

## **Life Affirmations in the Healing Process**

### **Journals**

Keeping a journal is a way to express feelings during a stressful and painful time. Writing can provide therapeutic release, especially for people who tend to internalize their emotions. People report feeling calmer and less disorganized after journaling. Journaling is a tool for making sense of life events and finding meaning in them. Putting words to paper clarifies our thoughts and helps us to make better choices. Keeping a journal may aid us in regaining a sense of control over our lives. Journaling can be as unique and idiosyncratic as we are – there is no right or wrong way to journal.

#### **Journal Sources:**

- [http://www.wholehealthmd.com/print/view/1,1560,SU\\_745,00.html](http://www.wholehealthmd.com/print/view/1,1560,SU_745,00.html)
- <http://www.journaltherapy.com>

### **Art**

Art lets us express ourselves without having to talk. By representing our thoughts and feelings, art can help us heal. It externalizes experiences and feelings in a tactile or pictorial form and enhances self-awareness. After a traumatic event, art facilitates catharsis and kinesthetic release. Art fosters integration and interconnectivity between brain hemispheres, which promotes healing. By organizing our thoughts and feelings, art promotes sound decisions and fortifies our active role in the healing process. Art, as a two-step process of expression and reflection, allows the isolation of internal focus as well as connection with others. Healing through creative expression is limited only by one's imagination.

#### **Art Sources**

- <http://www.arttherapy.org>
- [http://www.latimes.com/features/health/la-he-art20mar20,0,604786.story?page=1 &coll=la-home-health](http://www.latimes.com/features/health/la-he-art20mar20,0,604786.story?page=1&coll=la-home-health)

“The healing canvas: Art can soothe the mind and body.” Jenny Hontz, Special to The Times, March 20, 2006

### **Music**

Music has a demonstrable effect on our mood. Listening to music can still the clamor of external events, helping us to relax and attend to the present moment. Systematic studies suggest that music can equalize and slow down brain waves, boost endorphin levels, and reduce muscle tension. Music allows us to get in touch with our feelings, or it can provide a distraction from intense emotions. According to Don Campbell, author of *The Mozart Effect* and *Music: Physician for Times to Come*, music has come to be recognized as a tool for healing and well-being.

#### **Music Sources**

- <http://www.musictherapy.org/>

### **Ritual**

Ritual invests a certain set of actions with significance and meaning and allows us to recognize memorable events. When we face loss, rituals present a safe and structured space for the full expression of our grief. A memorial or funeral provides a sense of control during an otherwise chaotic time. Remembrance rituals serve as a bridge between life as it was once and as it is now. In attesting to the

connection between our lives and the lives of others, rituals generate social support and offer comfort. Rituals can be as simple as lighting a candle, or as extended as planting a memorial garden.

#### **Ritual Sources**

- [http://www.hospicefoundation.org/hfaPublications/books/lwg1998/healing\\_rituals.asp](http://www.hospicefoundation.org/hfaPublications/books/lwg1998/healing_rituals.asp)

#### **Pets**

Our pets may be our best companions in times of emotional turmoil. Pets can alleviate loneliness as well as help us become more social. An animal can lift our spirits, provide a focus for attention, and offer a constant source of comfort. Stroking a pet, or simply speaking to an animal, causes a drop in heart rate and lowers blood pressure. Although our relationships with people may be complex and unpredictable, interactions with pets are straightforward. Pets accept us unconditionally. An animal brings out our nurturing instincts and helps us to feel needed. Having a pet focuses us beyond ourselves, and perhaps feels more connected to the larger world.

#### **Pets Sources**

- [http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2002/11/1108\\_021111\\_dogswithjobs.html](http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2002/11/1108_021111_dogswithjobs.html)  
"Crisis-Response Dogs Offer Comfort After Tragedy," Maryann Mott, November 11, 2002
- [http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2002/08/0808\\_020808\\_therapydogs.html](http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2002/08/0808_020808_therapydogs.html)  
"Therapy Dogs Seem to Boost Health of Sick and Lonely," Lara Suziedelis Bogle, August 8, 2002

#### **Humor**

Laughing, smiling, or feeling joy may seem unimaginable during times of loss. Yet, grief is draining and humor can provide a needed respite. At first, humor may only be possible among those who have sustained the same emotional impact from the loss. Laughing together allows us to temporarily disassociate ourselves from the grief. Humor can help create and maintain social connections. Researchers at UC Berkeley "have found that people who laugh in the months following the death of a spouse are better able to function years later than people who express more negative emotions." Laughing, smiling, and feeling joy are important ways to affirm life even in the face of death.

#### **Humor Sources**

<http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/97legacy/death.html>  
"It's better to laugh at death than get angry," Patricia McBroom, July 17, 1997

#### **Activism**

Advocacy and activism can be a way to channel the intense energy experienced in grief. Loss may spark ideas and activate a strength we did not know we possessed. Various causes and organizations had their origins as a response to tragedy. Candy Lightner transformed the outrage she felt when her daughter died as the result of a drunk-driver's recklessness into MADD, the largest crime victims' association in the world. Grieving mother, Cindy Sheehan, mobilized a successful effort to focus media attention on the soldiers who have sacrificed their lives in the Iraq War. The AIDS Quilt demonstrates the public impact of the devastating illness and serves as an example of how loss can be a meaningful instrument for change.

#### **Activism Sources**

- <http://www.theimpossible.org>  
"The Impossible Will Take a Little While: A Citizen's Guide to Hope in a Time of Fear," Paul Rogat Loeb, 2004