

# Therapeutic Writing

■ by Kathy Konrath, MA, LCPC, LMHC

*O Lord, how long will you forget me? Forever? How long must you look the other way?  
How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul, with sorrow in my heart every day?*

*David, Psalm 13*



Have you ever felt this way? Forgotten by God? Disregarded? Anguished? In despair? I have. And I am so grateful that King David put his words down for me to read. One of the most remarkable things about David's words as written throughout the Psalms is that he often finds his resolve through writing. As you continue reading Psalm 13, you see David pour out his anguish which leads to anger, then desperation, and finally a resolve to trust in God. I can almost sense David taking a deep breath before he pens the words of verse 5, "But I trust in your unfailing love."

David found his resolve.

The process of writing has the potential to bring you through your feelings, and that's really what you want to do – move *through* your feelings. Feelings have a way of moving us,

and when left unchecked, feelings can mingle with thoughts and orchestrate us to say or do things we don't really mean. I believe the pastime of writing can help you get in touch with your feelings, identify your thoughts and ultimately find a resolve. David was a man of God. Even as he sinned and made major mistakes, he was devoted to the Lord. Through his writing he was able to get in touch with his feelings and the messages in his mind (such as "God has forgotten me") and settle upon a truth that is deeper than any thought or feeling – God's unfailing love for him.

You and I can tap into that resolve by taking time to express ourselves through written words. The act of putting pen to paper engages the left side of the brain which exercises logic and organizational thought, while the right side of the brain is free to create, intuit and feel. Writing opens the window to let you see what's inside yourself (thoughts and feelings) and express what you find in a safe and contained manner (it's just you, God, the pen and paper).

As you write, you work to remove mental blocks that can hinder you from getting clarity on what's really going on. With greater clarity, you may be able to determine what you really want or need in the moment (something that can be challenging when feelings scream back, urging to find immediate relief).

Do not agonize over the process of writing. You don't have to be a "writer" or have experience with journaling in order to experience the healing benefit - just a willingness to engage the process of writing to see where it leads.

*P.S. It is not always necessary to share your writing with another person (although that in and of itself can be quite healing). Re-reading what you have written can be enough to let yourself "hear" what's really going on in your heart, mind and soul. When you have entered that place, and your heart can speak, you might find you are ready to listen. The Holy Spirit is always listening.*

*Continued on Page 2: Ideas and How to Get Started*

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## Getting Started

1. Buy a notebook.
2. Grab a pen.
3. Take a deep breath and begin.

## Ideas to Help Your Writing Get Underway

1. Write by topic: anger, fear, joy, peace, guilt, etc. Write about times you have felt that way: Why did you feel that way? What was going on just prior to/at the time the emotion emerged? What did you do in response to the feeling? What did others do? What helped? What didn't? Discover what you learn about your experience with that particular emotion and see if there is a pattern.
2. Write a letter to yourself, from yourself. What do you want to tell yourself right now? If you were your own best friend, what would you say to yourself? ("Dear Kathy ...").
3. Write a "Do Not Send" letter to anyone with whom you have unresolved issues with (your spouse, child, boss, deceased parent, etc.). Write the letter without any hindrances. Say what you want to say but have not been able to. When you are done, shred the letter or resolve to talk about it when the time is right (but **do not send** the Do Not Send letter!).
4. Write a letter to your future self. Where do you want to be 5 years from now? What hopes and dreams do you have for yourself? Take a moment and tell yourself these things in a letter. After writing the letter, seal it in an envelope, address it to yourself, put a stamp on it and give it to a trusted family member or friend with instructions to drop it in the mail 1 year from the date written.
5. Write a letter to your child self. (This may best be done with your counselor.) Imagine yourself as a child growing up. What do you want to say to this child? If this becomes painful, process it with a trusted friend or your counselor.
6. Write a talking and feeling boundary. Complete this sentence when you have a strong emotion you need to work through:
  - "When you..." (details about what happened/what was said or done)
  - "What I thought was ..." or "What my mind made up about that was ...." (thoughts and beliefs)
  - "and about that I feel ..." (Anger, Pain, Fear, Shame, Guilt, Love, etc.).
7. Write a gratitude list. For the next 30 days, list 5 things you are grateful for. Do not repeat any items on your list for the next 30 days!
8. Write your highs and lows for the day. What was the best part of your day? What was the worst?



We'll share more about Therapeutic Writing in October on our Facebook Page.  
We'd love to hear how writing has helped you!

Kathy Konrath, MA, is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor (IL) and Licensed Mental Health Counselor (IN). She sees clients in our Evergreen Park, IL and Schererville, IN locations.

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