

'Expressive Telling' in Crisis PSS Toolkit

A guide for use online or on the phone

Adapted from The Expressive Writing and Telling Handbook -
Exercises for during or post-crisis

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This is the Expressive Telling PSS toolkit for use during and after crisis.
While the crisis here is taken to be the Covid 19 crisis, the exercises can be used referring to any crisis which participants have experienced.
In that instance, leave out the vaccine-related exercise.

These 'telling' exercises were adapted along with co-researchers from Akkar Network for Development NGO, Akkar, Lebanon and the authors readily acknowledge the expertise and input of social workers and principals at AND.

For further information or to receive a copy of the Expressive Life Writing Handbook which gives full contexts and references for this work, please contact S.Campbell@kingston.ac.uk or M.Jensen@open.ac.uk

Thank you!

Expressive Telling in Crisis

This curriculum is a version of the Expressive Writing and Telling handbook specifically adapted for use during crisis, particularly for use on the phone, when in-person is not possible. This version can also be used in person during a crisis, when a succinct version is advisable.

The Expressive Telling in Crisis method can be used on the telephone, but can also be used on WhatsApp, Messenger, or via other messaging applications. If using messaging applications, please make sure your client or beneficiary understands how to delete any information that they may not want to share with other users of the device before you begin.

The outline will be split into sections, marked out by a change in font: firstly, *information for the activist/ social worker*; and secondly, **information for the activist/ social worker to convey to the beneficiary.**



Thank you for your use of Expressive Writing and Telling methods with your clients or beneficiaries. The opinions and understandings of those who adopt these methods are key to the development of Expressive Writing and Telling and to how it might be used by others. Thank you if you are prepared to give us feedback on how the methods work.

Below you will find options for telephone-based or WhatsApp conversations with beneficiaries.

Contents

The curriculum contains the following exercises:

- A Breathing exercise*
- B Vaccine related exercise*
- C Past, present and future*
- D Looking back from a far distance*
- E Wishes and hopes with loved ones*
- F Concluding exercise*

The curriculum should be split ideally into two sessions with your client/ beneficiary.

We recommend that both session one and session two begin with A (Breathing Exercise). Session A can then be followed by the facilitator's choice of any of these exercises: B, C and D. Session Two again begins with Breathing Exercise A, followed by any of these exercises B,C,D not already completed (or all of them, depending on time and the reactions of the participant) and finish with E and F. You may decide on other pathways or leave some exercises out altogether.



Sessions:

Opening the Conversation

Beneficiary Safety

Ensure that you have discussed with the beneficiary the potential disruptions they may experience to their call, and what can be done in response to these issues. This may include:

- *Agree on a safe word to end the call should the client be aware of being overheard*
- *Agree a time/ day to phone back should the call end, or need to be closed quickly*
- *Ensure they are able to close down app windows quickly if needed, or open up one to switch to when needed*

Background to convey to the beneficiary:

Expressive Telling is a method of psychosocial support that has emerged from several years of research into expressive writing and telling in pressurized situations. The method is to focus on thoughts and feelings in a safe and supportive way. Telling our stories like this has been proven to support well-being and coping abilities. We use 'intentional listening' which means we focus on your own individual experience without judgment.

We ask for your consent to take up this expressive telling and the consent emphasises that the process is anonymised and there are no material rewards for participation and likewise, no consequences of non-participation. *In a crisis, it is easy to forget that we have the need to have our story heard. Sometimes the first step is to acknowledge what is going on. This 'expression' can sometimes bring some relief.*

Consent

Either read the 'on-phone' consent form below at this point and receive and record verbal consent, or if working 'in person', use the written consent form. Most NGOs or activist organisations use these in conjunction with their own safeguarding protocols.

Oral consent agreements to be managed over the phone:

The following four points of information must be communicated to the beneficiary:

1. **The potential benefits of Expressive Telling exercises (The exercises in this curriculum can increase your sense of well-being and the expression of difficult emotions in a safe environment", "it offers enhanced ability to identify origins of painful emotions and learn potential ways to cope with these feelings," etc.) You should also make clear the potential risks depending on the participant's specific environmental context ("these exercises may cause upset; may be overheard by others, for example)**

2. The person **“does not have to participate and there will be no consequence if they choose not to (no other benefits provided by AND will be denied to them)”**.
3. Participants **“can stop/drop out at any time, and withdraw from the research for any reason at any time up until that research is published”, and again there will be “no consequences” if they do.**
4. The participant **“will remain anonymous – though we may use some personal data if they give consent for us to do so” (such as where they are from, what their concerns are, if they are married or have children, etc) if they participate as part of our research. This research “is aimed at benefitting other people in crisis situations in future.”**
 - A. If the participant agrees orally to consent to these four points, then AND can simply take note that **“Yes Case number 101 has given initial informed consent,”** noting down the date and time that this consent was given.
 - B. We would then suggest that the same for topics listed in 1-4 above are raised in every subsequent discussion with the participant – not in a checklist format as you have done in the first interview, but in an informal discussion format. So for example **“How did you feel after the first session of Expressive Telling?” “Don’t forget that you don’t have to continue if you don’t want to. I will still be here to talk to and to work on your Life plan with you no matter what.” “Remember that you can always take a break or drop out if these discussions become too uncomfortable.” “Thank you for speaking with me today – what do you think about the idea that our discussions might help others in future?” “By participating in this research you are helping us to better understand how to support many other people.” “What do you think about these kinds of projects?” “Are you happy to speak to me once a week or is that too often?” etc.**
 - C. Finally, facilitators/interviewers can note down the responses to these questions/discussions about consent as your interactions continue. These discussions, and the notes arising from them would, we think, constitute a clearer, more meaningful and useful kind of “informed consent” interaction than simply filling in a form and filing it away.

Further information on Expressive Writing and Telling:

The full handbook with background, bibliography and full curriculum is available from siobhan.campbell@open.ac.uk



A: Breathing Exercise

PURPOSE: Helping people to feel calm

TIME: 4 minutes

AGES: All

GROUP SIZE: for individual interaction or groups of different sizes

RESOURCES: Establish that the beneficiary is in a safe place.

Breathing exercise - Belly Breathing (Source: EAMH-SL, PFA manual)

SAFETY:

The exercise should take place in a calm and safe environment with no noise interruptions if possible.



PROCESS:

If it is helpful, let participants know that

When we are stressed, our breathing becomes shallow, high in our chests, and we forget to breathe deeply into our bellies.

In advance of doing expressive telling, we use this breathing exercise which may help you to feel calm and ready.

Instruct participants with the following:

- **Close your eyes.**
- **Bring your hands to your lower belly with your two middle fingers touching.**
- **Relax your shoulders.**
- **Take a long, deep, gentle breath in, and so that your belly gets bigger (keep your shoulders relaxed). You should find that your middle fingers will pull apart slightly as the belly expands with the breath.**
- **Breathe out slowly, feeling how the belly comes in and the middle fingers touch again.**

Do this abdominal breathing a minimum of ten times (Breathe in /Breathe out x 10).

ALTERNATIVES:

With children, you can explain that when they breathe in, they are slowly blowing up their tummy like a balloon, and when they breathe out, the air is going slowly out of the balloon again.

B: Vaccine-Related Exercise

PURPOSE: To discuss the current pandemic, and feelings towards the vaccine

TIME: 5 minutes

AGES: All

GROUP SIZE: For individual interaction or groups of different sizes

RESOURCES: Establish that the beneficiary is in a safe place.



PROCESS:

COVID-19 has affected all our lives. And you will be aware that there is a vaccine. This exercise is designed to explore your feelings around those issues.

Firstly, let us try to maintain the feelings of being present in this moment that we have generated with the breathing exercise.

And, in your own time, could you address the following questions:

- **What are your sources of information about the vaccine?**
- **Do you know people personally who have taken the vaccine, and have you heard of their experience?**
- **What does the information or these relayed experiences make you feel?**
- **Could we supply you with some up-to-date information about the vaccine and about staying safe?**



C: Past, Present and Future

PURPOSE: To discuss time before the pandemic, during, and hopes for the future

TIME: 10 minutes

AGES: All

GROUP SIZE: For individual interaction or groups of different sizes

RESOURCES: Establish that the beneficiary is in a safe place.



PROCESS:

During this exercise, the questions fall into three areas: past, present, and future. You are asking your beneficiary to reflect on positive events from the past, and their hopes for the future.

Before Covid-19 or in the past, you enjoyed these three things:

- **You liked to:**
- **You felt happy when:**
- **You were most relaxed when:**

If you received supports, either practical or emotional supports, can you say what receiving those meant to you:

- **I received these kinds of supports during COVID-19:**
- **This is what they meant to me:**

And for the future, if you were to imagine life after crisis, what will be most important?

- If I could, I would change this:

- I would hope for this to happen:



D: Looking Back from a Far Distance

PURPOSE: To reflect back on the COVID-19 pandemic and to discuss events with hindsight from the 'future'

TIME: 10 minutes

AGES: All

GROUP SIZE: For individual interaction or groups of different sizes

RESOURCES: Establish that the beneficiary is in a safe place.



PROCESS:

This exercise will help you to guide your beneficiary through talking about the pandemic and their personal experiences using the safe space of the future.

This exercise asks you to imagine the far away future.

You have just turned 200 years of age. COVID-19 happened over 100 years ago.

A 30-year-old you know asks you what your thoughts were about that time.

Use these questions as a way in to tell a story from your experience.

- **What was the worst thing about the COVID pandemic for you?**
- **Was there anything that was surprising or even good during COVID?**
- **Would you say that you learned anything personally?**
- **Did you change anything within your family or learn anything as a family?**
- **What do you feel about the social structures or governmental structures and healthcare information around you during COVID?**
- **If you could change one thing about these structures, what would it be?**

E: Wishes and Hopes with Loved Ones

PURPOSE: *To reflect back on the COVID-19 pandemic and to discuss events with hindsight from the 'future'*

TIME: *10 minutes*

AGES: *All*

GROUP SIZE: *For individual interaction or groups of different sizes*

RESOURCES: *Establish that the beneficiary is in a safe place.*



PROCESS:

This exercise asks the beneficiary to think about someone they love, and to answer the questions with this person in mind.

Think of a loved one.

Bring this person to mind. This can be a family member or a friend.

This exercise asks you to answer in relation to the person you love.

It can sometimes help to express a hope, even if that hope is born out of crisis.

Say what you hope or wish for this person and for yourself:

- **What I wish for you is:**
- **What I wish for myself is:**
- **What I hope for us both is that:**



F Concluding Exercise – How is the Weather for You?

PURPOSE: To reflect back on exercises completed in the session

TIME: 5 minutes

AGES: All

GROUP SIZE: For individual interaction or groups of different sizes

RESOURCES: Establish that the beneficiary is in a safe place.



PROCESS:

This exercise invites your client/ beneficiary to reflect on the process, but it also doubles as a way of monitoring the client. It is based on the 'Weather Model' (Maclean 2016).

Now that you've done some expressive work, we'll think about what feelings go along with doing that. Looking at the following 'weathers', can you tell me some feelings that go with each weather?

Sunshine – what part of your experience with Expressive Writing went well?

Rain – What didn't go well?

Lightning – what came as a shock or surprise?

Fog – what didn't you understand, or wish were made clearer to you?



