

# WRITING & JOURNALING WORKSHOP FOR TEENS WITH OCD

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WRITING CAN BE AN INCREDIBLE TOOL FOR  
GROWTH, CREATIVITY AND MENTAL WELLNESS.

I credit writing for shaping my life and OCD  
journey in a positive way. Writing is for anyone  
and everyone.

## MY PERSONAL OCD STORY

I was diagnosed with OCD at the age of 27, I'm now 34. I've experienced symptoms since childhood.

My OCD centers around safety and perfectionism.

I published my first article about my personal experience with OCD in 2015 in the *Toronto Star*.

## TYPES OF WRITING WE'LL EXPLORE:

- WRITING AS A PERSONAL TOOL FOR RECOVERY THROUGH JOURNALING.
- WRITING AS A MEANS OF CONNECTING WITH OTHERS AND GETTING YOUR STORY OUT THERE.

## Types of Journals

### Free Flow Journal

Blank pages to fill with thoughts, ideas and goals.

### Guided Journal

A journal that asks you questions for your reflection.

### Motivational Journal

A journal featuring quotes or illustrations that can be a jumping off point for writing for mental health.

“There is no greater agony  
than bearing an untold story  
inside you.”

- Maya Angelou

## Some of the Benefits of Journaling

### Turning Pain Into Creativity

There's something empowering about converting pain into self-reflection. It doesn't mean the pain disappears, but I find it more manageable.

### Breathing Space

Sometimes writing things out can give you some distance from your thoughts. MSU Researcher Hans Schroder says of a 2017 study on anxiety and expressive writing, “Our findings show that if you get these worries out of your head through expressive writing, those cognitive resources are freed up to work toward the task you’re completing and you become more efficient.”

### Challenging Your Thoughts

If you're working with a cognitive behavioral therapist, writing can be a great exposure tool. Books like *Everyday Mindfulness for OCD: Tips, Tricks & Skills for Living Joyfully* by John Hershfield, MFT and Shala Nicely, LPC ( NHP, 2017) talk about writing ERP (imaginal exposure) scripts, but caution against doing so when your OCD is at it's highest.

## Practicing Mindfulness

Rather than avoid the thought, maybe use writing to empower you to face it, if only for a bit: "Today, I'm going to just sit with the uncertainty."

## Identifying Patterns

It's hard for me to have balanced thoughts when I'm anxious. It's either catastrophic thinking or nothing. I can now identify this better because of my writing patterns.

## Bye Bye Perfectionism

Writing doesn't have to be perfect. I spent years worrying that my writing wasn't great, when really the kindest thing you can do for yourself is let yourself be imperfect. Author Louise Penny says that all art looks like a dog's breakfast at first. Even if your journaling is just for your own eyes, allow it to be imperfect.

## Some possible triggers of journaling

### Perfectionism:

You decide whether you find journaling to be more stressful than helpful.

### Reassurance:

If your journaling is becoming a compulsion, then you decide what's healthiest for you.

### Privacy:

You determine whether you are comfortable with journaling or not.

## WRITING YOUR FIRST-PERSON OCD STORY FOR AUDIENCES

- It always has to do with your comfort and wellness first and foremost.
  - I started publishing at the age of 21 (adult) and decided who I felt comfortable sharing with.
- I've had people reach out to me with positive words of encouragement.
  - Writing groups at school or with friends can be so helpful.
- Finding a writing mentor who can suggest edits and feedback is also great.

THE NUT PARAGRAPH (Introduces your story and captures the readers attention):

"If you see me wince a little when someone says something like "Gosh, I'm sooooo OCD today!" it's because I know what it's like to be OCD all day, every day. In my experience, obsessive compulsive disorder does not just torment a person for a limited amount of time and then go on its merry way. For those of us without obvious compulsions, it can also be that much harder to detect."

EXAMPLE OF THE CONTENT OF YOUR STORY (Give them more substance. Show, don't tell!)

"I'll be holding onto the subway pole, and my eyes will scan the car for any sign of something "off ." It might be the person next to me digging into their pocket for a phone that will set off an alarm bell, and my heart will start racing with the fear that it might be a weapon, even if that particular trigger has played out hundreds of times before. The same goes for someone shifting around in a seat. My anxiety might get so high that rather than sit with the doubt, I have to get off at the next station or switch cars, even if doing so will make me late. It's a sort of hypervigilance in which my brain tricks me into thinking I'm doing all of this for my own safety."

## EXAMPLE OF STORY CONCLUSION

"And then there's the odd moment I'll be walking down the street after an obsessive day and the light will hit my face in a certain way. I'll notice people walking hand in hand or a bird flying from one tree to another. The market will have flowers in it and I'll pause a moment to pick up a bunch of sunflowers or dahlias. At that moment I'll be free from doubt. I guess some people would call that grace, and I can't really think of a better word for it. It's what I've got."

## SOME START-OFF POINTS TO HELP YOU WRITE YOUR OCD STORY OR JOURNAL

- What has OCD taught you about yourself?
- How do you plan to challenge your OCD in the future?
- What has your mental health journey been like so far?

“The first draft is just you telling yourself the story.”  
-Terry Pratchett