

JOINT EVENT

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Expressive writing with adolescents: what's really going on?**Maria F Guzzo and Danielle Groleau**
McGill University, Canada

Talking about a negative or traumatic experience can be helpful, however, expressing emotions can be challenging for adolescents. Finding the right approach for adolescents to express themselves is crucial to maintaining and promoting positive mental health. Some researchers claim expressive writing has positive mental health impacts on adolescents while others argue the contrary. Furthermore, even among advocates, there is little agreement about how or why expressive writing might produce positive mental health outcomes. Due to the paucity of research on the underlying psychological and cognitive mechanisms of expressive writing in the adolescent population, more studies are needed. For this research, analysis of journals written by adolescents during a structured expressive writing intervention was chosen as a qualitative method to reveal the underlying mechanisms of expressive writing. Data was generated through a randomized collection of student journals until saturation was met. A total of eight journals were thus kept for analysis. Data analysis combined both inductive thematic coding and conceptual deductive coding that reflected the psychological theories proposed in the literature to explain the potential mechanisms. The analysis suggests that 3 of the 5 theories proposed in the literature were found in the student journals. Furthermore, two additional theories chosen by the author but not proposed in the literature were also reflected in the journals. More structured writing interventions should be considered to facilitate the underlying mechanisms of expressive writing. More research is needed, such as using qualitative interviews to further understand the experience of expressive writing from the perspective of the adolescents themselves.

Biography

Maria F. Guzzo has completed her Masters degree in Psychiatry from McGill University and is now pursuing her doctoral studies at the same institution, specializing in adolescent mental health. Maria is president of a youth mental health family foundation and sits on several mental-health related boards in her community. She has been actively involved in her community as a well-renowned philanthropist who's mission is to promote mental health, more specifically with the adolescent population in school-based settings.

Dr. Danielle Groleau is Associate Professor and senior investigator at the Institute of Community and Family Psychiatry at the Jewish General Hospital. Dr Groleau is an anthropologist and received her PhD in Public Health from the Université de Montréal and postdoctoral training in Transcultural Psychiatry at McGill University. She specializes in qualitative research to study social determinants of health that have implications for public health programming and health policy. She has shifted her research interest the last three years to youth mental health research.

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