

HELPING PATIENTS USE THERAPEUTIC WRITING

A Provider Tool



- **Therapeutic writing**, a form of targeted journal writing, is a self-care technique encouraging deeper reflection, processing, and discovery, and simultaneously, reflective distance. It can help your patients to gain clarity and insight about their experiences and themselves—and thereby, to heal, grow, and thrive. It can help them and you identify what matters most to them in life.
- Therapeutic writing can be a useful tool for virtually anyone and any issue, both with individual patients and with groups. Studies have shown that it can help to manage the stress and anxiety that can come with emerging into adulthood, experiencing life transitions, and grappling with identity.
- You offer the writing prompts as frames, and it's up to the patient to determine which content would be most useful to examine through these frames. This means that patients can reuse the same prompts, to examine different content (e.g., exploring different people, moments, challenges, or experiences, etc.) from that angle, focusing on a different person, a different important life moment, different challenges.
- In therapeutic writing, the *process* is more important than the product: it is not about the sentences that the patient crafts on the page, but the act of writing itself. To this end, and for patients to feel free creative and safe personally, they don't need to read their writing aloud, but rather, talk about what the experience of writing itself. Individual patients can do their writing on their own and process with you in session; or with groups, you can offer brief silent periods of writing followed by periods of optional sharing and discussion. You can ask the patient to consider: What did you discover? What surprised you? What did you find challenging? What was more—or less—painful than you expected? Were there unexpected joys or insights? How did it help you better understand your experiences and yourself?
- Patients can also refer to journal entries later, as a resource, to read what they've written and track their progress.