USE WITH:
Individual students, small group, or whole class

GRADE LEVEL:
Middle school or high school

CONTEXT:
Remote friendly

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Write to Express Emotions

Help students reduce anxiety and increase happiness through expressive writing.

Created by [Greater Good Science Center](#)

Description:

Students will use expressive writing to reduce anxiety around emotionally challenging experiences.

Prep time needed:
15 minutes

Est. time to complete:
20 minutes

Steps:

1. Tell students they will be writing about an emotionally challenging experience for 3 to 4 sessions.

2. Share that writing about a tough emotional experience can help students view the experience more clearly, gain a greater sense of perspective, and take control of their life story. Communicate that expressive writing has been found to empower students to cope with challenges, increase happiness, and even improve school performance.

3. Invite students to brainstorm and write down recent emotionally difficult experiences. Have them think about things that are bothering them, conflicts they've had with family or friends, or things they are worrying about. Encourage students to choose one experience that feels meaningful, but isn't too difficult or overwhelming.

4. Encourage students not to worry about spelling or grammar and to keep writing for the entire 15 minutes. Let them know that nobody will be reading what they write.

5. Provide students with 15 minutes of uninterrupted writing time.

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6. Repeat this 2 to 3 more times over the next few consecutive days.

7. Remind students that the purpose of these reflections is to empower them to be the writers of their own life stories.

Tips for Educators:

- 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.

- Keep in mind that students may choose intense experiences that can trigger a trauma reaction; keep an eye on students' emotional reactions and connect with your school's resources (social worker or other professionals) to ensure support for students as needed.

- To increase accessibility, consider allowing students to type, draw, or voice dictate as needed.

Inspired by:

1. Travagin, G., Margola, D., & Revenson, T. A. (2015). How effective are expressive writing interventions for adolescents? A meta-analytic review. *Clinical Psychology Review, 36*, 42-55.

Related Materials:

Expressive Writing
https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/expressive_writing

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