



Work Sheet | Worrying

Unhelpful strategies

In an attempt to decrease or stop worrying, people often use certain strategies that actually keep the worrying going.

There are two main types of these unhelpful strategies:

Avoidance

For example, a person may avoid the television news because they fear that they will start worrying about the “bad things” that they hear. A person may avoid an opportunity of taking on a piece of work because they fear not being able to do it. The problem with avoidance is that people limit their opportunity to be exposed to worrying, which stops them learning that the outcome isn’t as bad as they thought. This keeps worrying going because their worries go unchallenged.

Thought Control

People often try (unsuccessfully) to control their worries in a number of ways. They may try to suppress them (telling themselves to “stop worrying”); they may try to reason with their worries (“the likelihood of this happening is so small”); distract themselves (focus on another task); or think positively (“everything will be OK”). These attempts at controlling worries often do not work for various reasons, i.e it is usually true that if you try to suppress a thought it has the opposite effect. Try not to think of a pink rabbit for the next 60 seconds and see how well you do.

Again, trying to reason is often useless, because no matter how small the chance of something happening, your need for certainty will not be able to tolerate this small chance and your answer will always be “but it could happen”. This unhelpful strategy not only keeps the worrying going, but it also fuels the negative belief – that worrying is uncontrollable.

Helpful Strategies

One of the most helpful ways of starting to deal with worry is to use a “Worry Diary”. This gets all the worrisome thoughts that are going around and around your head out on paper. It can be helpful in itself as it frees your mind, making it less cluttered, allowing you more able to think clearly. The Worry Diary needs to contain information about your worries:

What am I worrying about?

List your worrisome thoughts

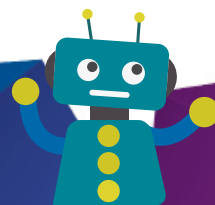
Then you need to ask yourself:

What am I predicting is going to happen?

How strongly do I believe this is going to happen? (Rate from 0% to 100%)

What emotion am I feeling?

How strong are these emotions? (Rate from 0% to 100%)





Then you need to start challenging these worries (on paper).

The following questions will be helpful:

- What is the evidence for my prediction?
- What is the evidence against my prediction?
- How likely is that what I am predicting will actually happen? (Rate from 0% to 100%)
- What is the worst that can happen?
- What is the best that can happen?
- What is the most likely that will happen?
- How helpful is it for me to worry about this?
- If the worst did happen, what would I be able to do to cope?
- How else could I view the situation?

The final step is to ask:

What would be a more balanced and helpful thought to replace my worry?

