

Expressive Writing (Greater Good Science Center)

[Link to Activity](#)

Time Required:

20 minutes a day, for 4 consecutive days

Why Try This Practice:

Expressive writing is an excellent strategy to consider if you are struggling to resolve a conflict with a friend or a loved one. Most of us have gone through times of great stress and emotional upheaval. This exercise gives you a simple, effective way to deal with these challenges and the difficult feelings they bring up. Research suggests that completing this exercise can increase happiness, reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety, strengthen the immune system, and improve work and school performance. These benefits have been shown to persist for months.

How To Do This Activity:

Over the next four days, write down your deepest emotions and thoughts about an emotional challenge that has been affecting your life. In your writing, really let go and explore the event and how it has affected you. You might tie this experience to when you were a little younger, your relationship with your parents, people you have loved or love now, or even your school. Write continuously for 20 minutes. Tips for writing:

- Find a time and place where you won't be disturbed.
- Write continuously for at least 20 minutes.
- Don't worry about spelling or grammar.
- Write only for yourself.
- Write about something extremely personal and important to you.
- Deal only with events or situations you can handle now—that is, don't write about a trauma too soon after it has happened if it feels too overwhelming.
- Optional final step: After the four days of writing, try writing from the perspectives of other people involved in the event or situation.

Why it Works:

When we experience a stressful event or major life transition, it's easy to ruminate over that experience; thinking about it can keep us up at night, distract us from work, and make us feel less connected to others. Expressive writing allows us to step back for a moment and evaluate our lives. Through writing, we can become active creators of our own life stories—rather than passive bystanders—and as a result feel more empowered to cope with challenges. Transforming a messy, complicated experience into a coherent story can make the experience feel more manageable.