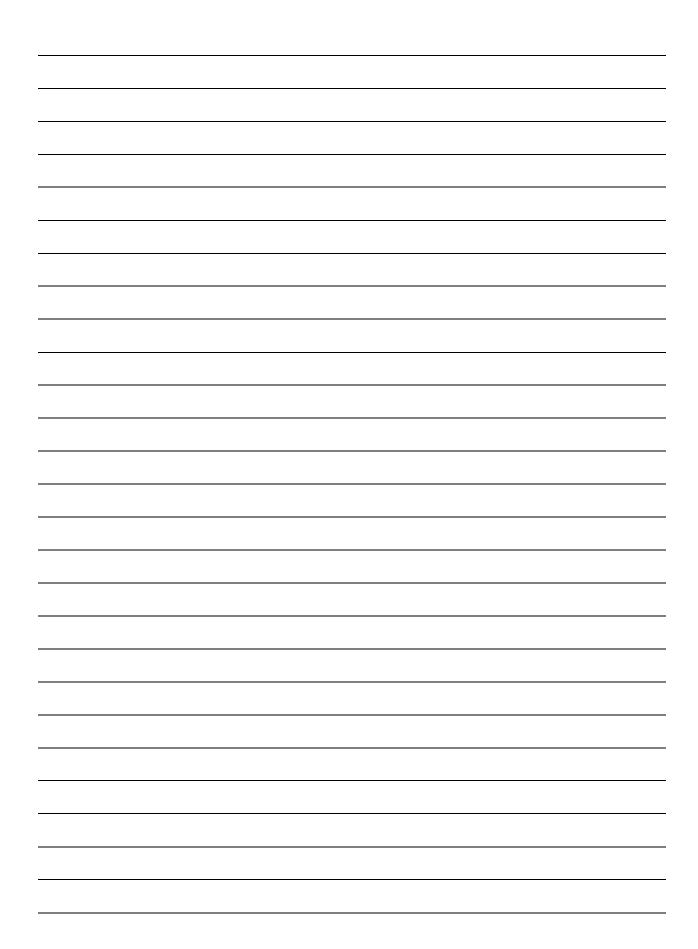
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Exercise 5: Maintain Hope

Hopelessness is a staple of an existential crisis, so being intentional about maintaining hope is key to combating it. These things can be simple like looking forward to seeing a friend or looking forward to seeing a movie. Or they can be bigger milestones like looking forward to a graduation or a job promotion.

| What gives you hope? | | |
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| What makes you feel hopeful? | |
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| What brings you joy? | | |
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| What do you look forward to? | |
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| Make a plan to engage with the above more often | |
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Exercise 6: Value Yourself

Another staple of an existential crisis is the tendency to undervalue self and question one's significance, contribution, or worth in society or life as a whole. Taking the time to find and highlight those things about yourself that are valuable as well as those contributions you've made that are valuable can help to combat the notion that you lack a place.

| What value do I hold? | |
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| List your best qualities | | |
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| List your best qualities | | |

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| What do you contribute to society? | | |
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| What do you contribute to your family? | |
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| What value do you bring to your workplace? | |
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| What valuable roles do you play? | | | |
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| Describe your own worth in detail? | | | |
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| Describe your place in the world | | | | |
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Exercise 7: Let It Go

Ultimately, there is a host of things we will not be able to solve, understand, or get to the bottom of and that is completely okay. Instead of getting lost in what we cannot ultimately understand at times it is best for us to resolve to make peace with not knowing and not understanding.

| Write a letter to yourself committing to let go of all that you do not know or understand and make peace with not knowing. | | | | |
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Exercise 8: Seek Talk Therapy

This is not a workbook exercise, but an action exercise

Seek talk therapy, if the symptoms of an existential crisis persist long-term or the symptoms become severe such as having suicidal thoughts then treatment should be immediately pursued.

While there is not a specific treatment for existential crises specifically, there are situations where the symptoms of an existential crisis require consultation of a medical professional.

| Free Writing/Journaling | | | | | |
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