

Write Your Way... Where?

By Dvora Frankel

What takes only five minutes and can change your life in incredible ways? Let's meet Yocheved Rottenberg, founder and author of Write Your Way Home — and learn all about this method that requires only a notebook, a pen and you!

Hi, Yocheved! Please tell us about what you do.

I lead therapeutic writing groups for women and teens all over the world.

What's that?

Therapeutic writing is when we use the tool of writing to understand ourselves, to know ourselves better and to grow into the person we want to become. You don't have to be a good writer in order to use writing to help yourself. You don't need to know grammar, spelling, sentence structure, or anything else you learn in school. All you have to do is choose to sit down and write whatever is on your mind.

Are you talking about journaling?

Actually, no. Journaling is amazing, and I highly recommend it to everyone, but this is a step further. Journaling is when you write anything that's on your mind in no particular order. That's excellent, and a great idea for any teen. Therapeutic writing uses writing exercises that help you move from Place A to Place B. The exercises are structured, and this framework makes the writing constructive. It lets us write productively and express our emotions without drowning in them.

Sounds good, but what if I hate writing?

Many people who take my courses say, "I hate writing!" Then they're shocked to discover that they love the classes! Our writing is not about choosing the right word. It's about expressing yourself and learning to know and really appreciate yourself.

Many people associate writing with school, and if they weren't entirely successful in that situation, they're scared of writing. Our writing has nothing to do with school, though. No one checks it and there are no assignments — it's just for you and your own sake. I highly recommend that you write in a special notebook that you keep private — you can ask your family to respect that, or you can even hide your notebook.

You need the safety to know that whatever you write is only for you.

Why is that important?

We all have a life journey to travel, so it's important to be real with where you are, and the perfect place to be real is in your notebook.

Why would a kid want to do therapeutic writing?

I call my classes "Write Your Way Home" because getting to know yourself gives a feeling of coming home — and that feels so good! All children struggle. No matter what the life circumstances, everyone has struggles — and we all want to grow from our struggles and feel better. We can start writing when we're in pain, or feeling frustrated or angry — and by the time we finish writing we feel much better.

Why is that?

Two reasons: First, just writing out our emotions on the paper makes us feel better and lighter. The second reason is to gain clarity, especially through what I call "reflection." Here's how it works: First, ask yourself, "What do I need to write about now?" Set a timer for five minutes and write whatever's on your mind. When the timer rings, stop writing and read over what you wrote. Ask yourself, "What can I learn from reading my writing?" This reflection gives us clarity. It helps us understand what's going on and overcome the internal struggle we're having.

What if a kid is struggling with something external?

That happens. Often, a teenager feels helpless because so much is out of their control. The only thing any of us can control is ourselves. And by understanding yourself, you'll have tools to deal with your external struggles. When we're stronger emotionally, we are more able to deal with our struggles.

What if I don't have time to write?

All it takes is five minutes a day — and you have five minutes! I say that five minutes a day keeps the doctor away. It really keeps you healthier!

I recently published a book called *Write Your Way Home*, with specific exercises that teens can also appreciate. But just setting a timer to write and then reflect is also very powerful.

How did you start teaching this?

I was a certified guidance counselor and then I learned therapeutic writing. It says in *Pirkei Avos* (6:1), "*Kneh lecha chaver.*" The Arizal tells us to read this as, "*Kaneh lecha chaver* — let the quill be your friend." When we write, the pen becomes our best friend, however we want and wherever we are.

I love writing and I love growth, so what could be better than combining the two? I love that a person can create such effective change in such an incredibly simple way. ■

Therapeutic writing is fun! Gift yourself a few minutes to quickly and honestly answer the questions in these four exercises. (You can do them all at once, or with breaks in between.) Then read over your answers. You might be surprised by what you find! (You can save these exercises and do them again another time — you might get different answers!)

1 Write your name in LARGE letters at the top of the page. Then, ask yourself:

When I see my name, how do I feel?
What does my name mean to me?
How does that make me feel?
One step that I can take is _____.

2 Finish these sentences quickly, without thinking deeply into them. When you finish, read them over and write a reflection — what you can learn about yourself by reading your writing.

My name is _____.
I love to _____.
I am afraid to _____.
I am good at _____.
I struggle with _____.
If I would be able to do anything, I wish I would _____.
But even if I can't do that, maybe I can _____.
If I would, I would feel _____.
And then I'd _____.

3 A Poem by _____

Today I am a _____ that _____.
(a thing) (a description)

The world outside thinks I am a _____ that _____.
(a thing) (a description)

But inside my room I am a _____ that _____.
(a thing) (a description)

Yesterday I was a _____ that _____.
(a thing) (a description)

Those around me thought I was a _____ that _____.
(a thing) (a description)

But really I was a _____ that _____.
(a thing) (a description)

Tomorrow I hope to be a _____ that _____.
(a thing) (a description)

Even if those around me think _____,
I know that I really am _____.

4 I am:

I am _____
I may not be perfect, but I can _____
I always wish for _____
I do my best to _____
I want the people around me to feel _____
I have unusual ideas, like _____
I have a secret talent — I can _____
I am _____