

Still here, still living

A journal for exploring death anxiety, at your own pace

Muireann Banks
Accredited Integrative & Somatic Psychotherapist · MSc, MIAHIP, MICP
muireannbankstherapy.ie

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Welcome

The fear of death is not the problem. The real problem is the unlived life: the moments swallowed by avoidance, the relationships held at arm's length, the self not yet fully inhabited.

Death anxiety is part of being human. It can be loud, or it can sit quietly beneath other worries. This journal offers a gentle way to turn towards it, with curiosity rather than fear, so that it can become a reminder to live more fully.

How to use this journal

- **Go at your own pace.** There are six sections. You might do one a week, or come back to a single prompt many times.
- **There are no right answers.** Write, draw, or simply sit with a question. Skip anything that doesn't feel right today.
- **Start and finish with your body.** The grounding practice on the next page helps you arrive, and settle again afterwards.
- **Notice, then pause.** If a prompt stirs up a lot, put the pen down, take a few slow breaths, and come back another day.

Taking care of yourself

This journal is not a substitute for therapy. If you find that thinking about death leaves you distressed for days, or gets in the way of daily life, please talk to your GP or a therapist.

If you are struggling right now, please don't wait:

- Samaritans: call 116 123, free, any time
- Pieta, for suicide and self-harm: call 1800 247 247 or text HELP to 51444
- Text HELLO to 50808 for free, anonymous support, any time
- In an emergency, call 112 or 999

EACH TIME YOU WRITE

Coming back to the present

Death anxiety tends to pull us into the future, into “what if” and “not yet”. This short practice brings you back to the one place you can actually live: right here, right now, in your body. Take two or three minutes over it before and after each section.

1. **Feel your feet.** Notice the ground beneath you, and the weight of your body on the chair.
2. **Follow three breaths.** No need to change them. Just notice the air coming in and going out.
3. **Scan gently.** Move your attention from your head down to your feet. Is there tightness, heaviness, warmth, or movement anywhere?
4. **Look around.** Name three things you can see, and one thing you can hear.
5. **Find something steadying.** A hand on your chest, a warm drink, a view from the window. Let yourself notice it for a moment.

What do you notice in your body right now, before you begin?

And afterwards: what has shifted, even a little?

SECTION ONE

Noticing

Death anxiety doesn't always look like a fear of dying. It can show up as worry about our health, a dread we can't quite name, constant busyness, or avoiding hospitals, funerals and certain conversations. The first step is simply to notice how it shows up for you.

When do thoughts about death or dying tend to visit you? What is usually happening at those times?

How do you usually respond: pushing the thoughts away, distracting yourself, keeping busy, worrying, or something else?

Is there anything you avoid because it brings death a little closer?

As you write this, what do you notice in your body?

SECTION TWO

My story with death

Each of us carries a history with death: the first time we understood that people die, the losses we have lived through, and the messages we absorbed growing up. Only go as far as feels okay today.

What is your first memory of understanding that people, including you, will die?

How was death talked about, or not talked about, in your family when you were growing up?

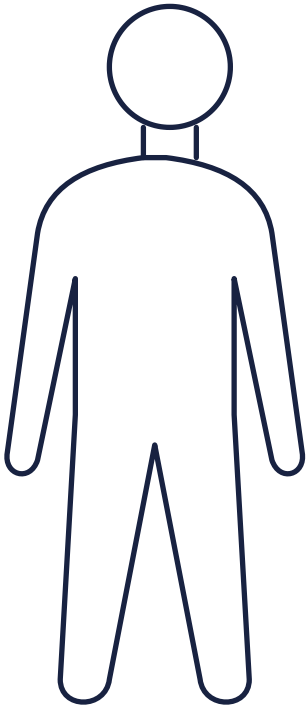
Which losses have shaped you, and how?

What have those experiences taught you about death, and about life?

SECTION THREE

Listening to the body

Experiences that are hard to put into words are often held in the body. Rather than thinking your way through fear, this section invites you to notice it: where it lives, what it feels like, and what helps it soften.



When you think about your own mortality, where do you feel it in your body? Mark those places on the outline.

You might use colours, shading or words: tight, heavy, buzzing, hollow, warm, numb.

What does it feel like?

What helps your body settle, even a little: a movement, a breath, a place, a person?

What might your body be asking for?

SECTION FOUR

The unlived life

> The more unlived your life, the greater your death anxiety.
>
> Irvin D. Yalom, Staring at the Sun: Overcoming the Terror of Death (2008)

Bronnie Ware, who cared for people at the end of their lives, found that the regret she heard most often was not having had the courage to live a life true to oneself, rather than the life others expected (Ware, 2012). This section turns towards what matters to you, now.

If you knew you had one year left, what would you change? And what would you keep exactly as it is?

What have you been putting off “for later”?

Where are you living by other people's expectations rather than your own?

Circle the values that matter most to you, and add your own.

Love	Family	Friendship	Creativity
Nature	Faith	Learning	Kindness
Adventure	Rest	Courage	Honesty
Play	Community	Freedom	.....

Looking at the values you circled: where are they already alive in your life, and where would you like more of them?

SECTION FIVE

Rippling

Irvin Yalom described “rippling”: the way each of us influences others, often without knowing it, sometimes for generations (Yalom, 2008). Thinking about the ripples we leave can bring a sense of meaning and connection that outlasts our own lifetime.

Who has left a ripple in your life? What did they give you that you still carry?

What ripples do you hope to leave, in the people around you and in the world?

Is there something you would like someone you love to know, that you haven't yet said? You might begin a letter here.

SECTION SIX

Practical peace of mind

Sometimes peace of mind comes from practical steps as well as reflection. Putting our affairs in order, so the people we love are not left guessing, can bring real relief. Tick anything you have already done, and notice how the others feel.

- [ ] I have made a will
- [ ] I have made an enduring power of attorney
- [ ] Someone I trust knows my wishes about care at the end of life
- [ ] I have thought about an advance healthcare directive
- [ ] Someone knows where to find my important documents
- [ ] I have thought about what I would like for my funeral or celebration of life
- [ ] I have thought about what should happen to my online accounts

Which of these feel easy to think about, and which feel hard? What do you notice in your body as you read them?

What is one small step you could take in the next month?

Where to start

The Irish Hospice Foundation's free **Think Ahead** planning pack helps you record your care wishes, name someone to speak for you about your healthcare, and keep track of important documents: hospicefoundation.ie.

I also work alongside a death doula who supports people with practical planning for the end of life. If you would like to be put in touch, just mention it when you get in touch through muireannbankstherapy.ie.

Notes, thoughts, next steps

TO CLOSE

A letter to myself, still here

Look back over what you have written. Then write a letter to yourself: about what you have noticed, what matters, and how you would like to live from here.

Still here. Still living. Still choices to make.

If you would like support exploring any of this, you are very welcome to get in touch. I offer integrative and body-based psychotherapy in Terenure, Dublin 6W, and online, in English and French: muireannbankstherapy.ie

Sources: Ware, B. (2012). *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying*. Yalom, I. D. (2008). *Staring at the Sun: Overcoming the Terror of Death*. Irish Hospice Foundation, *Think Ahead*.

© 2026 Muireann Banks. Free to download, print and use for your own reflection.