

Benefits of Expressive Writing

One common facet in many personalities is the trait of being overly self critical. There is no doubt most people are way too hard on themselves. It can stem from childhood perceptions and experiences. Children under 12 have not developed the higher cognitive intelligences and thus do not rationalise others perspectives when they are criticised. As you develop, any form of criticism can be incorrectly perceived and end up forming part of our adult self talk.

We are too self critical. Parents though trying to encourage their children to succeed can fall into the trap of focussing on what wasn't done well. Children perceive it as 'I am not good enough'.

What this could mean in adulthood;

- You never feel successful.
- Never feel you have done enough.
- Undersell your capabilities.
- You worry about being found out
- You get bored with routine.
- You over do the negative self talk



The above messages can pervade into adulthood expressed in self talk. Importantly the brain cannot distinguish between real and imagined thought, so that kind thinking generated by childhood perceptions is incorrect. Writing is a way to challenge and implant more accurate self evaluations consistent with an adult view. Over time the brain will believe in what you write.

Though it is useful and actualised to be somewhat self-critical, many over do it. One way to really impact the self talk is to use a journal of sorts. Expressive writing has tremendous psychological benefits.

People who are hard on themselves should use expressive writing at the end of the day.

You should write in way that you create a balanced perspective on the day's happenings. Rather than writing about the negative events of the day, Write and express the positives of the day, switch the perspective. Rather than blame yourself for all that is happening, consider the external events that contributed to what happened. Write down successes, learning's, and re-interpret negative experiences. Do not allow your mind to only have one view of an event. According to a research psychologist James Pennebaker (2006) using writing to change our perspectives is directly correlated with improved health. That means when you write, you challenge your perspective on the event.

Pennebaker also concluded that it is important to use positive emotion words when you write. That is use words like 'happy', 'enjoyed', 'excited' etc.

The usage of positive emotion words and reducing the usage of negative emotion words is also correlated with increased well-being. What is not important is spelling, grammar and structure. The act of using expressive writing allows better problem solving. It helps your brain relax.

In a study of depressed students Gortner, Rude and Pennebaker (2006) found that expressive writing lowered symptoms of depression. What is accepted is that being able to express emotions helps with depression. Writing allows that expression of emotions to occur without being swayed by others opinions. People who suppress emotions gained the greatest benefit. Expressive writing in a positive way expressing positive emotions improves emotional intelligence.

Expressive writing allows a whole brain thinking method and allows problem solving with emotion. Often subjective issues swim around in the right brain causing stress. Some people feel stressed at times and are unsure of why, just can't put a finger on it. Writing allows the left brain to put these subjective thoughts into a more linear and rational way making them easier to understand and resolve.

Writing is a technique that challenges your self-talk and the way you view yourself. It over time will modify your brain so negative self talk maybe automatically reduced.

Key benefits

- Improved sleep
- Improved self view
- Less depression
- Improved well being
- Better decision making
- Improved health

Steps to begin Expressive Writing

- 1) Buy a plain lined book and keep it handy.
- 2) When feeling unproductive, stressed or just before sleep is great (5 - 20 mins)
- 3) Forget spelling, grammar etc.. Just write
- 4) Allow conscience streaming (write whatever is on your mind)
- 5) Use positive emotion words more and negative emotion words less (Do not ignore negative stuff)
- 6) Consciously change perspectives on events when writing.
- 7) Do not be hard on yourself if you do not do it everyday, but make a commitment to point 2).

