

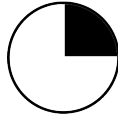
## EXERCISE: GRATITUDE & GOALS

When you're living in a really hard situation, it's easy to feel like nothing is working and nothing will ever get better. But even in the middle of chaos, small wins matter. This exercise helps you notice what's going right (even tiny things) while still working toward the changes you want.

This is NOT toxic positivity. Your situation is hard, and acknowledging small good things doesn't erase that reality. But it can help you feel less hopeless and more capable of making progress.

### Time Needed

10-15 minutes



### Energy Level

Low-Medium



### What You'll Need

Paper and something to write with

### When to Do This

Weekly or as needed

### How It Works

You're going to create two lists side by side: things you're grateful for (even small stuff) and things you're working toward. The point is to hold both at once: appreciating what you've got while still wanting more.

### Step 1: Set Up Your Paper

Divide your paper into two columns:

Grateful For	Working Toward
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

### Step 2: Fill In Grateful For

List 5-10 things you're grateful for **right now**. These can be TINY. They can be things that seem "normal" to other people but feel like victories to you. They don't have to be about your home situation at all.

Start each one with "I'm grateful that..."

Examples that might fit your situation:

- I'm grateful that I have this toolkit and am trying to help myself.
- I'm grateful that I can still get to school most days.
- I'm grateful for my friend who doesn't judge me.
- I'm grateful that my phone works so I can escape into music/videos.
- I'm grateful that I kept my backpack organized this week.
- I'm grateful for the teacher who checked in on me.
- I'm grateful that I found my homework when I needed it.
- I'm grateful that I have my own room, even if it's messy.
- I'm grateful that I woke up today and decided to keep trying.
- I'm grateful for the small clear space I created on my desk.
- I'm grateful that the bathroom was usable this morning.
- I'm grateful that I know things can be different someday.

#### **Things to know:**

- It's okay if this feels awkward or forced at first.
- You don't have to be grateful for the hard stuff. (You don't have to say "I'm grateful for this experience teaching me resilience." That's crap.)
- If you can only think of 2-3 things, that's fine.
- It's okay to list the same things every week if they're still true.

### **Step 3: Fill In Working Toward**

List 5-10 things you're working toward or want to change. These are your goals—big or small, immediate or future. They can be about your current situation or about your future life. Start each one with "I'm working toward..."

Examples that might fit your situation:

- I'm working toward being able to walk through my room without stepping on stuff.
- I'm working toward feeling less embarrassed about my home.
- I'm working toward having one friend over this year.
- I'm working toward keeping my school stuff organized.
- I'm working toward unburdening this big secret.
- I'm working toward not feeling responsible for fixing everything.
- I'm working toward having my own clean, calm apartment in the future.
- I'm working toward setting (and maintaining) better boundaries with my family.
- I'm working toward asking for help when I need it.
- I'm working toward being kinder to myself.
- I'm working toward saving money so I can move out at 18.
- I'm working toward finding one trusted adult to talk to.

### Things to know:

- These don't all have to be achievable right now.
- It's okay to want things you can't have yet.
- Some of these might stay on your list for years; that's normal.
- You're allowed to want a different life than the one you have.

### Step 4: Look for Connections

Now look at both columns together and answer these questions:

#### 1. Is there anything in my Grateful For column that's actually evidence I'm making progress on my Working Toward column?

Example:

- **Grateful:** "I kept my backpack organized this week."
- **Working Toward:** "I'm working toward keeping my school stuff organized."
- **Connection:** You're already doing it! That's progress.

#### 2. Is there something small I'm grateful for that I want to protect or expand? Could I set a small goal about it?

Example:

**Grateful:** "I have a small clear space on my desk"

**Next step:** Keep that space clear and maybe expand it by one more square foot.

#### 3. What's ONE thing from my Working Toward list I could make tiny progress on this week? Pick something realistic. You're not trying to achieve the whole goal - just take one small step.

### Step 5: Celebrate + Commit

**Celebrate:** Look at your Grateful For list. Really look at it. You found good things even in a hard situation. That takes strength.

**Commit:** Pick ONE thing from your Working Toward list to focus on this week. Write it here:

This week I'm focusing on: \_\_\_\_\_

One small action I can take: \_\_\_\_\_

## Using This Exercise

- **Do this weekly or bi-weekly.** It helps you:
  - Notice you're not completely stuck (even if it feels that way).
  - Keep moving toward what you want without burning out.
  - Practice holding both gratitude AND desire for change at the same time.
- **Save your lists.** When you're having a really hard day, look back at old lists. You might be surprised at what's changed or what you've accomplished that you forgot about.
- **Update as you go.** Things move from Working Toward to Grateful For as you achieve them. That's the whole point!

## Accessibility Considerations

This exercise involves writing two lists. Adaptations include: using voice-to-text or voice memos instead of writing, having someone scribe for you while you speak, drawing or using images instead of words, or simply thinking through your responses mentally. If executive function makes it hard to think of items, having someone prompt you with questions can help. There's no requirement to complete all 5-10 items; whatever you can generate is enough.

## Important Reminders

- **Gratitude doesn't mean you have to be okay with your situation.** You can be grateful for small things AND still be angry/sad/frustrated about the big picture. Both are true.
- **Your Working Toward list might look impossible right now.** That's okay! Just because you can't do it today doesn't mean it's not worth wanting.
- **Progress isn't linear.** Some weeks your Grateful For list will be shorter. Some weeks you'll make no progress on your goals. That's normal and doesn't mean you're failing.
- **You're allowed to want more.** Wanting things to be better isn't ungrateful; it's human.

## Real Talk

This exercise works because it keeps you from two extremes:

1. **Only focusing on what's wrong** → leads to hopelessness and giving up
2. **Only focusing on positives** → leads to denying reality and not making changes

The truth is in the middle. Your situation is hard AND you have some things going for you. You can't fix everything AND you can make small improvements. You're stuck in some ways AND you're moving forward in others.

**Both things are true. Hold onto them both.**