

THERAPISTS AGREE: JOURNAL WRITING WORKS

It's no secret that writing down thoughts and feelings in a journal is a useful therapeutic tool. But just what happens when clients write their lives?

Kathleen Adams, LPC, Director of the Center for Journal Therapy in Denver (www.journaltherapy.com) and one of the leading theorists in the use of life-based writing as a therapeutic tool, asked over 2,600 helping professionals to complete the sentence, "When my clients or patients write journals...."

By far the number one response was that the client benefited in some way. More than half (52%) of the responses said that the client gained insight, awareness, clarity and/or emotional expression on therapeutic issues through writing in a journal. Responses included:

- they release feelings and gain new insights into their issues.
- they make sense out of inner confusion and conflict.
- their eyes are often opened to a better understanding of themselves and their life situations.
- it helps them form a sense of identity.
- they gain insight and can share their thoughts with others.
- they tend to express emotions in writing they didn't even think they had.

One-quarter (26%) stated that the client's written expression helped the therapy move along more quickly and/or deeply (18%) or helped the therapist work more effectively with the client (8%). Responses included:

- they move out of stuck places; we're able to get more work done faster.
- I use their writings as a framework for our sessions.
- it helps with the therapeutic process.
- I find they work at a deeper level.
- I can assign writing tasks to help reinforce therapeutic strategies.
- they get clearer and progress faster.

Eight percent (8%) stated that clients who wrote journals experienced difficulties (e.g. fear, resistance, stuckness); another 8% reported their clients did not write journals and/or the therapist did not work with client journals in treatment. Six percent (6%) referenced the therapist's response ("It makes me happy," "I am excited and curious," "I encourage them to keep it up") without noting a client outcome.

Data was gathered from June 2006-November 2008 in a continuing education workshop, *Journal Therapy: Writing as a Therapeutic Tool* offered through Cross Country Education (www.crosscountryeducation.com) to psychologists, social workers, guidance counselors, psychiatric nurses, substance abuse counselors, EAP counselors and psychotherapists in 80 US cities.