

Responding to Emotional Pain: Feeling and Healing Your Emotions

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How to use Expressive Writing in the Most Effective Way

WRITE FOR FOUR DAYS MINIMUM.

WRITE FOR TWENTY MINUTES A DAY. If you wind up writing for more than twenty minutes, that's great. Nevertheless, the following day you must write for a minimum of twenty minutes. You may not count any extra time spent writing one day to carry over to the next day.

WRITING TOPIC. You can write about the same event on all four days or about different events each day. Not everyone has had a major trauma that they want to write about. However, we have all had major conflicts or stressors in our lives that you can also write about. However, whatever you choose to write about should be something that is extremely personal and important for you.

WRITE CONTINUOUSLY. Once you begin writing, write continuously without stopping. Don't worry about spelling or grammar. Your high school English teacher will never see it. If you run out of things to say, simply repeat what you have already written.

WRITE ONLY FOR YOURSELF. You are writing for yourself and no one else. Plan to destroy or hide what you have written when you have finished. Do not turn this exercise into a letter. After you complete your expressive writing task, if you want to write a letter, then do it. But this exercise is for your eyes only.

THE FLIP-OUT RULE. If you feel as though you cannot write about a particular event because it will "push you over the edge," then don't write about it. Deal only with those events or situations that you can handle now. If you have additional traumatic topics that you can't get to now, you can always deal with them in the future. It's ok to push yourself outside your comfort zone, but don't enter the danger zone.

PENNEBAKER WRITING INSTRUCTIONS, "Your goal is to write about your deepest thoughts and feelings about the trauma or emotional upheaval that has been influencing your life the most. In your writing, really let go and explore the event and how it has affected you. It may be beneficial simply to write about the event itself, how you felt when it was occurring, and how you feel about it now."

Adapted from the following book that I highly recommend:

Pennebaker, J. W. (2004). Writing to Heal: A Guided Journal for Recovering from Trauma and Emotional Upheaval. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publication, Inc.