

Expressive Writing in The Counselor's Journey

I was a reader before I was a writer, but since I could write I have written. I believe writing to be both a creative and a therapeutic act. When I trained as a counselor in the 1990s I naturally wanted to share writing as a therapeutic practice but I was unsure that was legitimate. Gradually I discovered community and developed my own approach to using expressive writing in counseling and supervision.

Journal Therapy is a structured process using expressive writing and reflection. Some things can be written before they can be spoken, others are only known when they are read on the page. Structure, pacing and containment make Journal Therapy safe for thinking about difficult things.

Trauma is a rupture of the narrative
Writing is a way of restoring
(re-storying) the personal narrative

The Thompson Trauma Model:

- 1 Writing and not reading
- 2 Writing and showing writing (to therapist)
- 3 Writing and reading to self
- 4 Writing and reading out loud
- 5 Speaking

The journal is the ideal place to examine sources of and possible proactive responses to professional distress

Use expressive writing as Self-Supervision to:

- Witness your work with clients
- Create a practitioner narrative
- Prepare for supervision
- Keep client stories separate
- Identify/work with transference /countertransference

Journaling is an effective way to identify & track issues that arise

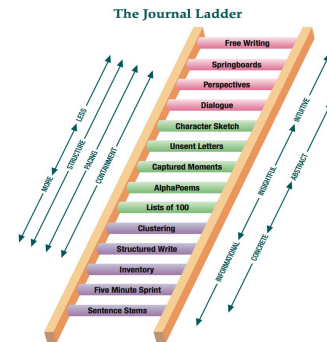


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Writing for Health and Trauma Recovery: Tools for Counseling Practice

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Structure	Foundation, form, sequenced tasks, orderliness
Pacing	Rhythm, movement, timing
Containment	Boundaries, limits, shape
Concrete	Easy to understand and attempt, external, reality-based
Abstract	Symbolic, metaphorical, internal, imaginal
Informational	Practical, immediately useful
Insightful	Connections, patterns, awareness
Intuitive	Sudden knowing, internal wisdom, quiet voice within

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All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them⁵

Shame derives its power from being unspeakable. Language and story bring light to shame and destroy it

“ Journal Therapy is the purposeful and intentional use of cathartic, reflective, process and/or integrative writing to further therapeutic goals.”

Kathleen Adams in *Writing as Therapy, Counseling & Human Development* Jan 1999

“ My existence...creates a story. How I create this story is of utmost importance. Existential psychotherapy is about retracing the story and reorienting a person in time. The way in which I tell my story is the way in which I create a self. Existential philosophy does not posit the notion of a fixed and determined self. Our stories change as we live and so we are changed too.”

Emmy Van Deurzen - *Dilemma Consultancy website*

Classic Journal Techniques for Counseling and Trauma Recovery:

- Steppingstones Captured moments
- Character sketches Dialogues
- Unsent letters
- Perspectives

Colette said, when one we love dies There's no reason to stop writing them letters⁵

Bibliography/References

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- 3 Isak Dinesen
- 4 Brown, B. (2012) *Daring Greatly*. New York. Gotham Books
- 5 Michaels, A. (2000) *The hooded hawk*. In *Poems*. London: Bloomsbury
- 6 & 7 Hornbacher M. from her talk "Writing As a Tool of Recovery" April 25, 2012
- 8 Carolyn Jennings, *Tell Me More* in *HUNGER SPEAKS* a memoir told in poetry

The Feedback Loop

The feedback loop transforms the journal into a therapeutic tool. It distinguishes therapeutic journal writing from a purely descriptive, cathartic or diurnal journal entry.

Re-read your journal entry, then write a 'feedback statement' to provide a reflective response to what you have written. In this process, the self on the page is recognized and your relationship is deepened in that moment. This is an ongoing reflective process, deepening and developing self- knowledge, integrating feeling and experience.

There are two types of feedback statement:

1. about the content of what you've written (or not written):

When I read this I notice...
When I read this I remember...
When I read this I am surprised to find...
When I read this I realize...

2. about feelings evoked as you read your journal entry:

When I read this I feel...
When I read this I have a sensation of...
When I read this I am aware of...

Expressive Writing in The Client's Journey

In 1986, I became an outpatient at Porter Adventist Hospital's Eating Disorder Unit. Alongside counseling and support groups, I began to journal as part of my recovery. I have written journals continuously since then. I have discovered myself as a person I never knew when I suffered from disordered eating. I have never relapsed.

We can say on the page what we can't yet say aloud. Writing is the opposite of destruction. The writer is the part of us that wants to heal and be healed

I
I want to hear more, she says, not less.

We wrangle appointments into slots around obstacles of two calendars, and stretch my checkbook's limits.

II
I leave our appointments choking on all the more
I still want to say.
When I'm not with her, I hold this pen. I learn I need.
I arrive
at listening to myself.

III
Written words listen,
feed me back to me
one bite at a time,
begin to form an outline of a self.
My sketchy outline and shy beliefs
land once a week in her lap
of listening. Her deep pool of attention
writes the next line.

Like therapy, writing is archaeology, a painstaking unearthing⁶

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