

An Ounce of Prevention

Complimentary

December 2015

Issue 228

Printed by:

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Writing as a Stress Reliever

-Carol Vivyan, getselfhelp.co.uk

Writing is an integral part of therapy, such as using thought record sheets and mood or activity diaries. Additional therapeutic techniques that involve writing are helpful at particular times. There are many benefits to writing, including “getting it out of our head”, seeing things from another perspective, a part of exposure work (distressing memories), or externalising the problem – even just putting words on paper really helps. Choose to set a time limit for your writing.

Rainy Day Letter to Self

It is helpful to people, when feeling well and able to cope with daily life, to write a letter to themselves, to read when they're not feeling so good, or are struggling to cope. The well, stable and strong you, writes a letter to the more vulnerable you. If you don't feel you're ever in a good enough place to write a letter in this way, you could try imagining that you are feeling well, strong and able to cope, or perhaps older and wiser, and write a letter from the future, to your present more vulnerable self, offering guidance and support for how to get to that better place. You might decide that you can read this letter at certain times, when you're feeling a certain way, or when you're struggling with particularly dark thoughts. In your letter, include:

- What helps you feel better at those times
- What you've found that helped in the past
- Guidance on what you need to do (e.g. talk to someone, do something, be with others)
- Advice on what not to do –as you know from experience that it doesn't help you in the long run
- Your personal strengths and resources
- What you need to know at that time

I understand, I've been there, I care, others care –even though it might feel like they don't, you can get through this, you've done it before, remind yourself to use particular techniques to help get you through, “it will pass”

- Be compassionate, caring, supportive, understanding, encouraging to your vulnerable self.

Writing your story

It is helpful to write down what's happened to you, either over your lifespan, or perhaps a particular distressing memory. Take some time, when you won't be disturbed, and write down everything you can remember about that time. Get it all on paper. Once it's there, you might choose to re-arrange it so that it reads like a chronological story, as it happened. You

might choose to write it as a story, or in note form, using bullet points with a brief description. The more you can write the better. You can build it up over time. Describe the circumstances, the ages and size of people involved. Perhaps consider the bigger picture –what was going on not only for you but for others involved too. Describe what you felt, thought and did at that time. This helps to put the story together (it's often fragmented in our memories), helps get it out of our heads, and often enables us to see a different perspective on what happened. Once it's on paper, we can read it through as often as we need to, in order to put the memory in its proper place –as a story, a memory, from the past, which belongs in the past.

Letters to others

It is helpful to write a letter to others, perhaps about what you really think or feel about them or what they did that hurt you so much, or to express how much you appreciate someone, or want to say sorry, or that you want to forgive. You might want to wait a while, and perhaps discuss with your therapist or a wise friend, before deciding whether it's a good idea to actually send the letter (if the person is still alive and known to you), or you might choose to deal with it differently. Some people find it helpful to (go outside and) burn the letter, watching the smoke rise up, particularly if the person has died. Or just imagine the letter arriving at its destination, the person reading it, and seeing the reaction you want them to have. Or maybe it's enough just to have written it, so another option may be shredding it, or watching it slowly disintegrate whilst soaking in water.

A Better Future

When we're feeling really hopeless, believing things can never change, it is helpful for us (or have a trusted someone else) to write an account describing us in a desired future, maybe in one, five or many years from now. Someone who's been depressed, anxious, in debt, unemployed and unable to support their family financially –may write (or have written by someone else) a letter describing them finding a satisfying job, getting on with colleagues, positive feedback from the management about how you're getting on at that time, bringing home the money your family needs in order to cope, and even put some aside for a holiday. Describe how the family relationships are so much better.

Random Writing – The Mind Dump

It is helpful to just write down whatever comes into our heads, perhaps for a certain period of time –10 minutes or half an hour. It may read as nonsense, and that's okay. That's how our minds work. Write down all the random, apparently nonsensical words and sentences, anything that comes to mind. You might include brief descriptions or sketches of any images that come to mind. Don't change or edit anything. Simply write. You might then look back and see if there's anything there worth spending time

thinking about, or you might decide that it's okay to just leave it there, on the paper. You can choose what you then do with the paper –to keep or destroy it, and how to do that.

Keep a notepad with you

If you have trouble sleeping, it is useful to have a notepad and pen or pencil on your bedside table, so you can jot down any worries that come to mind, and tell yourself you can deal with or pay attention to them in the morning. Carrying a notepad in your handbag or pocket means you can write down anything, anytime.

Keeping a Journal

You can write, whatever you want to write, every day, or whenever you need to, your thoughts, feelings, responses. These can be intensely private, what you wouldn't share with anyone else. Write at times when you feel just okay, when you feel great, and times when you're really distressed or struggling to cope. It helps to put things in perspective, get it out of your head and onto paper (or on a computer), and means you can look back on it at another time, if that would be helpful –to see how you coped, that things can and will be better, that you can survive, that this will pass.

Not a writer? Try music

Music can greatly affect our mood. Choose your piece of music wisely. If you're feeling depressed, choose upbeat, energising music. If you're feeling tense and uptight, then choose music that is likely to relax you –with a slower and gentler pace. Generally, choose music that is the opposite of how you're feeling. Very often when we're depressed, we like to listen to sad songs. Sometimes that might be helpful, but if you want to feel better and improve your mood, you'll need to choose different music. However, music is very personal, and what works for one person may be very different from what works for another. If you're not sure what piece of music to use, then get a few tunes together, and try them. You'll soon know if a song or piece of music is going to do the job! Very quickly you'll notice it starting to affect you.

Watch out for song lyrics. Whilst the music does the main job of affecting our mood, the lyrics also play a part. If you're going to practise mindful listening, then it may be best to choose music without words.

Listening

You can put the music on in the background whilst you carry on with your daily activities. It's okay to sing or hum along, or even dance! You may prefer to do that alone, although it can be more fun with others.

Mindful Music

Put some time aside to sit or lie down and be with the music, so that you can give it your full focus of attention. Ask others not to distract you, turn off your phone and do whatever else you need to do to reduce distractions. Find somewhere comfortable and give it your total focus, with your full attention on the music. As you listen:

- Bring your attention to aspects of the music that you don't normally notice: the rhythm, the different instruments or sounds at different times, the pauses, the tune and the background harmony, the varying loudness and speed of the music, the high and low notes, long and short.

- Notice how the music is affecting you as you listen: notice your breathing, your heart rate, your body's rhythm.

- Bring your attention to the rest of your body, and notice the physical sensations as you listen to the music.

- Notice what emotions the music bring up, and how your mind is being affected (calming, energising, inspiring, more alert, relaxing).

- Listen to the music as a whole –let it sweep you away and along, getting lost in that music. If any thoughts come into your mind, just notice them and allow them to be carried away on the music, then bring your attention back to the music.



Parenting Corner

Search: [Adolescent Depression and Sleep – umn connect](#)

Search: [Dr. Dan Siegel - On Disorganized Attachment in the Making](#)

Search: [The Commit to Kids Parent Guide](#)

Net News

Here are some web sites you & your family may find helpful:

Search: <http://www.acesconnection.com/clip/just-breathe-4-mi>

Search: [Coloring to Relax](#)

Search: [How Exercise can Calm Anxiety - NYTimes](#)

Self-Help Corner:

City of Edmonton Community Resources: 211
Catholic Social Services: 780-471-1122
Support Network / Distress Line: 780-482-HELP
Kids Help Line: 1-800-668-6868