

Worksheet 4.25 Emotional Storytelling Instructions

Research shows that when people experience traumas or any sort of event that results in lingering negative emotions, writing about these negative events can be very helpful (Niederhoffer and Pennebaker, 2002). It seems that putting your emotion-laden experiences into words helps you to stop avoiding your thoughts and feelings and to start to make sense of the negative events. When you free yourself up from these negative experiences, you are more likely to be able to focus on your daily life goals and activities without being distracted by negative emotions. Essentially, emotional storytelling can be viewed as a first step in the process of finding forgiveness.

This worksheet has been designed to help you engage in emotional storytelling. For the next four days, please find a quiet space to sit down and write about a negative event or trauma in your life and the emotions you feel regarding this experience. Please include your innermost thoughts and feelings regarding the event. Set a timer and write for 15 minutes each day. Do not be distracted by spelling, grammar, or punctuation. If possible, spend some time relaxing after you are done writing, rather than moving directly into a new activity. Be prepared to discuss your emotional storytelling writing experience at your next therapy session.

It is important to note that the process of writing about emotional upheaval may have the short-term effect of making you feel worse, as you will be focusing on the negatives in your life. However, research shows that in the long-term, this process of emotional storytelling has many positive health benefits (Pennebaker et al., 1988; Petrie et al., 1998).