

THE THERAPY WORLD BLOG

How I Overcame Silence and Opened Up in Therapy

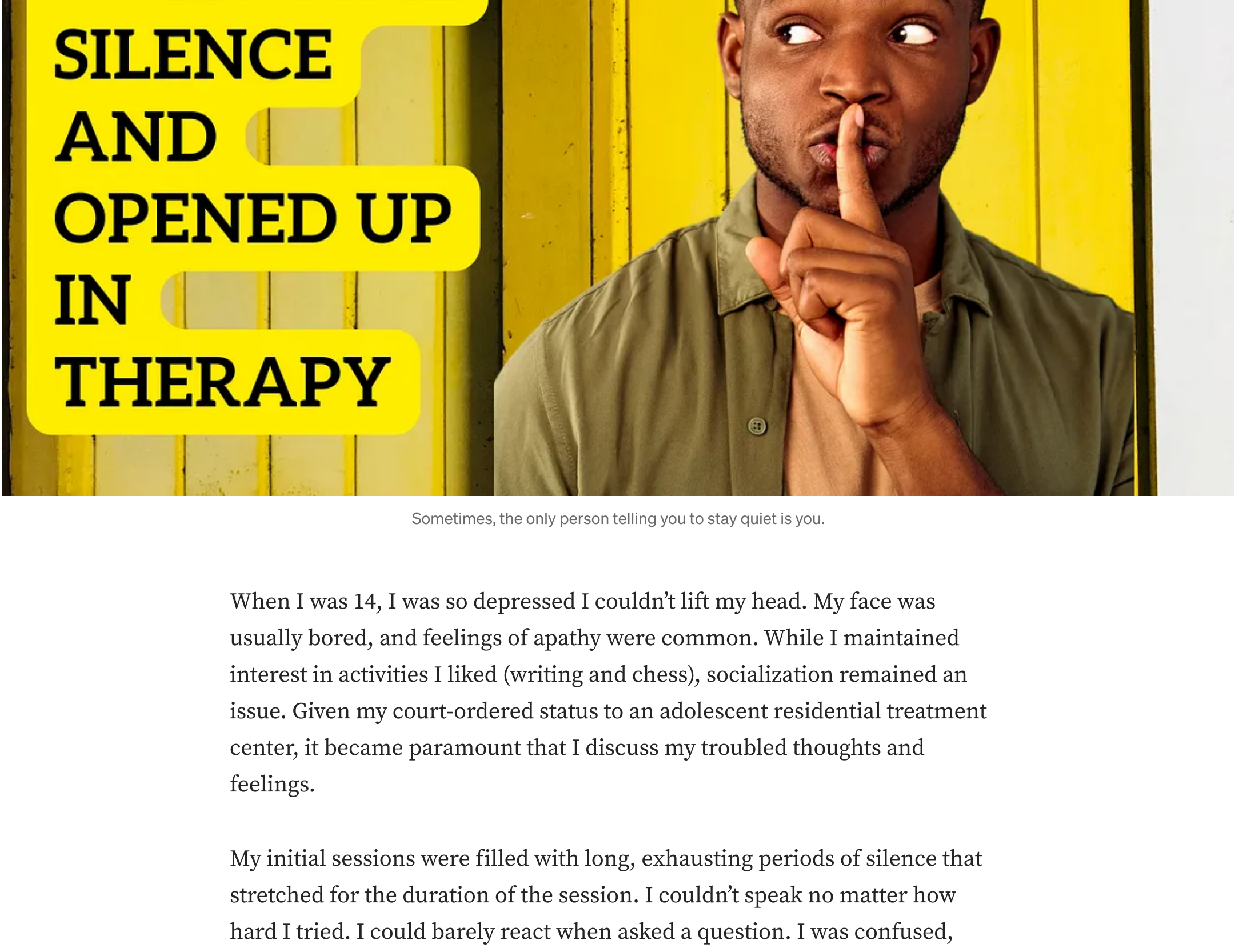
I was an emotional, extremely quiet teenager battling anger and pain. Here's what I did to start sharing more with my therapist.

 Kevin Brown

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Sometimes, the only person telling you to stay quiet is you.

When I was 14, I was so depressed I couldn't lift my head. My face was usually bored, and feelings of apathy were common. While I maintained interest in activities I liked (writing and chess), socialization remained an issue. Given my court-ordered status to an adolescent residential treatment center, it became paramount that I discuss my troubled thoughts and feelings.

My initial sessions were filled with long, exhausting periods of silence that stretched for the duration of the session. I couldn't speak no matter how hard I tried. I could barely react when asked a question. I was confused, disoriented, and hurt, but desperate to feel better. Eventually, I began to open up to my therapist by taking smaller steps forward. Now, I'm sharing the details on what I did to share more with my therapist.

I accepted my silence

For nearly six weeks, I barely tried to utter a sound, opting instead for guttural grunts, mumbling, and hushed, brief responses. Even as sick as I was, I realized there was a benefit to simply being present. Despite not talking, I could think, reflect, and learn, which is why I accepted my silence early on. Reflection, I knew, was the best way to start from rock bottom.

To me, accepting my silence meant not trying to talk too much, listening more than speaking, and offering answers that communicated how challenging communication was. My therapist was gentle and quiet as well, which led me to believe that my quietness wasn't a character flaw. Instead, I saw silence as an opportunity to discuss — briefly — why I struggled to be vocal.

I talked a little at a time

In my early sessions, I was extremely medicated, tired, exhausted, and in severe emotional pain. By engaging in small talk with my therapist, I was able to grow more comfortable with sharing. I could mention something I'd learned in a book, heard in a conversation, or experienced in the past.

Rarely, did I need to elaborate — a few quick explanations were enough. A little sharing at a time gave me the strength to share more in therapy. In fact, I fell back on this technique later when my silence returned.

Sometimes, small amounts of conversation are a sign of a bigger problem. Initially, I sought comfort, refuge, and relief. Through gradual communication, I didn't feel stressed to achieve so much as quickly. While my time in therapy lasted many months, I felt better knowing I could start off slowly. Personally, a slower approach to communication was more preferable than being pushed at the start.

I talked about what bothered me most

Much of my childhood was plagued by mistreatment at home and loneliness at school. When my silence interfered with me making progress in therapy, I focused on revealing small details of major traumatic experiences. Often, this meant retelling a story a similar way or describing how I felt after a negative experience. What I realized through gradual sharing was that the things that bothered me the most filled me with passion and spirit.

Unlike discussing issues that had little relevance, I spoke on anger, self-harm, aggressive thoughts, and lashing out. My responses were filled with emotion and my gestures and body language reflected how I was feeling. Such reactions proved more helpful to my therapist than anything I could have said early on. My therapist was able to see and hear what was bothering me and centered her attention on those topics. Ultimately, my progress in therapy was more meaningful when I channeled my tension into sharing negative experiences.

I thanked the therapist after a compliment

During sessions, I received compliments from my therapist on my personality and character. Due to low self-esteem and depression, accepting these compliments was a challenge. But by gently offering a smile or a quiet thank-you, I felt rewarded in the moment, and a sense of energy would surge through my mind. Only when accepting compliments did I feel compelled to keep speaking while ignoring or belittling them kept me feeling trapped in resentment.

From experience, I'll credit therapists for always knowing the perfect things to say — or in some cases, not to say. Receiving and accepting positive feedback turned out to be among the greatest assets I could have. Typically, after a compliment, I tended to want to follow up with something positive myself. Such a response was a sign that I was making progress and sharing more in therapy.

I asked questions

In therapy, I questioned everything I could. Why I felt the way I was feeling was the most prominent question on my mind. Asking questions gave me a chance to speak and show I was serious about therapy — without doing too much talking. I learned even more and over time grew excited. Figuring things out helped me share more in therapy.

Even then, the questions I asked were more about trying to get involved in therapy than it was receiving actual answers. Active participation kept my mind from wandering, which would cause me to ruminate and become preoccupied on a single thought or problem. When the silence became deafening, I made sure to pop in a question from time to time. Questions were the key to getting me to feel more energized and stable.

I improved my posture

Depression, emotional pain, guilt, and shame had a major impact on my posture. Early in therapy, I slouched with my back practically sprawled on the seat cushion, my neck in an awkward, painful position. This fatigued posture was a sign of the stress I was under, but noticeably, making small improvements lifted my mood and improved my speech.

Instead of fixating on a scene outside the window, I grew more attentive. Eventually, not talking as much became boring and cumbersome. Learning to sit up straight with my shoulders at height and butt firmly in the seat helped me to open up in therapy and keep talking. Overall, my therapy sessions improved when I changed my posture.

I attended sessions bi-weekly

It wasn't recommended for me to attend therapy once a week. Due to the severity of my symptoms and the danger to myself, I visited my therapist twice a week. Because of this, I soon found myself building momentum early on. This rhythm translated to me opening up more and becoming more talkative.

In retrospect, a session a week would have been damaging to my mental health. The pain I was experiencing needed processing, and I needed to heal. This meant that I had to check in with my therapist a few times a month. In doing so, I not only improved my mental health and elevated my mood, but I also became more comfortable at a faster rate of speed due to the additional meetings.

I shared my dreams

Commonly, I discussed my professional dreams of being an author, graduating college, and finding a nice girlfriend. These experiences meant the most to me in life. Despite my depression, when I shared my dreams, I felt a sensation of happiness even if it was only in my mind. Simply speaking about my dreams allowed them to materialize in detail, which led to a brighter mood and increased feelings of stability.

If dreams are big in therapy, then understanding what work needs to be done to accomplish them feels more of a necessity. Many of my sessions were filled with me discussing things I wanted to do or dreamed about doing, even in instances where those experiences felt impossible to pursue. Hope, I realized, was a major aspect of recovery. Sharing my dreams probably had the most significant role in helping me talk more in therapy.

Final takeaways

Learning to open up more in therapy protected my mental health. By being proactive in my communication, I created opportunities to find solutions and coping skills for my problems. Only through gradual communication did I begin to finally feel better. Therapy, back when I was a kid, was beneficial when I spoke more frequently and assertively.

After a while, I noticed I didn't miss my old silent self, preferring instead the more vocal version of me that could obtain better, healthier results. Opening up in therapy also helped me later in life. Today, I'm stronger, more determined, and more enthusiastic than ever. I'm empowered because I know how to rely on communication during a struggle.

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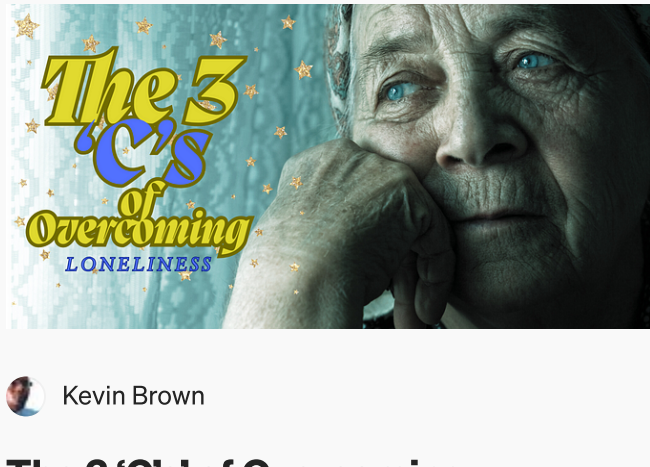
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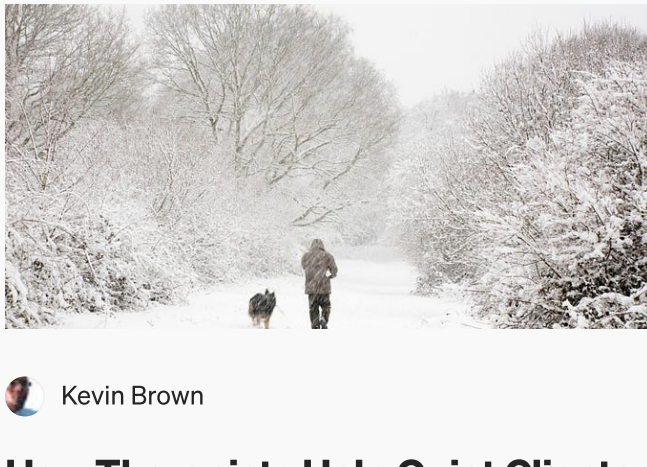
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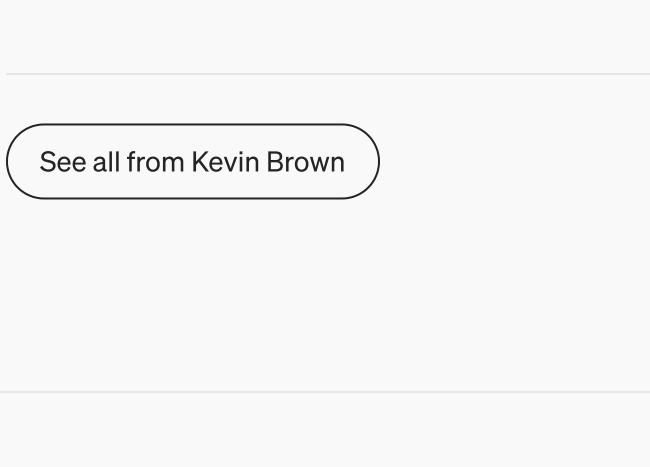
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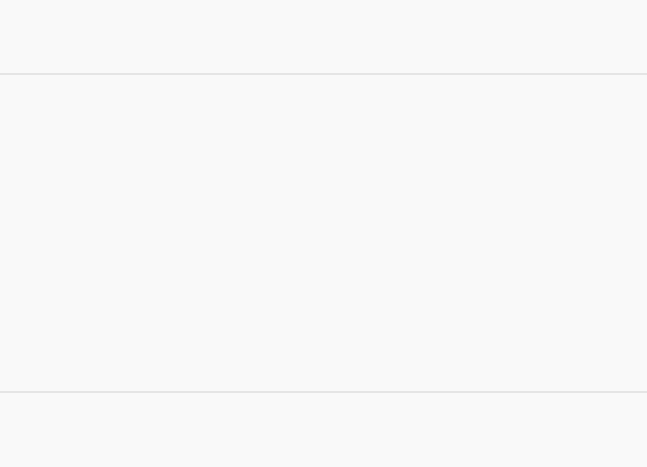
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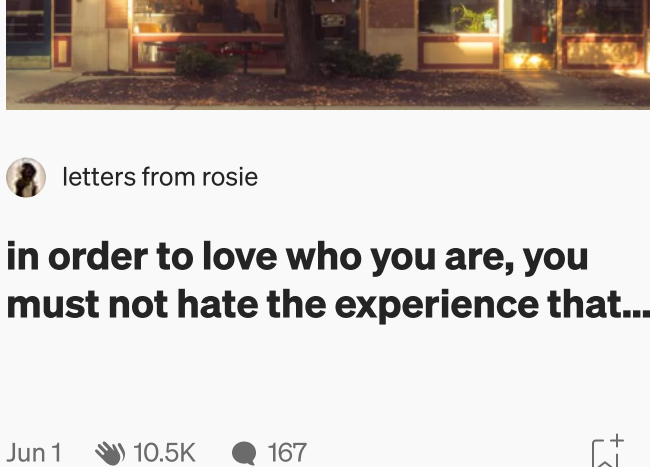
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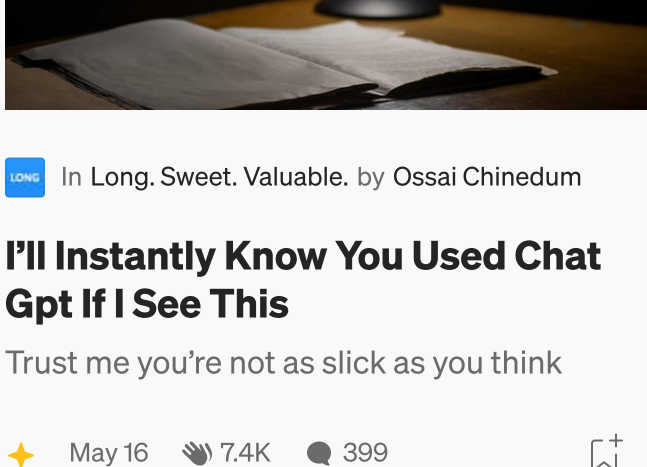
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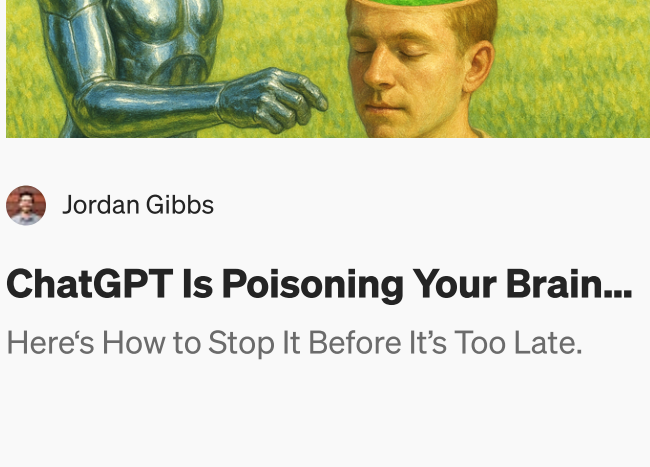


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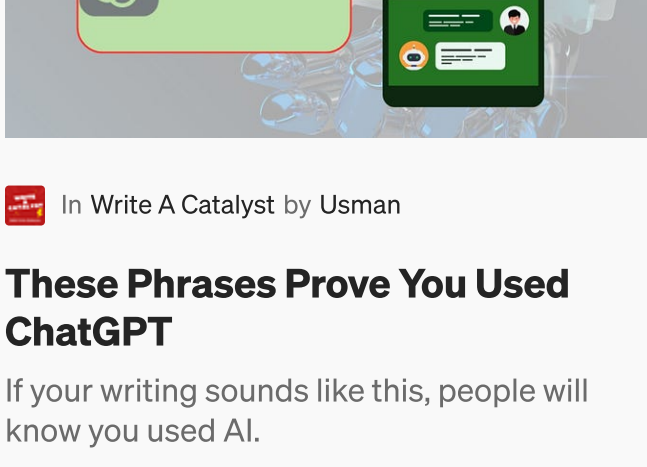


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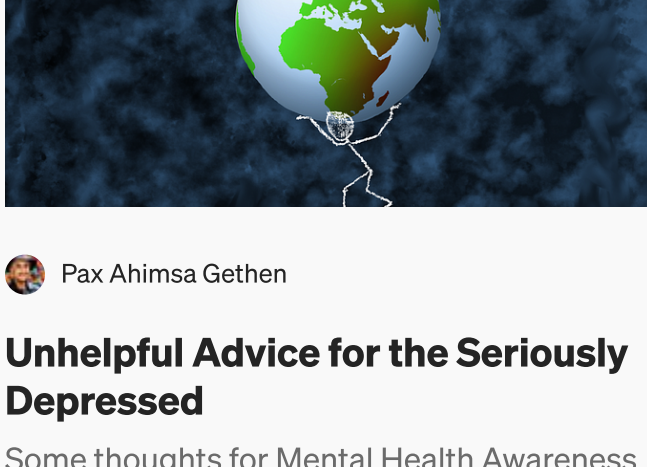


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