

# Guide to Writing for Healing



**Everyone has a story to tell.** And stories have the power to inform, heal, and create community. Writing can help you make meaning out of your experiences and validate and release the emotions inside of you. This guide will help you to begin the process of exploring and recording your **#CourageousStory**.

## Begin

Develop a practice of writing by setting aside time each day to write. It does not need to be a specific amount of time. Setting up consistent time each day to write can help to develop the practice of writing.

Just write. Put your pen to the paper or your fingers on the keyboard and write. Do not stop to edit or ponder if what you are writing makes sense. Just get the thoughts from your head onto the paper.

If you have to write 'just write' for a few lines to get you started, that's okay. Your stream of consciousness will lead you to something new.

### These prompts may help you start.

#### Use your senses

- Listen to a piece of music and write down your responses;
- Go outside and listen to the sounds around you. What do you hear?
- Meditate. Then write about how you feel. Do you feel differently than before you began to meditate?
- Go on a walk. What sounds do you hear?
- Sit by a woodburning stove or fire. Does this make you think of any place, time or person?

#### Remember good memories

- Favorite people
- Favorite times
- Favorite vacations



### **Remember difficult memories**

- Where were you?
- Who was with you?
- How did you feel?

### **Think about your wishes**

- If you had more free time what would you do?
- If you could be anywhere right now where would you be?
- If you could be with anyone or any group now who would it be?

### **Express freely**

- What troubles you?
- What delights you?
- Can you link these feelings to events in your life?
- Write without knowing what will be next. Write to surprise yourself.

### **Play off something**

- Start with a quote, or a favorite line in a song. Write what it means to you or how it applies to your life.

## **Reflect**

Once you have developed a practice of writing, spend time reviewing those early thoughts. Reflecting on your writing can help you to gain a deeper understanding of your experiences. As you revisit your writing, you will recognize how far you have traveled along your journey and the hurdles you have faced and overcome. Now that you are in a different place of understanding add something to your earlier writing.

### **Ask yourself:**

- What else can I say about this activity/event/situation?
- What else was I feeling when I wrote this?
- What am I feeling now while reading?
- What else might have been happening during this activity/event/situation?
- Is this an accurate summary of this activity/event/situation?
- Can I write even more about this?
- If someone didn't know you or your circumstances would they understand what you have written?



## Imagine

After you reflect upon your writings, and have perhaps revised some of them, you may discover a wish to explore your experiences on a deeper level.

### Here are some questions to consider:

- Have you accepted what has happened in your past or is happening now?
- Do you have a 'new' normal in your life?
- Have you gained any new understandings about the people who stood by you during your challenging times?
- Have the storms that you have weathered taught you any life lessons along the way?

Pondering and writing about these questions may open doors to new understandings.

## Take Care

It's critical to take care of yourself during the writing process, especially early in the process. Writing may bring about feelings of unease, anxiety, or depression. If this happens this would be the time to see a therapist to help you cope with these feelings. Writing will never be a substitute for therapy.

## Ways to Share

After writing or rewriting your story you may want to share it with others, but if you don't it is 100% fine to keep your writings private!

If you want to share your story, below is a list of some websites that welcome contributors for their blogs.

- [The Courageous Parents Network](#)
- [The Compassionate Friends](#)
- [The Mighty and Modern Loss](#)
- [Option B](#)

## Final Thoughts

Your stories matter, and writing them may help you to unburden some of your feelings, recognize how far you've traveled on your journey, and they may even lead you to some new understandings. So, go ahead, pick up your pen and write!



**Websites and blogs to learn more about writing to heal:**

- <http://expressivewriting.org/>
- <https://poetrytherapy.org/>
- <https://www.compassionatefriends.org/blog/writing-as-a-way-of-healing/>
- <http://www.healthstorycollaborative.org/blog/2019/7/29/writing-poetry-a-healing-practice>

**Books:**

- *Opening Up by Writing It Down* by James W. Pennebaker, PhD and Joshua M. Smyth, PhD
- *Expressive Writing: Words That Heal* by James W. Pennebaker, PhD
- *Writing As A Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives* by Louise DeSalvo
- *The Story You Need to Tell: Writing to Heal from Trauma, Illness, or Loss* by Sandra Marinella, MA., Med.

