



# **Self-Discovery Creative Writing**

**a self-guided curriculum guide for  
mental health, trauma and addiction**

**By: Maia Akiva**

Maia Akiva's Self-Discovery Creative Writing Groups at Reconnect Integrative Trauma Treatment Center are immensely helpful groups for our clients. They help the clients start practicing writing as part of their healing journey and self-work. Maia's journaling prompts give the clients space to bring deep awareness to themselves by writing down their thoughts and feelings. Maia's metaphorical writing prompts allow our clients to approach their lives and what they are going through in a non-direct way that feels safer and more accessible.

*~Shilloy Sanchez, Clinical Director Reconnect Integrative Trauma Treatment Center*



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# TABLE OF CONTENT

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USING THE GUIDE	7
PRE-GROUP EVERYTHING YOU DO BEFORE YOU GET TO THE GROUP	9
BUILDING A RUNDOWN OF THE GROUP	12
WHILE IN GROUP EVERYTHING YOU DO WHILE YOU ARE FACILITATING THE GROUP	13
POST GROUP EVERYTHING YOU DO AFTER THE GROUP IS FINISHED	17
LIST OF GUIDELINES / RULES FOR RUNNING A CREATIVE WRITING GROUP	18
CREATIVE WRITING EXERCISES FOR MENTAL HEALTH, TRAUMA AND ADDICTION	20
» BEGINNING OF GROUP EXERCISES	21
» JOURNALING EXERCISES	24
» IMAGINATION EXERCISES	32
» METAPHORICAL EXERCISES	36
» POETRY EXERCISES	42
GROUP TOPICS WITH EXERCISES	45
» BEING A MUSIC FAN GROUP	46
» WRITING GAME GROUP	49
» JOURNALISM/CREATIVE NON-FICTION GROUP	51
» GRATITUDE PRACTICE GROUP	53
» RAIN/WINTER/SUMMER/HEAT WAVE/COLD WEATHER/SNOW GROUP	55
» GOING ON A FIRST DATE WITH YOUR PAIN AND HEALING GROUP	57

» INVENTING YOUR OWN HOLIDAY GROUP	59
» YOUR FAMILY GROUP	61
» SHEL SILVERSTEIN BOOKS GROUP (CHILDREN BOOKS GROUP)	63
» LETTING GO GROUP	65
» DANIELLE LAPORTE RAPID-FIRE QUESTIONS FROM THE BOOK THE DESIRE MAP GROUP	68
» SELF-LOVE VALENTINES DAY GROUP	71
» YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR JOURNAL/PAGES GROUP	74
CLOSING GROUP EXERCISES	76
CREATIVE WRITING CURRICULUM FOR ADDICTION AND RECOVERY	81
» GUIDELINES FOR USING THE CURRICULUM GUIDE IN ADDIC- TION TREATMENT CENTERS AND REHAB FACILITIES	82
HERE'S WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING...	86
ABOUT MAIA AKIVA	89

Hello,

My name is Maia Akiva, and this curriculum guide is the child of a beautiful collaboration between my mind and my heart. Many people ask me how I started doing what I do—facilitating self-discovery creative writing groups at different treatment centers. Well, it's actually a funny story:

I did not set up to work in treatment centers around Los Angeles facilitating creative writing groups. After working for 20 years in corporate entertainment and leaving to pursue my passion to become a motivational speaker and a workshop facilitator, an offer fell in my lap. My dear friend and writer Allison Deegan was asked to bring a creative writing curriculum to a treatment center in Los Angeles. Being the busy woman that she is, she was unable to do it and right away thought of me. Why?

I am not a therapist and have not worked in the mental health field, but for the past 20 years, I have been on a personal healing journey from depression, trauma and addiction. I learned a lot about pain and healing. But even more importantly, Allison knew that my passion in life is healing myself and helping others heal themselves. Mix that with being a writer and years of creating creative curriculum and facilitating groups in the Israeli Army, Israeli Scouts, Writegirl.org and many more, it was natural for Alison to think of me.

This curriculum was created week after week while working with clients in various treatment centers and hearing about their pain, their healing, their dreams, their challenges and their journeys that got them to where they are today: sitting in a group room at a treatment center working on healing themselves and their past.

This curriculum's intention is to give them a space to explore themselves mentally and emotionally using journaling, imagination, metaphors, poetry and many more creative writing tools. It is meant to help them to develop a relationship with themselves and to get to know themselves in unusual and creative new ways.

With exercises like writing an instruction sheet for your new clone on how to be you, going on a coffee date with your pain and your healing and writing a poem with the words yesterday, today and tomorrow about yourself, among many other exercises, is giving them room to explore themselves, who they are, how they got here and what they want moving forward, in creative and new ways.

I hope you will enjoy exploring this guide and curriculum and that it will help you be of service to your clients in new and exciting ways.

Maia(:

# INSTRUCTIONS FOR USING THE GUIDE

This curriculum is written as a buffet of exercises. It is not written as lesson plans.

The group's curriculum materials are built for at least 4 months or less with the same group of clients.

The writing group helps the client's practice being present, connecting and exploring themselves using journaling, metaphorical writing, imagination prompts, and magical realism writing amongst others. It is always one of the client's favorite groups.

The next breakdown is how to work with this curriculum guide and how to facilitate creative writing groups.

The curriculum guide is divided into three parts: **Pre-Group, While in Group, and Post-Group.**

**Before every chapter of Exercises there is a note with instructions on those specific group of exercises.**

The Self-Discovery Creative Writing Group is not a process group or a discussion group. The goal of the group is to get clients to write and share. Remember that as you facilitate the group and give the writing prompts to the clients. Always remind the clients that those are writing instructions, and that

once they understand the writing prompts, they should start writing.



# BEGINNING OF GROUP EXERCISES

**1.** Two Truths and a Lie game about different topics: The client thinks of three things about himself and his life (stories, facts, likes, dislikes). Two of them are true, and one of them is a lie. The rest of the clients try to guess which one is the lie.

Topics ideas: family, hobbies, friends, high school years, mornings, holidays, seasons, day of the week, weekends, travel, education, and anything else.

-Two truths and a wish.

-Two truths and a fear.

**2.** Getting to know each other questions game:

-Every client gets a blank page.

-The client writes his name on the top of the page.

-When the signal is given, everyone moves their paper to the person sitting to the right of them.

-The client writes a question he wants to ask the person whose name is on the top of the page.

-When the signal is given, the client moves the paper to the right and receives a brand-new paper.

# JOURNALING EXERCISES

## 1. Declaration of your healing:

-Write a description of your life now. What is going on? How are you feeling? Thinking? What's working? What's not working? What is the flow of your everyday life?

-Write a description of your life 5-10 years from now if you didn't go to treatment.

-Write your own declaration of your healing based on the idea of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

Make sure it includes:

What is your understanding and definition of your healing?  
What does your healing mean to you? What are you declaring?  
How can your declaration of your healing improve your life?  
What are you seeking healing from? What are your healing intentions, desires, and actions? And anything else you want.

-Start every sentence with "I declare." Feel free to add amendments to your declaration of healing.

-Write it in the words of the Declaration of Independence or in your own words.

-Think of a place in nature (see above).

**6.** Write a list of challenges you have now in your life and in treatment.

-Pick one challenge from the list and journal about it.

-Write a self-compassion/self-empathy/self-support letter to yourself (from yourself) about the challenges you face.

**7.** Write a list of the progress you have made in treatment.

-Pick one progress from the list and journal about it.

-Write a self-congratulations/thank you/self-empathy/self-support letter to yourself (from yourself) about the challenges you face (do this with clients who have been in treatment more than 10 days).

**8.** Write your bio:

-Pick an area of your life you want to write about. You can write an education bio, travel bio, mental illness bio, friends bio, education bio, etc.

-Pick the kind of genre you want to write in, such as comedy, drama, facts, horror, etc.

-Think about the first thing that comes to mind when you think about yourself. Use these thoughts to write your bio.

**9.** Write a scene (like a script/or a description) between you and you. You can choose you from the past (age 12, 4, 10) or the future (age 70, 50). The scene is taking place at the supermarket where your 2 characters meet.

What do they say to each other? What is the conversation about?

# IMAGINATION EXERCISES

## 1. Six-word sentences:

-If you were to write a six-word memoir, what would it be? How would you distill your story and the sense of being you into six words? What six words would capture the essence of who you are, how you feel, what you like, what matters to you, why you are here, and what you know right now and right here at this point in your life? (Feel free to turn to some good old humor and have fun!) Examples:

“Poet locked in body of contractor.”

“Hiding in apartment knitting against depression.”

“My second-grade teacher was right.”

“Out-of-box human looking for a box.”

-Continue this exercise with as many topics as you'd like to do in that group. This can be done on repeat in groups by just choosing different topics in every group.

TOPICS: (Feel free to add your own. They can be done thematically about events, holidays, etc.) Bio, Higher Power, being an addict, your sobriety today. sitting in groups, your past week, online meetings, anxiety, being stuck in the house with other people, friends, parents, problems, things that are going well, desires, going to the grocery store, quarantine, addiction

**6.** Invent a secret that you have and write about it. It can be a poem or a short story. Describe the secret in detail. It's not a real secret that you have but a made-up secret. Use your imagination and have fun with it.

For example: One time I snuck into an airplane and was able to fly to NYC for free.

**7.** Describe in a few sentences your perfect date with yourself. Where will you go? What will you do? You can make it realistic or you can describe it without worrying about time and money.

**8.** Create a logo for yourself. "You, Inc." What is your tag line? What is the design? What is the name of your company? It's okay if you are not an artist. It can look bad. Focus on the idea.

**9.** "My Imaginary Friend 2020." If you could have an imaginary friend now, who would he/she be? Invent one for yourself. What is their name? Who are they? Are they human? How do they help you? What would you do with them? Write a description about you and your imaginary friend.

**10.** Pick out something from your bag/pick up something from your room (if on Zoom).

Invent where it came from before it got to your bag. Where it will end up after you throw or give it away?

**11.** Write a movie trailer about your life. Imagine what will be a good idea for a movie or TV show about your life story and write the trailer. Pick the way you want to write the trailer. A. "In a world where..." B. A description of the scenes.

Who is going to play you and the rest of the people in your life?

# METAPHORICAL EXERCISES

## **NOTE:**

This section is all metaphorical exercises. Please explained to the clients that since these are all metaphorical exercises; there is no right or wrong way to write them. Encourage them to use their imagination and creativity while writing them. And do not worry if they get them right; it's just an experience so they can do the best they can.

**1.** Pick an object you have owned for a long time. Give that object a personality. What does it like? Dislike? Friends? Does it liked being owned by you? Personify the object by giving it a voice. Pretend you are that object. See, feel, and hear things from the perspective of that object. You can use the genre you write. It can be a poem, a short story, or an essay.

(If the group is done on Zoom, clients can pick an object from the room/house.)

(If the group is in outpatient, another option is to pick out something from your bag.)

**2.** Recipe of your life. Write down:

Three emotions you feel every day/week (positive or challenging feelings).

Three fears you have in your life now.

Three desires you have in your life now.

Three therapeutic/healing events or actions you do every week (therapy, meditation, exercising, walks, cooking, breathing exercises, etc.).

Write a full recipe using those things from your lists as ingredients and more things you want to add. You can write a recipe for a better life, a recipe for your healing, a recipe for moving forward, etc. If you are stuck, think of a recipe you know, and use it with your ingredients.

**3.** You are going to be cloned. Write an instruction sheet to your clone on how to be you. What would you like to share with your clone that will be helpful to them? You can share about your past, your present or a wish for your future.

**4.** Pick a color in the room. Give that color a personality. Write about what that color reminds you of: things, events, people, memories. How does the color make you feel? Who are the color's friends? Enemies? What are the color's likes? Dislikes? Does it like being that color, or does it wish it were different? Is it in a relationship with another color? Does it have a mental illness? Is it in treatment? How is it doing? Include anything else you want to tell about that color.

**5.** Explain to the clients that this is a metaphorical exercise that can sound weird, but it is fun to write and explore. There are no wrong answers since it is all metaphorical.

-The clients will answer two questions using the metaphorical prompts.

-The 2 questions are: 1. What is your life like now? What would you like your life to be like?

The metaphorical prompts are:

(This exercise can be done with different feelings. Positive feelings. Negative feelings. It can be done with thoughts. It can be done with different parts of the self.)

**14.** Write a list of the things you are “at war” with yourself—parts, feelings, beliefs, actions.

Choose one.

Write a peace treaty with the one you chose.

“A peace treaty is an agreement between two or more hostile parties, usually countries or governments, which formally ends a state of war between the parties.”

What does your agreement include? What are the terms? How can they be broken? What happens if the term is broken? Who is in charge of keeping the peace?



# POETRY EXERCISES

## NOTE:

Note: Poetry is a great creative outlet. It allows clients to write about difficult topics in an indirect way and to give words, that may be tough for clients, a different meaning to use.

However, not all clients feel comfortable with writing poetry. Use those exercises when you feel it fits with the group you are facilitating. But be aware that even if the clients are uncomfortable with writing poetry, with a little push, it can be a great outlet for them that they didn't know was available to them.

Explain to the client that even though we use the word poetry, they are not expected to write a perfect poem. They can write a very simple poem, a rhyming poem, a non-rhyming poem, a deep poem, a metaphorical poem, a short poem, a long poem, etc. Also, explain that they have the range to play around with the format and can write a poem, a spoken word, a song, a haiku, etc.

**1.** Create a poem with your own pattern. The different patterns are:

-A poem where the first letter of each line is your name written vertically.

-A poem where the first word in each line is the same word.

-A poem where the same word appears in every line of the poem.

-A poem where the same word is ending the sentence in every line in the poem.

# GROUP TOPICS WITH EXERCISES

**NOTE:**

I call this chapter Group Topics. Some exercises in this chapter are stand-alone exercises. Some exercises are the length of a group. Most of these exercises are longer than the other chapter exercises. They can be their own group or the center of a group and be facilitated with a few other shorter exercises from other chapters.

# BEING A MUSIC FAN GROUP

**1.** Questions to get to know you about music: What is your favorite music genre, favorite singer/band? If you played an instrument, what would it be? What was the best concert you ever saw/worst concert you ever saw/dream concert you want to see but haven't yet of someone dead or alive?

**2.** First, write the title of a song that you love.

Second, invent a title for things in your life. You can make up the title, or if you can't make up a title, you can use the title of a song that already exists.

What would be a title for a song about –

- Your family
- Your worst day last week
- Your best day last week
- Something you desire
- Your last therapy session
- Your challenges
- Something you love to do
- Your feelings

# WRITING GAME GROUP

## 1. Prepare before the group:

-Cut the 10 prompts into 10 pieces. Mix the cut pieces. Put them in an envelope.

## 2. During the group:

1. A client picks up a prompt from the envelope.
2. The client reads the prompt out loud.
3. Everyone writes the prompt.
4. Everyone shares out loud what they wrote.
5. Another client picks a prompt, and so on.

## WRITING PROMPTS:

Write “a warning page & please return to” on the inside cover page for anyone who finds your journal in case you lose it. (Note: Journals gets lost all the time, so this can actually happen.)

Make a goal page. Set 5 goals for your time in treatment.

Write a letter to someone or something in your life. (Note: The letter can be to anything or anyone and doesn't have to be log-

# GRATITUDE PRACTICE GROUP

1. Explain to the clients that this group will focus on the topic of gratitude. Ask them if they have ever done a gratitude list or had any kind of gratitude practice.

If the client shares that they don't like gratitude lists, have a short discussion about the difficulties of practicing gratitude. And offer them to keep an open mind as we do the next exercises that can help them.

If the clients share that they love it and have been practicing gratitude, have them share their experience and feelings and encourage them to dig even deeper in the next exercises we will do.

2. Write in your journal your dream life with everything that you want to be/to have/to see/to experience/to feel. Don't hold back.

3. Read your dream life back to yourself. **Circle anything that you already have and that resembles what you already have.** (Note: explain to the clients to not focus on what they don't have but to try to connect to what they do have that shows up differently in their life now.)

# YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR JOURNAL/ PAGES GROUP

**Note:**

This group is based on the idea that clients have a relationship with their journal, just like they have a relationship with their therapist. The journal they write in listens to them and keeps their secrets. Sometimes, it gives them advice. Explain to the clients that this is a metaphorical exercise about their relationship with their journal, as though it were a living entity in their healing journey.

\*If the clients don't have a journal but only wrote on paper sheets every week, have the writing be about the relationship between the pages in general and the clients, even though the pages change every day.

**1.** Answer the following questions in your journal:

What is your journal's name?

What is your journal's age?

What is your journal's gender?

# CLOSING GROUP EXERCISES

## **NOTE:**

The closing group exercises are optional for ending a group. They can be used when:

1. The clients are restless and need to switch gears from the therapy work toward the end of group.
2. When you have a bit of time left in the group before the end but not enough time to start a new writing exercise.
3. When you feel it will be beneficial for the clients to get to know each other.

### **1. Writing game: Writing a fictional story together on a board.**

-On a poster or a white board, write the first sentence from a book/movie or have one of the clients share a first line they love. Another option is to just make up a first line in a story.

-One by one, the clients go to the board/poster and add one new line to the story. The group writes and builds a story together.

-If you have a small group, you can repeat the cycle as many times as you wish. The story always works the best with three cycles.

# CREATIVE WRITING CURRICULUM FOR ADDICTION AND RECOVERY

This curriculum guide is a perfect fit for Addiction Treatment Centers and Rehab Facilities. The exercises in this guide have been facilitated for the past six years in many Addiction Treatment Centers and Rehab Facilities and they are liked by both Clinical Directors and by Clients who get to use creativity as a self-reflection tool for their addiction and recovery work in a fulfilling and new way.

Even though the curriculum is written with Mental Health Treatment Centers references, they can be adjusted for Addiction Treatment Centers with a few simple guidelines.

**NOTE:**

As you will see, a lot of the exercises can stay in their original version. Exercises about feelings, checking in, etc., are affective in addiction work. Feel free to pick and choose the changes you would like to make as you know your clients best.



# HERE'S WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING...

*Maia Akiva's Self-Discovery Groups at Reconnect Trauma Center are by far our clients' favorite group. They love it and look forward to it every week. Maia's creative prompts are original and fun to experience. They help the clients explore themselves and their creative sides in a safe and supportive environment. Maia is reliable and easy to work with. She communicates very well and is very flexible when things change. We love having her as part of the team at the Reconnect Center. The groups are a great addition to the recovery and healing journey of the clients at Reconnect.*

**~Karol Darsa, Psy.D., Licensed Psychologist, Executive Director Reconnect Center**

*Maia Akiva's Self-Discovery Creative Writing Groups at Sanctuary Addiction Treatment Centers are a great addition to our programming. They provide an opportunity for clients to use creative writing as a helpful tool in their road to recovery.*

*Maia's creative writing prompts are unique and fun to experience. They help the clients explore themselves, their addiction, and their sobriety in creative ways in a safe and supportive environment.*

*The groups that she facilitates are a great addition to the recovery and healing journey of the clients at Sanctuary.*

**~Denise Cooney, LMFT, Clinical Director Executive Recovery Group**

*As a trauma treatment center, Maia Akiva's Self-Discovery Creative Writing Groups at Reconnect Integrative Trauma Treatment Center are immensely helpful groups for our clients. They help the clients start practicing writing as part of their healing journey and self-work. Maia's journaling prompts give the clients space to bring deep awareness to themselves by writing down their thoughts and feelings. Maia's metaphorical writing prompts allow our clients to approach their lives and what they are going through in a non-direct way that feels safer and more accessible.*

**~Shilloy Sanchez, Clinical Director Reconnect Integrative Trauma Treatment Center**

*Maia creative writing prompts incorporate creativity and emotional exploration, which helps our clients express themselves in new and important ways. She is very diligent about communicating, brainstorming and providing assistance when needed. I'm glad to have her as part of our team.*

**~Joe Hobel, MFT Clinical Director, Resilience Treatment Center**

*Maia's warm and genuine style is endearing and inspirational. I've had the opportunity to work with Maia at WriteGirl, a writing non-profit mentoring organization for Los Angeles teens. Maia never fails to create breakthrough writing activities.*

**~Kirsten Giles, WriteGirl Workshops Coordinator**

*Maia's creative writing workshop helps ease those who have never intentionally explored self-love into the world of self-love. She makes a point to take the self-love work beyond the surface and challenges participants to engage in dialogue with the parts of themselves they cherish and those they dislike. Maia's attitude throughout the workshop displays a level of affection and caring for her participants that is greatly refreshing. There is always a waiting list for her workshops, and the youth really love her.*

**~Jessica Weissbuch, Program Manager, LifeWorks**

*"These writing prompts have been a splendid resource for my groups! They provide a variety of activities and allow for quick adaptation, ensuring groups remain fresh and familiar."*

**~Tim Langeloh, Mental Health and Addiction Group facilitator**

*"The creative writing curriculum guide allowed me to expand my database for facilitating creative groups for mental health and allowed my clients to explore themselves and their healing journey in new creative ways. I recommend this guide to any mental health facilitator."*

**~Caroline Phelps, Associate LMFT and Mental Health Group Facilitator.**

# ABOUT MAIA AKIVA



**M** Maia Akiva is a professional speaker trainer and performer in Los Angeles. Her unique approach of Mental Health + Creativity encourages audiences to embrace their relationships with their emotions and feelings as a path to success, happiness, freedom and fulfillment using creativity.

She specializes in self-discovery, self-empowerment, creativity and creating motivational entertainment, with workshops and her fictional podcast, *Interview with Myself* —in which she interviews her feelings and emotions as guests on the show.

Maia reimagines self-help methods in a dynamic blend of insight and humor for a flourishing everyday life. With outside-the-box learning experiences, meditations, and stories that personify and realize abstract emotions, Maia guides her audience through the journey of self-discovery that she is inspired to navigate every day.

Originally from Israel, Maia teaches creative unblocking and stress relief to companies like Hulu, the City of Santa Monica, Vans, Frame, 72 and Sunny, and others. Her unique creative presentations are featured at The Goomi Group, a Corporate Wellness company in the US.

She founded a business creating original curriculum and facilitating Self-Discovery Creative Writing groups in Addiction, Trauma and Mental Health Treatment centers that now has 3 facilitators including her facilitating groups around Los Angeles CA. Some of her clients includes: ReConnect Integrative Trauma Treatment Center, Resilience Treatment Center for Mental Health, Sanctuary Treatment Center and many more.

She is now training therapists, writers, mental health staff and organizations on her Self-Discovery Creative Writing curriculum.

She is an active member of Epiphany Space, an artist community in Hollywood, and leads workshops for WriteGirl, Models of Pride, and Caltech upholding her personal mission: *Empowering everyone for self-help by making friends with our emotions.*

*Content. Programs.*  
*Mental Health*  
+  
*Creativity*  
*By Maia Akiva*

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