O'Brien Journaling Technique

Purpose

This method uses factual writing to release emotions and heal. It relies on finding past events, writing what happened in observable detail, and avoiding emotional analysis while you write. In the Always Be Reiki framework, it can also help explore subconscious patterns identified during a Reiki session or Four Planes discussion.

21-day rhythm

- **Practice for 21 days.** Daily is excellent; 4-5 times per week is acceptable. You can use on one single traumatic event over and over for 21 days or different events which have the same theme eg 'things which make me angry'. Can continue for 60 days if necessary.
- **Use pen and paper if possible.** The physical act of writing keeps the process concrete and factual.
- **Keep it private during the 21 days.** Date the entry, put it away, and do not retell or analyze it verbally.
- **Work gently.** Choose a memory that feels workable. If you become overwhelmed or disassociate based on the emotions present in the memory then stop for a moment, drink water, break the pattern and then carry on journaling. The overwhelm and the dissociation is the emotions being released, reduced or cleared which is the aim of this exercise. If you really cannot continue then stop completely for the day and come back to the same memory the next day.
- **It's fine to release emotions such as anger, sadness or fear etc.** Expressing emotions by screaming, crying or seeking safety is not same as verbalizing and is fine to seek after journaling.

How to do one entry

1. **Pick one event.** Choose a traumatic, painful, confusing, or emotionally charged memory. Start with a single scene, not your whole life story.
2. **Describe the scene factually.** Write what a camera could see: place, time, people, objects, weather, room, clothes, sounds, exact words, sequence of actions.
3. **Move through what happened.** Write one factual happening, then the next, then the next. Keep asking: what happened next? If the 'fact' you remember seems implausible, impossible or 'new information' write it and carry on. Accuracy is less important than what memory we have and in some cases memories are forgotten because they are traumatic and they seem 'new' to us as adults.
4. **Avoid feelings and analysis.** Do not write how you felt then, how you feel now, why it happened, what it means, who was right, or what it says about you.
5. **If feelings or analysis appear, stop.** Cross them out. Return to the next factual detail you can see or remember, eg 'What Happened next?'.
6. **Do not verbalize the event.** Avoid as much as possible retelling the facts, feelings, or analysis out loud or verbally. This includes ordinary conversations and therapy sessions. If you need safety support, get support - but keep the memory work itself on the page. Verbalizing 'keeps' the emotion within you. Writing releases and allows you to clear the emotional blockage and allow you to move on.
7. **Release emotions related to the event.** Scream into a pillow, cry, seek safety if you want.

Example: factual writing with corrections

Fact: I walked into the kitchen. The glass was on the floor. My uncle stood by the sink. ~~I felt terrified~~ ~~He was cruel and wanted to hurt me.~~ Fact: He said, "Pick it up." [Then carry on with the next fact until the end of the scene]

When feeling or analysis appears, cross it out and return to the next observable fact.
The clearing approach in this method is simple: write the facts, avoid feeling/analysis, avoid verbalizing.

Get Started: First Entry

Use this page for your first factual memory entry. Keep it plain, simple, and observable.

1. Choose the memory / event

Name the event in a few words only. Example: "kitchen argument," "school hallway," "hospital room," "phone call."

2. Set the scene factually

Where was it? Who was there? What objects, sounds, light, clothes, doors, windows, smells, or exact words do you remember?

3. Write the event as a sequence of facts

Write only what happened. If you write a feeling or analysis, cross it out and return to the next factual happening.

4. Close the entry

- If there are any emotions you are feeling from the memory eg sadness, anger, fear then allow yourself to express these after the session. For example you can ‘scream into a pillow’ if you are angry, or cry if you are sad or stay with someone (be with an animal or someone that brings you safety) who can support you if you are scared. Releasing emotion is not the same as ‘verbalizing’ facts, emotions or analysis of the event. Its healthy to release emotions and the point of this exercise generally.
- Put it away for 21 days and review at a later date if the facts seem unbelievable. There is no particular need to review these notes in future unless you want to discover what is accurate or not factually. The emotions are released in the moments you are writing and could be thrown away after that if you desire.
- Do not verbalize or analyze the memory during this period. Releasing emotions is not same as verbalizing and is encouraged.
- Ground afterward: feel your feet, breathe down into the belly, do some Qui Gong, drink water etc etc.