



WORKING WITH WRITING THERAPY

ADVICE FROM PRACTITIONERS WORKING WITH WRITING THERAPY

I've been a big believer in writing as a superhighway to the subconscious since I began my practice many years ago. For many people, it can be a great outlet and effective tool. I have found adding a component of ritual is particularly useful as well. For example journaling about letting go of trauma or pain is supercharged by adding the ritual of burning the pages when the writer feels like he or she is ready. As the brain registers the literal release of the pain, all the senses become involved and the message of moving past the issue is absorbed fully into consciousness.

- Marilyn Halas

Usually, when I work with writing I like to start the session in a relaxed manner (guided meditation). We will then discuss a subject that I propose and immediately following the clients are given 10-15 minutes to write freely. Afterwards, the clients in the group who would like to share, read out what they have written within the circle. For the last step, I like to get everybody to share in one word, what they are taking home from the writing session.

- Tiziana De Giosa

A lot of client struggle is with letting go of their addict-life and getting in touch with who they are and where it is they want to go to. For clients, it is useful to have small exercises, (autonomic) goal-oriented, to make the transition from their self-destructive addicted life towards a value-based life. At this moment, writing is not regularly implemented in therapy sessions. Sometimes I ask clients, to briefly evaluate the day in the evening by writing three things for which they are grateful. I have to note that the intellectual and introspective capacities among clients often differ very much.

-Berber Jacquemijns



I notice that not all of my clients are comfortable expressing their feelings. Some do, some shy away, whilst others just can't. Of course, in all cases, I use writing therapy little or more depending on the responses I get from them.

I use it as a catharsis tool. I literally call it the 'vomit' time!

I ask my clients to write on a topic, which we then read together in order to gain perspectives on the emotions that they have transferred to paper. These are in the form of questions. The brain becomes aware of why a particular, paragraph, sentence or word has been written as it has just been transferred from the subconscious mind. When we read it together, there is a deeper level of understanding to that feeling/emotion.

Stay with the client even if the writing does not make any sense at a conscious level but as a practitioner, we can recognise that the writing comes from a place of hurt, pain, grief and/or happiness and joy. Emotions can cloud writing and it takes time to separate the water from the mud.

This form of therapy helps make the client an expert of their own experience. From a trauma-informed approach, it gives the client/writer the ability to literally re-write their trauma narrative which could be considered the integration phase of trauma recovery.

Also, it allows clients to identify, look up words and use examples which they may not have the confidence to communicate through speech. Research is just starting to catch up now on the healing powers of writing. Writing therapy allows room for story-telling which many cultures engage in and use to pass on their history and traditions. I would imagine from Eastern philosophy this is what one would refer to as "speaking their truth"..

- Anu Krishna



Most of the time, a topic of what to write about will come up during a session. From there they may be asked to do a writing assignment based on what is said.

For example, a client that has 30+ years of sobriety almost killed himself at the age of 21 while driving under the influence. During one of the sessions, he lamented that he wished someone had talked to him about his behavior because he may be in a better place at this point in this life. The accident caused significant spinal injuries so he has some physical deficits associated with gross motor movements. His assignment was to write a letter to his 21-year-old self to let him know how his life was turning out. My goal was to help him see how much he had accomplished in his life, what he was currently doing, and how the accident contributed in some positive ways as well. We discussed the assignment and since it was developed during the session, I had not had the opportunity to think about clear examples to answer the client's questions. We spent a few sessions after he wrote the letter to flesh out some additional information and he was able to gain closure.

When I request writing assignments, clients invariably ask how to do it. I typically ask them questions to help them think about what's important to them. Sometimes it's still unclear for them, so I will verbally start a letter with them and ask them to fill in the blank.

- Diane Shepard