

Gwen Jones
Gwennanjones26@gmail.com
07958 379455

Healing Through Audio's Ability

Heading: Say it your way

stand-first: How keeping a spoken journal of thoughts and feelings can do you a power of good

Have you ever found yourself talking out loud or verbalising your thoughts and feelings? If you went a step further and recorded your speech on a device, you would be audio-journaling, the practice of keeping an audio record of what's on your mind. Research has shown that talking to yourself is both normal and beneficial for mental health, while several studies have demonstrated that journaling is a powerful tool for happiness and goal-setting. So that gives audio journaling, which combines the two, the potential to be a double win.

The origins of documenting our innermost thoughts and feelings through an audio journal is sometimes traced back to **US-born Iolene Catalano, who in the months and days before her death in 1994 of an AIDS-related illness, reflected on her life through a microphone. The recordings were collated by David Isay and released a year later as an audio journal called *All the Way Broken*. Through the entries, Iolene describes her childhood experiences in orphanages, mental institutions and reform schools as well as her time as a poet and singer [Gwen to check].**

According to **Raheel Karim, a consultant psychiatrist at Pall Mall Medical in Manchester who also practises within the NHS [Gwen to check]**, the process of giving voice to thoughts and feelings in this way can be just as cathartic as writing them down. For him, it is another 'effective tool' to find emotional release: 'By verbalising your thoughts and feelings, you release them from your brain,' he says. 'This verbalisation begins the acceptance of those emotions, which can help you make better decisions and calm your mind.'

No filter

When something is written on paper, or in a digital format such as a text message, the mind has more time to process and think about what is going to be said. Arguably, an audio journal can encourage a person to be more openly expressive about their emotions, says Raheel. 'When you write, there is a tendency to filter and edit what you record. This means that a written account is not always the most accurate reflection of how you really feel,' he says. 'When you talk out loud, you are more likely to release raw truths that you might censor otherwise.'

He adds that audio journalling is an important tool for tackling overwhelming moments as they happen, or when you are feeling overwhelmed when reflecting about an event. In the moment, when emotions are running high, it can also be easier to press a button on a phone and start talking than to find pen and paper and begin jotting down thoughts.

Be an observer

Not only is an audio journal your own story-recording device, it also allows you to step outside yourself and observe your thoughts and emotions. Observation is key to healing, says addiction psychologist Jacky Power. 'Hearing yourself say it out loud, even into a microphone, changes your relationship with the feeling because it brings in an element of observation. Observation helps because you can then recognise you are not your feelings. This is important, because people can often panic that if they feel a certain feeling they don't want to, it will never go away. That's not true. The pain is in the resistance to the feeling.'

Crying out loud

You might not realise that an event has caused you distress until you begin to say it out loud – and when you do, the tears might follow. Sometimes this emotional release can only happen when a person is alone as there can be a tendency to put on a brave front when people are with friends or family. But crying can help in the healing process both emotionally but physically. Jacky explains that tears cried through feelings of grief contain a hormone that acts as a natural painkiller: 'Called leucine enkephalin, it is only released as you grieve, not when you cry tears of joy. When you share how you feel and allow yourself the very natural process of crying, you are helping your body to do what it does best and soothe your pain, bringing you back to homeostasis.'

Acceptance

Speaking freely about emotional issues is something Leanne MacDonald, wellbeing coach and founder of *The Everyday Goddess Revolution*, advocates in her work with both children and adults. She believes that an audio process is a powerful way to voice things you haven't been able to say out loud among other people. 'People often experience inner tension and uncomfortable emotions because of unmet expectations of another person, situation or event,' she says. 'That process alone [audio journalling] allows the release of unresolved emotion and it's even more powerful when you can listen back to what you've expressed, or even convert the audio into a transcript and read it back as this allows you to see the situation from a new perspective and neutralise the emotional tension.'

With accessibility to an audio journal a mere click away on a smartphone, why not give audio journalling a try? You never know where the journey may lead you.

[boxout]

Head: Digital talk

There are several apps for audio journalling and most phones also have an in-built facility, though this is likely to have fewer options. Some benefits of using an app to record your thoughts, according to consultant psychiatrist Raheel, are:

1. Control. By releasing thoughts and emotions from your mind through speech, you are taking ownership of them. This can reduce the likelihood of becoming overwhelmed.
2. Reflection. Lots of apps provide timeline options, so if you wish to, you can reflect on your mental health journey and see how far you've come.
3. Documentation. You can note your moments of worry and anxiety, and then share them with health professionals or trusted friends if you feel the need to. This can be helpful because when an overwhelming event or emotion has passed, it can sometimes be difficult to remember it fully and accurately.

4. Immediacy. Triggers that lead to anxiety or a feeling of being overwhelmed can occur at any time, and come from anywhere, so an on-demand journalling feature is good for supporting mental health and tackling emotions straight away.

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Words: Gwen Jones

If you're finding thoughts and emotions difficult to cope with alone, it's a good idea to talk about it to your GP or health professional. Help and support for better mental health can be found at Mind, [mind.org.uk](https://www.mind.org.uk).

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