

Expressive Writing

Session 1: Implicit Value System

- Write about your deepest thoughts as if no one is going to read them.
 - Then do it assuming your priest will read it; your psychologist; your mother; etc. Each context will create an implicit value system that will affect you're writing.
- Anonymous writing's power can lie in that you can process it free of implicit value systems which will help free you rather than lock you into a particular dogma.

Session 2:

a. Understanding Your Stress

Find a quiet place to try this writing exercise. Start by writing stress at the top of the page: then, under it, write whatever associated word or topic enters your mind. Continue to do this, immediately writing one word or phrase after another as they enter your mind. Don't think too hard and don't evaluate censor or otherwise limit what you associate with each successive word. Keep writing until no more words or topics appear in your mind. Take a short break and then review your writing. Look at the List of words, topics, and phrases to see if you notice patterns. Are there themes or topics that emerge? Are there patterns in the emotions or meaning of the words? Such patterns may help you understand the nature and impact of stress in your life.

b. Try Expressive Writing

Find a quiet time and place for this next writing exercise. Right for 20 to 30 minutes, focusing on your deepest emotions and thoughts about the stressful or upsetting experience nearby. Whatever you choose to write about, it is critical that you are calm and explore your deepest emotions and thoughts. Right continuously, don't worry about spelling, grammar, or style. Warning: many people report that after writing, they sometimes feel somewhat sad, although this typically goes away in a couple of hours. If you find that you are getting extremely upset about the writing topic, simply stop writing or change topics.

Session 4:

- a. How often? How long? How much time between sessions?
 - 2-12 x/day, 2-30 min, with 10 min to 1 week rest between
 - Intensive 10 min on, 10 min off x 3 (process a single event in great detail)
 - More frequent, shorter is better intuitively
 - Breaks between writing sets, even 2 min, helps people switch to a different perspective (even if subtle)

- b. Getting in the mood
 - A more confessional style room, dimly lit, seemed to warm people up more than a lab-like décor
 - No interruptions
 - Evening may be an ideal time for some
 - Some studies show that it helps with sleep
 - BRAC (basic rest and activity cycle)

- c. Practical Considerations
 - Write continuously, even if draw a blank, continue repeating the same thing
 - Don't worry about grammar, spelling
 - Computer or handwriting is okay; or talking into tape recorder (faster, less slowing down your thought, not as private)
 - Private, write for yourself or you will change the perspective; you can shred it

- d. Picking a Topic
 - Write about topics where there is some distance (emotionally), or that you are currently living with (even from the past)
 - If you can't tell others about it
 - What do you feel about it and why? How does it influence your life? Your relationships? Your goals and dreams?

- e. Writing Style: Freestyle
 - Write whatever comes into your mind for 10-20 minutes. Try to write the entire time without stopping. Don't worry about style or grammar; the important thing is to keep writing continuously for the entire session. Just let yourself write, a sort of limbering-up exercise.

f. Cognitive Processing

- See ABCDE Record
- <https://www.yorkconcussion.ca/patient-resources/#1569512662607-f2e52496-8931>
- See Group Counselling: CBT and Positive Psychology
- <https://www.yorkconcussion.ca/group-counselling/>
- Socratic questioning
 - What is the evidence that my thought is true? What is the evidence that my thought is not true?
 - What's an alternative explanation or viewpoint?
 - What's the worst thing that could happen and how would I cope if it did?
 - What's the best that could happen?
 - What's the most likely outcome?
 - What is the effect of telling myself this thought?
 - What could be the effect of changing my thinking?
 - What would I tell someone else if he/she viewed this situation in this way?
 - What should I do now?

g. Best possible future-self: Writing from 5 years in the future

- Think about yourself in the future.
- Imagine that everything has gone as well as it possibly could.
- Think of this as the realization of all your life dreams.
- Now, write about what you imagined.

h. Write

Over the next four days, I want you to write about your deepest emotions and thoughts about the most upsetting experience in your life. Really let go and explore your feelings and thoughts about it. In your writing, you might tie this experience to your childhood, your relationship with your parents, people you have loved or love now, or even your career. How is this experience related to who you would like to become, who you have been in the past, or who you are now?

Many people have not had a single traumatic experience, but all of us have had major conflicts or stressors in our lives, and you can write about them as well. You can write about the same issue every day or a series of different issues. Whatever you choose to write about, however, it is critical that you really let go and explore your very deepest emotions and thoughts.

Warning, many people report that after writing, they sometimes feel somewhat sad or depressed. As with seeing a sad movie, this typically goes away in a couple of hours. If you find that you are getting extremely upset about a writing topic, simply stop writing or change topics.