



Write to Heal Trauma and Grief: Tools Everyone Can Use

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Why Write to Heal?

Writing about loss helps people:

- Reflect on meaning and significance of a death
- Map the feelings and experiences of grief
- Release tension and express sensitive thoughts
- Find clarity and perspective over time

Writing about traumatic experiences:

- helps make meaning from devastating events,
- allows people to transform pain and shift how they carry the past,
- empowers individuals to move forward with their lives.

Therapeutic writing helps people:

- Deal with difficult emotions
- Identify coping strategies
- Improve communication skills
- Engage in intentional self-care
- Create and maintain self-directed change

How Does Writing Work?

Phases in therapeutic writing process:

- Experiencing a full range of feelings
- Breaking the silence with words on the page
- Acceptance and organizing the story
- Finding meaning or making sense of the story
- Reframing the story for healing and moving forward

What Type of Writing?

Reflexive exercises are designed to focus inward, to inquire after our own thought processes and prejudices. (Making lists.)

Free-flow exercises leave no space for the inner critic or censor. (Free writing.)

Journal exercises help to structure experiences into a narrative. (Using prompts.)

Descriptive writing focuses the writer in the moment - mindfulness though a pen. (Detailed sensory-involved storytelling.)

Reflective exercises work to help us perceive experiences from a range of viewpoints. (Reflection.)

How To Write About Trauma and Grief

Those who wrote about both the **factual experience** and the **emotions** they felt in relation to the experience were the ones to experience the most profound results.

Treat negative and positive emotions as equally important. It is important for us to face our hardships, but writing only negative feelings over and over again on the page might not always help and could even be detrimental.

**You must let the pain visit.
You must allow it to teach you.
You must not allow it to overstay.**
- Ijeoma Umebinyuo

Benefits and Risks

In a groundbreaking study by Baikie and Wilhelm (2005), participants wrote for **15 minutes** daily for **4 days** about their deepest thoughts and feelings about a traumatic incident of **their choice**.

Benefits:

- Fewer stress-related doctor visits.
- Lower blood pressure, improved mood.
- Improved working memory.
- Fewer intrusive thoughts & avoidance symptoms.
- Reduced absenteeism from work.

Risks:

- Emotional charge often occurs with writing about traumatic events.
- Often an increase in distress and negative mood at the beginning of a writing practice.
- These responses tend to be short-lived.

Mitigating Risks

- Ensure privacy for your writing.
- Give yourself quiet time for deep thinking and feeling.
- Set limits that feel manageable and use a timer.
- Give yourself permission to stop anytime.
- Write about what is of interest to you that wants your attention.
- Write freely and honestly, without editing.
- Don't hold back or censor yourself.
- Have a plan in case you become upset.
- Plan self care activities when you're done writing.

Give yourself full permission to do this your way at your own pace.

REMEMBER: There is no way to do this wrong!

**Whatever pain you can't get rid
of,
make it your creative offering.**
~Susan Cain

What About Songwriting?

Writing music is an exercise in risk-taking and in telling your own story, with benefits including health, emotional, and social outcomes.

- Therapeutic lyric writing helps people to share their stories in ways that are socially accepted.
- Lyrics can be literal, figurative, or metaphorical; whether direct or cryptic, you're telling a story.
- Songwriters may confront truths, discover strengths, and explore experiences through introspection.
- Songs created can be a medium for communicating their experiences with family, their community, or with politicians and policy makers.

Creating music yourself – singing your own song - has a powerful impact.

How To Write A Song

Parts of a Song:

Intro – used to open the song

Verse – each verse progresses through the story of the song with a repeating melody pattern

Pre-chorus - usually short transition from verse to chorus with lyrics or an instrumental section

Chorus – the main message of your song, with its own melody, repeating throughout the song

Bridge – a short, contrasting section offering tension or release of tension in the story (may be a plot twist)

Outro – conclusion – may be the chorus repeated, or some variation of the chorus, or a line or two that sums up the story

Types of Storytelling in Song (Using the "I" perspective)

Personal: Truth and confession - telling your own story.

False Personal: Creating a character to tell someone else's story as if it were yours.

Getting Started:

Using prompts offers a springboard into your story.

Lyrics first approach – focus on words, phrases and rhymes to tell the story.

Melody first approach – focus on patterns of music to set the mood and tone.

To Share or Not To Share?

Sharing deeply personal writing should always be invitational. Feeling seen, heard, and witnessed can offer relief and powerful validation.

Options for Sharing:

One-to-one sharing with a trusted mentor or therapist.

Small group sharing with a support group or select trusted friends.

Public sharing by speaking, posting on the internet, and publishing

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