

WRITE TO HEAL

by

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Write about trauma and release poisons. All of us at some time in our lives have experienced traumatic, emotional experiences that may have lodged in our system. It could be as small as being chastised by a teacher or as big as sexual abuse. Each individual records and reacts according to their own personality, life circumstances, and interpersonal relationships. Many times these emotional incidents occur in childhood, become buried initiating the growth of tumors, benign or cancerous, real or metaphorically. To heal is to let go of these poisons and at the same time acknowledge their existence.

How is this done with writing? One does not need to be a literary writer to express feelings, thoughts and experiences. Since this form of writing is mainly for you, spelling, grammar, punctuation, all the blocks set up by well meaning teachers are bypassed. Even short hand notes are fine as long as you can read it.

The idea is to write without thought to content or form. You can begin with a list of words. Eventually the momentum to express and free the material tumbles forth into phrases and sentences. Let them come without direction. To write about a pain secretly harbored is a catharsis, a freeing experience to heal.

Write the story as if you were telling a trusted friend, you, what happened. Include as many people in your narrative story as you need. Don't edit. If you find yourself veering off course, follow the new path because that is the authentic voice. You are writing for yourself. There is no one who can censor your thoughts or your words.

James W. Pennebaker, PH.D, is a research psychologist and author of many journal articles and books on the subject of writing to heal. He says in his book *Writing To Heal* to write for four consecutive days, twenty minutes each day about a specific trauma in your life, and add in as many related characters as the story requires.

You can destroy the pages you have written or keep them and refer to them at a later date. The process of writing is the catharsis to release the poisons. If you read your writing at another time you may discover an “aha”, a connection or cognitive realization. The initial trauma perhaps of being chastised by a teacher or parent may have been the original site of the pain, but through the years chastisement or criticism by an authority figure can evoke a similar reaction that causes anger, frustration, stress, headaches or other physical pain. It is important to release the original trauma and see connections in order to heal from the trauma.

Sometimes one experiences fatigue after writing about traumatic experiences. Fatigue can last for a short period of time, an hour or more, as Pennebaker says the time it might take to recover from a sad movie. However, if fatigue or depression persist, it is important to seek the help of a professional mental health clinician in order to continue the healing process.

“We write to know”, were the words written by Arturo Vivante novelist and short story writer. It is through the process of writing and revealing that we learn about connections, see them in a different perspective as an adult then we might have absorbed them as a defenseless child, and are better prepared with insight and awareness to reduce their sting and bite.

A simple writing exercise to heal is as follows:
Arrange for 10 minutes of uninterrupted time. Find a quiet, comfortable place to write. Prepare yourself with paper and pen and timer, if you are more comfortable writing at your computer rest your fingers on the keyboard. Close your eyes. Quiet your mind. Focus on one painful or traumatic incident that occurred. Visualize the incident. How did you feel? Once you have visualized and

responded with an emotion or feeling turn on the timer and begin to write. You can make a list of words, write phrases without punctuation or stream of consciousness, the piece does not have to make sense. The important thing is to just let the words flow through you and out. If you begin to veer off course follow the new course because that is the authentic voice, the material that wants to be released. Write without stopping or editing until the timer goes off. You can read what you've written, continue writing for another fifteen minutes or not read the material and walk away from the work. Thoughts have been set in motion in any case and you may return to the writing out of curiosity or need to continue to write the story.

Writing is a process. It is through the writing process that healing occurs. It is cumulative. One of the most important objectives is to write about a trauma, small or large, and in the mere act of doing the writing you are releasing poisons that have had a negative impact on you.