

Community Institute for Psychotherapy

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2021-2022 News & Notes



August 2022 News and Notes The Benefits of Expressive Writing By Robin Joy Berenson, PhD, LMFT

In this age of multimedia and constant communication, it can be difficult to slow the pace long enough to recognize our own voice among the many. Add to that, the multiple roles we play each day in our busy lives: partner/parent; coworker/employee/boss; friend/neighbor/confidant; and more.

Expressive writing, words meant just for ourselves, can be a healing oasis in this era of frequent overwhelm. Whether a daily diary entry, an occasional “note to self,” a morning journal entry, or a many-page creative freewrite, giving ourselves time to put our thoughts into words on a page or text onto a screen affords us the opportunity to connect with ourselves in a unique way. Here are just a few of the reasons.

Explore Personal Meaning: Writing out thoughts on an ongoing basis allows us to review meaningful events as well as important ideas and feelings. It’s a time to reflect, problem solve, and re-tune our thinking.

Writing for ourselves can increase awareness and understanding of the day to day, and help point to next steps. When facing challenges, it can be a means of building resilience by reminding us of past successes and solutions. When working toward a long-term goal, recording progress on a daily basis can encourage and help to renew our resolve.

Recently, gratitude journals have gained in popularity. In these, a person at the end of the day notes down three (or more) things they are grateful for in their lives. Identifying what you appreciate most encourages greater awareness, exerting a rippling effect throughout the day. Not surprisingly, this practice has been found to improve sleep quality and overall well-being.

Promote Mental Health: In a similar vein, the University of Rochester Medical Center, in their article, “Journaling for Mental Health,” explains, “Keeping a journal helps you create order when your world feels like it’s in chaos.”

“One of the ways to deal with any overwhelming emotion is to find a healthy way to express yourself.” Among the benefits of journaling for mental health is the ability to manage symptoms of emotional distress such as anxiety, stress, and depression, as well as to identify triggers.

Preserve Memories: Logs, diaries, journals can contain a wealth of vivid detail of times past. Whether for ourselves looking back on a significant period or preserving information for future generations, such records can bring the past to life as nothing else can. Perhaps it’s the year spent abroad, the family’s move to California, the baby’s first year, or the trip to Machu Picchu. Even not-so-significant events can provide a fascinating window into the past, for example, “How we lived in 1973.”

Writing for Discovery: Enjoy the fun of “freewriting” for creative expression, to overcome writer’s block, and discover surprising avenues of thought you never would have expected. Many professional writers use this technique to generate new ideas.

With a prompt or perhaps no plans at all, write quickly without stopping, “keep the hand moving!” for a period of time: 10, 15, 30 minutes. Freewrite authority Natalie Goldberg suggests inviting a friend to join you in this exercise.

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This technique has grown steadily in popularity in recent years and there are many useful how-tos on the internet.

“Journaling for Mental Health”

<https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/encyclopedia/content.aspx?ContentID=4552&ContentTypeID=1>

“3 Fabulous Freewriting Techniques for the Uninspired Writer” <https://www.academicwritingsuccess.com/3-fabulous-freewriting-techniques/>

“Writing to heal” <http://www.apa.org/monitor/jun02/writing.aspx>

“The Health Benefits of Journaling” <http://psychcentral.com/lib/the-health-benefits-of-journaling/000721>