

Expressive Writing

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Using Expressive Writing

Journal writing is a simple tool for stress-management and emotional wellness. Writing about your life and your feelings has positive effects on physical and emotional health. Extensive research by James Pennebaker and colleagues shows that individuals who occasionally write about their emotions and thoughts experience several benefits: increased feelings of well-being, reduced physician visits, reduced absenteeism from work, improved academic grades, and enhanced immune system functions (Lepore & Smyth, 2002; Pennebaker, 1997, 2004). A study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* showed that medical patients who wrote in a journal for three consecutive days showed improvements that were verified by their physicians. Arthritis patients showed reductions in arthritis symptoms, and persons with asthma showed measurable improvements in breathing (Smyth, Stone, Hurewitz, & Kaell, 1999).

Instructions (Adapted from Pennebaker, 1999)

Each time you write in your journal, express your deepest thoughts and feelings about some important emotional event or issue that has affected you. In your writing, let go and explore your deepest emotions and thoughts. You might tie your topic to your relationships with others, including parents, lovers, friends, or relatives; to your past, your present, or your future; or to who you have been, who you would like to be, or who you are now. You may write about the same general issues or experiences on all days of writing or on different topics each day. All of your writing will be completely confidential. Do not worry about spelling, sentence structure, or grammar. Journaling is most effective if you write whenever you notice that you are thinking or worrying about something too much. Set a length of time comfortable for yourself, anywhere from 10 to 20 minutes. Then continue writing until the time is up. You do not need to write every day. Instead, think of expressive writing as a way to clarify your thoughts and emotions. This method is particularly powerful in helping you to get through emotional upheavals.

Assurances for Subject

Many persons are hesitant to write for fear of others discovering and reading their journal. Feel free to dispose of your writings after you have written the day's entry. No one need ever see what you have written. The process of self-expression is beneficial even if the text is immediately shredded, burned, or otherwise destroyed.

References

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