

Before You Begin

For the first few days. Before your first session, before anything feels figured out yet.

● WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENS FIRST

None of this is guesswork. It reflects what people who've been through this before you tend to wish they'd known on day one — because hearing it from someone who's already been there is exactly what makes the unknown feel smaller.

- ☐ Meet your care team, and understand who does what — you don't need to know everyone on day one.
 - ☐ Ask for the plan: sessions, cycles, what the schedule actually looks like.
 - ☐ Decide who to tell, and when. *There's no right timeline — some people tell everyone immediately, some wait weeks.*
 - ☐ If you can, ask someone to come with you to the first appointment. An extra set of ears helps.
 - ☐ Start a running list of questions — even "I don't know what to ask yet" is a fine place to start. (There's a printable guide for this at the same link where you found this page.)
 - ☐ Give yourself permission to not have this figured out yet. Almost no one does, in the first week.
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There's one more thing worth knowing before you begin — not a task, but something about how the mind handles fear. It's on the next page, because it's worth reading slowly.

One thing about the fear

The urge to push the fear away, stay busy, or control every part of what's coming is completely normal. It's also usually what makes the fear feel bigger — and that's not a coincidence. There's a real mechanism behind it, from two different directions.

WHERE THIS COMES FROM — BRIEF STRATEGIC THERAPY

This journal is built on Brief Strategic Therapy, a clinical approach where a central finding is this: most of what keeps a problem painful isn't the problem itself — it's the exact strategy a person uses to try to manage it. Psychologists call this an "attempted solution." With fear, the most common attempted solution is avoidance: pushing it down, staying busy, refusing to think the thought. It feels like control. Often, it isn't.

WHERE THIS COMES FROM — PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH

Separately, decades of research on thought suppression have found the same pattern outside of any therapy room. In a well-known set of experiments, people told to not think about something specific — a white bear, in the original study — ended up thinking about it more, not less. Part of the mind has to keep checking whether the suppression is working, which means it has to keep bringing the thought back up to check. Fear tends to work the same way. The effort spent not feeling it is often what keeps it circling.

Naming the fear does something different. It doesn't make it disappear — but it gives it an edge, a shape, a size. A shapeless fear can be about everything, all at once, all day. A named fear is about one thing. That's a smaller, more specific weight to carry.

TRY THIS

Write down, in one sentence, the thing you're most afraid of right now. Not the whole diagnosis — the one specific thing.

And then? Naming it once isn't the end of it — it's the start of a habit. Come back to this same question tomorrow, and the day after. Some days the answer will be the same. Some days it'll change completely. Both are fine.

This is exactly what the Before Results and After the Appointment pages in your *With You* journal are built to hold — a place to put this down regularly, not just once. If today is the day you start using it, this is a good place to begin.

Reviewed by Lourdes Rellosa, Clinical Psychologist trained in Brief Strategic Therapy under Giorgio Nardone.