

Therapeutic Writing – Writing for Wellbeing

Research shows that writing can benefit your health and wellbeing, but so far no-one knows how it works. No special talent, ability or imagination is needed. Many people would enjoy writing, and benefit from it, if they just had a push to get started. Whatever you write is right for you. Trust yourself to write whatever you need to write.



Write for yourself. No-one else needs to see what you write. Afterwards you can put your writing away, read it again, write some more, show someone else, or just tear it up and throw it away. It's doing the writing that does you good, not what you do with it after.

You can write almost anytime and anywhere – day or night, in your room, in a cafe, on a bus, in the park. Writing is an almost free hobby – all you need are some paper and a pen or pencil.

When someone first tries creative writing they're often surprised by how much they like it, and then they can find they have an interest for life that will give them many hours of enjoyment and satisfaction – that's what happened to me.

How to Get Started with Writing for Wellbeing...

You could write a story, or a poem, or write about your hopes for the future or about a place you'd like to visit. Write what you feel like writing, two lines or two pages – it's up to you.

Another idea to start you off is to think about a dream or a memory before you start to write. Or open a newspaper, or turn on the radio, and think about the first story or song that you hear or see and write about it. See where your pen takes you.

You could try freewriting: just scribble down whatever comes into your head for 5 or 10 minutes, perhaps inspired by an interesting word, object or picture. When you are freewriting, don't stop to think or correct your writing. Spelling and punctuation don't matter at all. Don't feel you need to write in 'proper English' – remember you are writing only for you. Just keep writing whatever pops into your head. You might be surprised by what you write!



Different Kinds of Writing

Different kinds of writing can help our wellbeing depending on how we are feeling and thinking. I use many kinds of writing in my writing groups, including: mindful writing, freewriting, journals/diaries, writing about positive experiences and memories, and writing stories and poems.

Mindful writing, for example, can be calming. Have a go at mindful writing like this: write to describe the sounds around you, and what you can see, feel, taste and smell right now in whatever place you're in. Or notice something in the world and write to describe it in detail.

Writing about positive memories can help you feel more motivated and cheerful.

Writing your thoughts and feelings (expressive writing) every day in a diary or journal can help you to make sense of things and allow you to look back at your progress (see caution below).

Caution: if your thoughts are completely negative at the moment it's possible you could emphasise your negative thoughts in your mind if you write them down. Instead, try doing some mindful writing, or write a story from your imagination, or a poem based on observation of the world about you. Or write about a happy memory such as a place you visited that you really loved, or a memory of a happy time you spent with someone. Write in your journal or diary each day, but if all your thoughts are negative then be sure to only write about positive things and achievements – even if some days you can only write “I got up today” or “I went to the shop to buy milk.”

Over to you now – why not start a regular habit of 5 minutes mindful writing plus 5 minutes freewriting every day?

Further Reading

1. Words for Wellbeing blog: <http://trioross.wordpress.com/>
2. Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/WordsForWellbeing?fref=ts>
3. Therapeutic Writing – Mindful Writing (handout)
4. Therapeutic Writing – Journals and Diaries (handout)
5. Therapeutic Writing – Freewriting (handout)
6. Email Carol at writing.year@cumbria.nhs.uk for copies of handouts and to enquire about ordering the Words for Wellbeing book (£9.50 including P&P)

***** You may photocopy this sheet provided you do not alter it in any way *****