



J. David Creswell Ph.D.

Adapt and Thrive

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The Healing Power of Words in the Age of AI

Words are one of the oldest healing technologies we have. AI may add to that.

Posted August 19, 2025

👍 Reviewed by Lybi Ma



For thousands of years, humans have turned to words to process emotion and make sense of life's hardest moments. We tell our stories around campfires, confide in friends, write in journals, and talk about our deepest thoughts and feelings with therapists. Over 40 years of research on *expressive writing* programs confirms just how powerful words can be: when people write about stressful life events, they often experience measurable health benefits in the months following their writing—from [fewer doctor visits and stronger immune function](#) to better outcomes for conditions like [asthma and arthritis](#).

But why do words help us heal?

Some psychologists nod to Freud: Words give us a way to surface buried feelings and release their grip. A more con-

ries into more benign forms. When we tell the story of our pain, we're reorganizing emotional memories, opening the door for new meaning and resolution.

While scientists have long recognized the benefits of putting feelings into words, few anticipated how swiftly and profoundly generative AI tools would reshape the landscape of emotional expression.

Therapy AI chatbots platforms are exploding in popularity, especially among younger generations seeking help. These tools, which are built on large language models like ChatGPT, offer emotional support in a form that feels surprisingly human. Recent CDC data show persistently high rates of anxiety and depression among Gen Z, and traditional mental health services are often too expensive, stigmatized, or simply unavailable. Enter generative AI tools like Wysa, Woebot, and Replika, apps that are now downloaded by millions and often rank among the most popular in the mental health section of app stores. For many young users, these chatbots are a lifeline: someone, or something, to talk to when no one else is listening. One user described it this way: "I feel like I'm talking in a true no-judgement zone... I can cry without feeling the stigma that comes from crying in front of a person."

Most people outside Gen Z don't realize how fast this AI mental-health revolution is unfolding. A February 2025 survey found that **nearly half (49 percent) of generative AI users** with self-reported mental health conditions were already using AI chatbots like ChatGPT, Woebot, or Wysa for emotional support, and many without any prompting from

Many people are understandably uneasy about the idea of AI therapists, and for good reason. These tools are advancing rapidly, becoming more conversational, emotionally attuned, and humanlike with each passing month. Even trained clinicians are having trouble telling the difference. In a [2024 study](#) published in the *International Journal of Human–Computer Interaction*, therapists reviewed anonymized transcripts of therapy sessions—some human, some with a chatbot named Pi. These human therapists correctly guessed which was which only slightly better than chance, and they rated the chatbot conversations as higher in quality. These initial studies suggest we should be looking carefully at these tools and asking hard questions: How do they shape the way we process emotion and seek connection? What are the limits of their support? What ethical guardrails should be in place? How do we ensure they are safe? These are not just questions for the AI engineers who are building these technologies. We need new interdisciplinary research to understand how these technologies are being used in real-world settings and what effects they may have, both helpful and harmful, on our emotional lives.

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With the right safeguards in place, how might generative AI support our emotional lives?

Imagine a 24/7 emotional coach that speaks your language, remembers what you've shared, and gently reminds you who you are and what your values are when you forget. It doesn't judge. It doesn't interrupt. It doesn't burn out. It listens, often with more patience than most people can offer. Trained on the best evidence-based therapy methods, this coach brings compassion, consistency, and clarity.

Will these therapist AIs replace trained human clinicians—or further erode in-person human connection? It's a real concern, especially given that Gen Z is spending more time online and less time engaging in real face-to-face conversations. But we can't forget that AI can learn, and it can certainly learn how to better connect us to human therapists and to help us have more meaningful in-person interactions. Just like the best psychotherapy, the new AI is capable of skillfully getting out of the way to enable us to live out in the world.

Words are one of the oldest healing technologies we have. Now with AI, we're building something new: tools that learn from our words, help us reflect on our lives, and support us in transforming our suffering. This is more than digital therapy.

future of mental health may not be about replacing human connection, but *deepening* it with technologies that have real potential to listen, reflect, and remind us what it means to be human.

References

For more information on the science behind expressive disclosure, see: ["Why 'Use Your Words' Can Be Good for Kids' Health"](#).



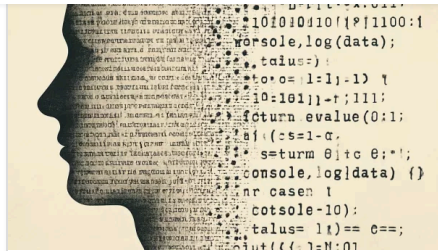
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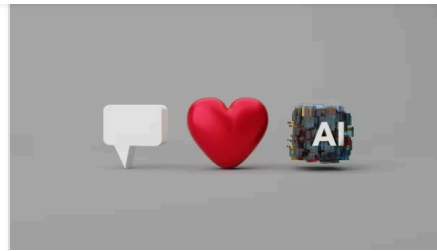


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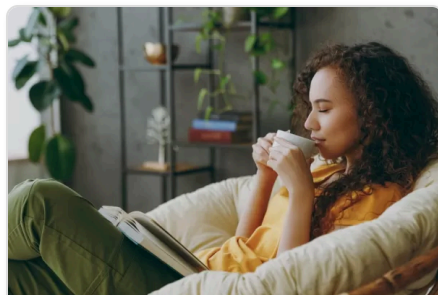


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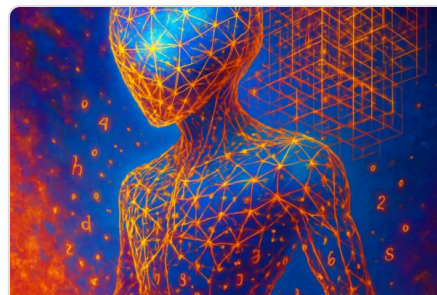


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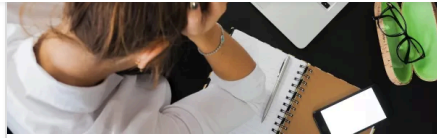


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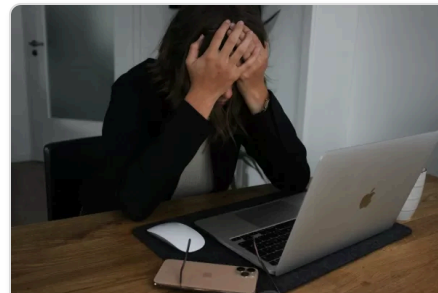


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from Psychology Today.

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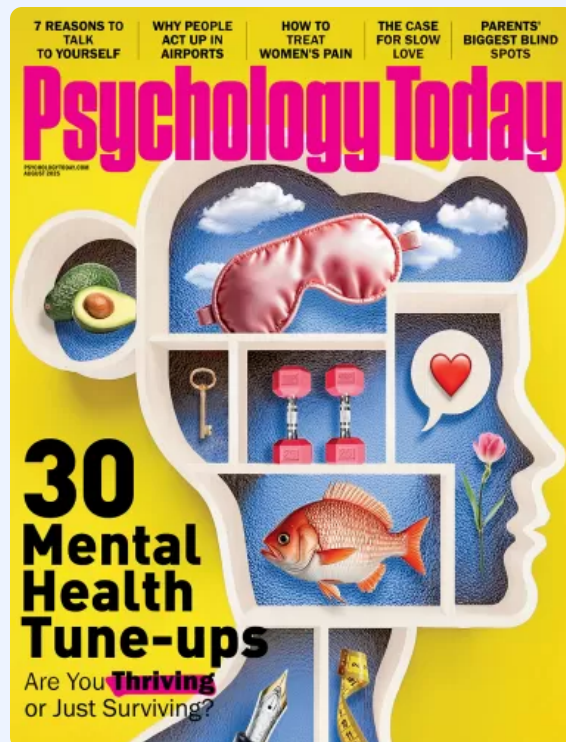
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