

Comprehensive Life History

Writing a comprehensive life history (CLH) can be an effective exercise in a number of ways:

1. CLH enables one to explore significant and meaningful events and experiences, reactions and emotions at various ages and to discover the possible impact they may have on present feeling and behavior. This insight is productive in effecting change in one's life.
2. CLH can be cathartic in eliciting emotional responses to life events that have been hidden or buried for many years, thus providing for the grief, anger, etc. that is needed to emotionally "let go" and proceed into the future with greater strength and confidence.
3. CLH Provides your therapist with a great deal of information and insight about you, your history, and your perceptions.
4. CLH can be the grounding and the catalyst for many decisions regarding the present and the future.

There are many ways to approach a CLH. Your CLH will depend on how deeply you wish to delve into your past experiences and how you and your therapist will use this material. Here are a few of approaches:

Detailed Chronology CLH – Begin with your birth and chronicle each year of your life to the best of your memory and that of others (family, friends, etc.). Focus on events, reactions of others, your feelings, your thoughts, your perceptions, and the

perceptions of others. Clearly, you must depend on the memories and stories of others for your earliest years.

This can be an enormous undertaking! However, you need not view this as a beginning to end project. The point is not completing the CLH, but experiencing the emotions and insights elicited by the experience, reflecting upon them, and using them for your healing therapy.

Stream of Consciousness CLH - Simply focus on some event or memory in your life and begin writing. "Wander" through that memory, letting it take you wherever it may lead. One event leads to another, the first in the distant past, another from yesterday, then back to High School, etc.

Often, from this stream of consciousness writing emerge themes, emotions, and reactions that are useful and therapeutic.

Character Driven CLH - Instead of focusing on events, concentrate on significant individuals in your life: mother, father, sisters, brothers, other relatives, friends, teachers, coaches, neighbors, etc. Your reflections will be an exploration of experiences with that individual and your thoughts, feelings, perceptions and insights relating to them.

Significant Event CLH - Holidays, birthdays, vacations, family gatherings, graduations, seemingly insignificant events that seem to stick with you yet have the power to elicit great emotion, deaths, illnesses, etc. These are often events that can shape us and give us insight.

Thematic CLH -

Remember that a CLH is not simply a dairy of life events. It requires that you take time to:

1. remember
2. explore
3. reflect
4. seek to understand
5. look for insight
6. discover life themes

All these things, in one way or another, are recorded in writing. It is the action of writing that solidifies and concretizes these memories and reflections and makes them useful in your healing therapy.