

## WRITING THERAPY



Have you ever kept a secret diary? Most of us have at some time in our lives; however for some people this is more secret than for others. Growing up I can recall writing down what had happened in my day but not my deepest thoughts and feelings in case my diary was found!

These days it is easier to restrict access to what we write and make it for our eyes only, which is one of the reasons this technique is recommended for everyone and anyone. This is a really therapeutic process designed to overcome any blocks that prevent us saying how it really is or even admitting this consciously to ourselves.

Every day we have a stream of inner chatter, also known as self talk; some people are more aware of this than others. You may share this with someone close and express your inner thoughts and feelings, however most people don't and have various blocks that prevent them from doing so.

Using this technique is really liberating and people have said how much lighter they feel after using it. It can really help release thoughts and feelings which weigh us down subconsciously. It can help clear the clutter from our minds and help us think more clearly.

Use this technique every day for at least two weeks and notice how much more self aware you are at the end of this period. The discipline of doing this is often necessary to force us to become consciously aware of our true thoughts and feelings and how these affect our every day behaviour and ultimately our lives.

Once you get into using this technique and build up momentum you may be surprised at what you write. When people are suddenly given this simple technique they can destroy blocks that hold them back from getting in touch with what they really think and feel and what is behind this, if anything.

Unhelpful thoughts and feelings sometimes emerge, e.g. related to unnecessary guilt, fear of what other people think, self-criticism, anger, anxiety about responsibilities, etc. Sometimes just recognising what we are saying to ourselves all day (our inner chatter) is enough to help us stop doing this and further destroying our self esteem and confidence.

There are various ways this technique helps with personal growth. It can be used any time but particularly at times when you are not in as positive a place as you would like. It is a good starting point for any self development work you are going to do.

For example, if you are going to help yourself using the H4L e-book 'Helping yourself with Cognitive Behaviour Therapy', 'Writing Therapy' is a great place to start. It helps increase self awareness, objectivity and our ability to help ourselves through anything that is going on in our lives or just in our heads! This is extremely empowering and can increase self esteem and inner confidence.

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## **Guidelines on how best to use this technique**

### **Use this technique if you...**

- are not feeling as well balanced as you would like but are not sure why
- are experiencing any unhelpful emotions such as anger, guilt, resentment, jealousy, panic
- have a difficult decision to make
- feel under pressure
- feel confused and in need of clarity
- are finding it difficult to express your thought and/ or feelings
- are encountering stressors in your life over which you feel you have no control
- feel blocked in some way, e.g. emotionally or creatively
- have thoughts about someone or something that you don't want to share with anyone else
- have a secret that you cannot share with anyone
- feel irrational and unable to express your thoughts and feelings calmly

### **How to do it:**

- Ideally start by making a regular time for writing therapy every day; first thing in the morning and/ or last thing at night is a great time because you are more likely to get in touch with what you are really thinking and feeling then, as you will be free of distractions
- Decide if you want to set an alarm clock to ensure you only use a set amount of time to do this; 5-20 minutes at a time is recommended, however if you want to keep writing after this time and nothing is stopping you, just keep writing until you have expressed all of your thoughts
- Make sure you will not be disturbed
- If you don't want to keep anything you write you can use scrap paper and a pen or pencil or just use an application on your computer and not save what you have written, e.g. you can use a word document or type into an e-mail not addressed to anyone
- Only type if you can type accurately and quickly or are someone who doesn't feel the need to correct typos as you go!
- Write at a consistent pace and continue to write what ever comes into your head, unless you have chosen to focus on working through something specific that is bothering you
- Do not hold back in any way, just write whatever comes to mind
- Include anything even things that seem irrelevant
- This is the perfect vehicle for expressing thoughts that you feel uncomfortable with and would not ever want to share with anyone else

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- The more uncomfortable you are the better, because this probably means you really are getting in touch with your deepest thoughts and feelings
- Do not worry about whether any of what you write makes sense or if you flit from one subject to another, just write continuously
- Disregard grammar, punctuation and spelling, etc; it doesn't matter if what you have written makes little sense
- Don't stop and read what you have written
- If at any time you are stuck for something to write, focus on this, rather than stopping and staring into space, e.g. start by writing something to the effect of 'I am stuck for something to write and yet I can't stop talking normally, why is this?'
- If you feel uncomfortable using this technique initially explore this by asking yourself 'what is it that I find uncomfortable about this?'

### **What to do after you have finished Writing Therapy**

#### **Ensure your notes are kept private**

This is crucial as it will encourage you to use this as a tool for life. So after you have finished writing make sure that what you have written is not going to be read by anyone else.

#### **Identify themes and unhelpful thoughts and think outside the box**

It can be helpful to read back what you have written 24 hours later and look for any themes within what you have written, e.g. unhelpful thoughts related to work such as 'I hate my job but I have no choice but to stay there' or 'I should do X or Y will happen'. If you do identify themes or individual unhelpful thoughts try to think outside the box and ask yourself if there are any alternative ways of thinking that would be more helpful. The 'Helping yourself with Cognitive Behaviour Therapy' e-book can help with this.