Multiple Matching Exercise

You are going to read an extract from an article about physical exercise. For questions 1 – 10, choose from the sections (A – E). The sections may be chosen more than once.

In which section are the following mentioned?

1- A description of the origins of expressive writing research. _____

2- The typical duration and frequency of expressive writing sessions. _____

3- Evidence that initial discomfort may be outweighed by long-term improvements. _____

4- A warning that expressive writing should not be used as the only form of treatment. _____

5- An explanation of what control participants are asked to do. _____

6- A suggestion of possible applications of expressive writing for specific groups. _____

7- A recommendation to limit the time spent writing in one session. _____

8- A description of participants reporting both distress and value in the writing process. _____

9- Reference to reduced medical visits as a result of expressive writing. _____

10- A statement that expressive writing is considered generally safe for most people. _____

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Emotional and physical health benefits of expressive writing

Extract adapted from a text published online by Cambridge University Press on 02 January 2018

A

Writing about traumatic, stressful or emotional events has been found to result in improvements in both physical and psychological health, in non-clinical and clinical populations. In the expressive writing paradigm, participants are asked to write about such events for 15–20 minutes on 3–5 occasions. Those who do so generally have significantly better physical and psychological outcomes compared with those who write about neutral topics. Here we present an overview of the expressive writing paradigm, outline populations for which it has been found to be beneficial and discuss possible mechanisms underlying the observed health benefits. In addition, we suggest how expressive writing can be used as a therapeutic tool for survivors of trauma and in psychiatric settings.

B

Over the past 20 years, a growing body of literature has demonstrated the beneficial effects that writing about traumatic or stressful events has on physical and emotional health. In the first study on expressive writing, college students wrote for 15 minutes on 4 consecutive days about 'the most traumatic or upsetting experiences' of their entire lives, while controls wrote about superficial topics (such as their room or their shoes). Participants who wrote about their deepest thoughts and feelings reported significant benefits in both objectively assessed and self-reported physical health 4 months later, with less frequent visits to the health centre and a trend towards fewer days out of role owing to illness. The authors concluded that: 'writing about earlier traumatic experience was associated with both short-term increases in physiological arousal and long-term decreases in health problems'.

C

The basic writing paradigm used in most of the subsequent expressive writing studies involves participants writing about traumatic or emotional experiences for 3–5 sessions, often over consecutive days, for 15–20 minutes per session. Most studies have been conducted in the laboratory, although more recently writing has been done at home or in a clinical setting. Participants often reveal a considerable range and depth of emotional trauma in their writing. Although many report being upset by the writing experience, they also find it valuable and meaningful. Control participants are asked to write as objectively and factually as possible about neutral topics such as a particular room or their plans for the day, without revealing their emotions or opinions. No feedback is given on the writing.

D

The immediate impact of expressive writing is usually a short-term increase in distress, negative mood and physical symptoms, and a decrease in positive mood compared with controls. Expressive writing participants also rate their writing as significantly more personal, meaningful and emotional. However, at longer-term follow-up, many studies have continued to find evidence of health benefits in terms of objectively assessed outcomes, self-reported physical health outcomes and self-reported emotional health outcomes.

E

Expressive writing is generally associated with an immediate increase in negative affect, but this short-term distress does not appear to be detrimental or to pose a longer-term risk to participants. Given the large number of studies conducted to date, with only a few finding any worsening of symptoms for those writing about traumatic experiences, the expressive writing paradigm appears to be reasonably safe for participants, even if no specific benefits are obtained. However, it is recommended that patients be told that they can stop writing at any time, should they wish, and appropriate contact numbers should be made available in case of distress. Patients should be encouraged to write for a maximum of 20 min at each session, so that the task does not seem too overwhelming, although they may choose to continue writing once the time is up if they wish and if this is feasible. Regardless of the demonstrated benefits of expressive writing, it should not replace appropriate medical or psychological treatment in clinical populations; it should be used as an adjunct to standard treatment while further research is being conducted.

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