



Chantal Wunderlich, MA, MFT: Therapeutic Writing



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How did you become interested in your specific field of work?

Over a decade ago, I started making a point of writing at least three pages a day, allowing the words to flow without interruption and simply writing whatever came to mind. I found this exercise enormously transformative and have kept up this daily writing practice, ever since. My approach, which I refer to as therapeutic writing, is an attempt to integrate what I have found most healing in my personal writing experience into my psychotherapy practice.

What about your practice makes it unique?

Most of us think of psychotherapy as the “talking cure.” Perhaps my approach could be thought of as the “writing cure.” The page can invite a kind of unflinching honesty from the writer that may, for some, not be accessible in a person-to-person conversation. The aim of my approach is not only to provide the space for the writer to find this kind of intimacy with herself on the page, but also to create an environment in which she can then talk about what has been revealed on the page, bringing this into the relational realm where it can be acknowledged and integrated.



Describe to us what a session with you would look like.

Therapeutic writing, as I offer it, happens in a group context. The group, depending on the focus, may vary in size or duration; the structure, however, remains somewhat the same. In each session, members of the group are presented with writing prompts (often in the form of poetry) in response to which the participants write in stream-of-consciousness style—whatever comes to mind without interruption. After each timed writing period, those who wish to do so share what they've written and receive a guided form of feedback from the group.

What about your work do you find the most beneficial and the most challenging?

Therapeutic writing helps people craft a narrative for their inner experience. As therapists, we know something about the healing power of words, and it seems that much of our work involves helping our clients find a way to articulate the unspoken. For some people, particularly those who have suffered some form of relational trauma, face-to-face contact can bring up a kind of anxiety that robs them of their words. For these people in particular, the page/writing can be a kind of safe stepping stone to speech.

How have you seen your specific modality affect others differently than other types of similar treatment?

The way I've seen writing used in therapy has often been either as "homework" (in the form of keeping a journal), or in groups where the directive is to write about specific topics such as, for example, coping strategies. Though these interventions are not without value, in my approach the writing functions more as a projective tool to prod the unconscious, evoking previously inaccessible material. It's more about exploring what is there, discovering something new, or seeing it in a new way and then bringing it to light in the group where it can be validated and integrated.



What type of population does your unique approach best serve and why?

Most people who come to my office seeking writing therapy have had some previous positive experience with writing as a form of healing. As I've alluded to previously, for some people, face-to-face contact can bring up too much anxiety for them to stay connected to their inner experience. The page is where they can be more honest, braver perhaps, more regulated, really. The writing groups provide a unique opportunity for people to experiment with being seen.

What types of clients do you feel are not appropriate for your approach and why?

The group is not designed as a primary intervention for someone in crisis or someone in need of individual, undivided attention and/or feedback. The approach would also be ill-advised for those with limited capacity for self-reflection, or for those who are actively psychotic or otherwise unable to adhere to group guidelines.

Tell us about what your approach means to you personally.

After being witness to what I observe in the writing groups, I cannot help but be on the same page as Anatole Broyard in believing that "inside every patient there's a poet trying to get out." Also, that "stories are antibodies against illness and pain." I'm continuously amazed by the courage, creativity, and inner resourcefulness the writing brings out in the people I work with. Being able to facilitate and witness the healing that develops through the writing groups not only inspires me, but, again and again, reaffirms my faith in people's capacity for healing and growth.

You can contact Chantal directly to utilize her unique services at:

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