

TAKING CARE OF YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

EXPRESSIVE WRITING

The power of writing offers an important health opportunity. Writing provides an enjoyable way of exploring and expressing feelings. When people write different things, what they are feeling in their minds and hearts, they feel better and healthier. Just by focusing on positive emotions like optimism and empathy and moving away from negative emotions like guilt and fear we feel more connected to others.

During these past few weeks most of us have spent longer amounts of time at the computer playing video games, reading and writing emails and viewing friends and family on Facetime. Expressive writing gives our minds the time to rest and allows new ideas and thoughts to be formed. We begin to pay greater attention to being in the present moment, understanding our emotions from our senses and feelings, not from what we are being told to feel.

Benefits of Expressive Writing

Loneliness is on the rise and it puts people at risk physically. We are all feeling the social isolation and anxiety that is on the rise. Maybe you are feeling low, down in the dumps or just stressed out. These emotions over time can impair our immunity, increase inflammation which is related to arthritis, diabetes and heart disease. It also promotes unhealthy habits such as less exercise and increased smoking, drinking and eating.

One major benefit to expressive writing is that it can help the writer find meaning in their experiences, view things from a new perspective, perhaps see the silver linings in the most stressful or negative experiences. It can also lead a person to have important insights about themselves and their environment that may be causing them to feel anxious and stressed.

How To Begin Expressive Writing

1. Assemble your writing tools, simple notebook, journal, pens and pencils
2. Set a schedule to write a certain amount of time each day
3. Decide when and where you will write

Follow these steps to WRITE

W – What do you want to write about?

R - Reflect on it, close your eyes and allow yourself to visualize the written words

I - Investigate your thoughts and feelings then begin writing and continue

T - Time yourself, write for about 5 to 15 minutes each day

E – Exit by re-reading what you've written and then closing the page

Writing Ideas

If you are feeling overwhelmed about what to write try some of these ideas:

1. Writing a letter to yourself
 2. Writing a letter to someone else
 3. Write a poem
 4. Free writing – Just write anything that comes to your mind
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- a. What really makes me happy is
 - b. What I wish I could change.....
 - c. The most important thing in my life right now....
 - d. To be honest, I would rather....
 - e. Who do I admire and why?
 - f. The words I'd like myself and others to live by are....
 - g. Make a list of 30 things that make you smile

You will probably feel some resistance before you begin, BEGIN ANYWAY.

1. Start writing about where you are in your life right now and talk about the resistance to putting your thoughts on paper
2. Approach with an attitude of gratitude by keeping a list of things and people you appreciate
3. Look outside your window and connect to nature

Most importantly, develop an understanding of your needs and desires and learn to listen to yourself.... "LIFE IS EITHER A DARING ADVENTURE OR NOTHING AT ALL"

Helen Keller