

## What Is Worry?

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- Worry is the cognitive or “thinking” part of anxiety.
- It is made up of fearful thoughts about things that
  - could happen
  - have happened or
  - are happening.
- Fearful thoughts are intrusive and negative.
- For some people, worry is an occasional experience.
- For others, worry can be a habitual experience or a typical style of thinking (Wilson, 1996).
- It may have been selected (through evolution) because of its survival value (i.e., worry may lead to cautiousness and reduced mortality).
- In our society, worry is extremely prevalent—the most frequent complaint of those who consult their family physician with concerns about their emotional functioning (Wilson, 1996).
- It is slightly more common in women (Wilson, 1996).

Worry never robs  
tomorrow of its  
sorrow, it only saps  
today of its joy.

L. Buscagli

## What Do People Worry About?

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- Those who worry most tend to focus on social-evaluative fears (Wilson, 1996).
  - Fear of criticism
  - Fear of making mistakes
  - Fear of meeting someone for the first time.
- Other content areas include the following:
  - Family or home life
  - Finances
  - Work
  - School
  - Health
- For students, school and career are likely among the most prominent worries.
- The “basic fears” of the worrier (vs. specific fears that characterize phobias) tend to be:
  - Fear of losing control
  - Fear of not being able to cope
  - Fear of failure
  - Fear of rejection or abandonment
  - Fear of death and disease (Bourne, 2000, p. 14)

# Understanding My Worry

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GAINING AN INCREASED UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR WORRY IS AN IMPORTANT FIRST STEP IN REDUCING YOUR ANXIETY. CAREFULLY REFLECT ON YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE AS YOU ANSWER THE QUESTIONS BELOW.

- I've always been a "worrier."  Yes  No
- I worry about the same things over and over.  Yes  No
- I have difficulty controlling how much I worry.  Yes  No
- I worry even if there are no signs of trouble.  Yes  No
- I worry about things that never happen.  Yes  No

Worry was first a problem when:

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I tend to worry more when:

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Worry uses up this much time everyday:

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Worry affects my daily life in these ways:

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I worry about losing control in these ways:

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I worry I won't be able to cope when:

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I worry about failing at:

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I worry about being rejected:

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The other things I worry about are:

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Worry is a problem for me because:

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I think I worry so that:

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When I worry I:

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When I worry less:

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When worry is no longer a problem for me:

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# What Causes Worry?

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- The exact cause of the worrying seems to vary from person to person but can include such factors as the following:
  - Genetics
  - Childhood experiences (e.g., excessive criticism, harmful parental expectations, parental abandonment, rejection) (Bourne, 2000)
  - Stressful life events
- Worry can be made worse by stressful situations that play into or touch on basic fears held by the person, such as:
  - increased demands for performance
  - conflict in relationships
  - physical illness
  - any situation/event that increases your perception of danger or threat in your environment (Bourne, 2000)

# When Is Worry A Problem?

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- |                     |   |  |
|---------------------|---|--|
| ▪ Problematic Worry | ▪ Occurs without sufficient sign of trouble                               | ▪ Negative                               |
| ▪ Noise             | ▪ Out of proportion to the situation                                      | ▪ Controllable                           |
| ▪ Repetitive        | ▪ May be chronic, habitual and not related to the nature of the situation | ▪ Can be intense                         |
| ▪ Unproductive      | ▪ Reasonable Worry  | ▪ May be frequent                        |
| ▪ Negative          | ▪ Signal  | ▪ Occurs when there are signs of trouble |
| ▪ Uncontrollable    | ▪ Repetitive  | ▪ Not out of proportion to the situation |
| ▪ Can be intense    | ▪ Productive  | ▪ A response to a stressful situation    |
| ▪ Frequent          |   |  |

# Distinguishing My Reasonable And My Problematic Worry

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USE YOUR ANSWERS TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE REASONABLE AND THE PROBLEMATIC WORRY IN YOUR LIFE.

Choose a specific worry and write it below. Then, ask yourself the following questions:

My specific worry:

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- |  |                              |                             |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Is this worry a "signal" that something needs to change?                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Has this worry prompted me to begin problem-solving?                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Does this worry feel controllable?   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Is the extent of my worry in response to an actual problem?                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Is this worry in proportion with the actual likelihood of something bad happening? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Do you think that there is more to this worry than "noise"?                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Are there any real signs of trouble to be worrying about?                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |

*Repeat this exercise with any other worries that you experience.*

# Other Symptoms That Can Accompany Problematic Worry

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PEOPLE WHO ARE WORRY-PRONE SOMETIMES HAVE OTHER SYMPTOMS, IN ADDITION TO THOSE ALREADY MENTIONED (BROWN, O’LEARY AND BARLOW, 2001):

- restlessness—feel keyed up, on edge
- easily fatigued
- difficulty concentrating (and then remembering/recalling information later)—can’t focus
- irritability (“crabby,” “grouchy”)
- muscle tension and difficulty relaxing
- “lump in the throat” or nausea
- difficulty sleeping
- feel “down,” depressed
- a reduced ability to function academically, socially, at work or in other important areas
- health problems (e.g., headaches, general aches and pains)

## My Symptoms Of Worry

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WORRY HAS AN ADVERSE IMPACT ON MANY ASPECTS OF LIFE, INCLUDING PHYSICAL WELL-BEING, BEHAVIOUR AND EMOTIONS. IDENTIFY FOR YOURSELF THE SYMPTOMS THAT YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED WITH YOUR WORRY.

- |  |   |       |
|--|---|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> restlessness                              | <input type="checkbox"/> withdrawing from others    |       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> more irritability with friends and family | <input type="checkbox"/> poor job performance       | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> muscle tension                            | <input type="checkbox"/> headache                   |       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> feeling down or depressed                 | <input type="checkbox"/> aches and pains            | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> feeling keyed up                          | <input type="checkbox"/> poor appetite              |       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> feeling “on edge”                         | <input type="checkbox"/> frequent tearfulness       | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> difficulty concentrating                  | <input type="checkbox"/> fatigue                    |       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> difficulty remember information           | <input type="checkbox"/> increased alcohol use      | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> difficulty relaxing                       | <input type="checkbox"/> increased caffeine use     |       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> “lump” in my throat                       | <input type="checkbox"/> feeling confused           |       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> nausea                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> feeling frustrated         |       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> difficulty sleeping                       | <input type="checkbox"/> constant rushing, hurrying |       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> reduced ability to function               | <input type="checkbox"/> avoiding people/situations |       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> poor academic performance                 | <input type="checkbox"/> weight gain or loss        |       |

# The Results Of Your Thinking

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## The Benefits of Reasonable/Solution-Focused Worry

Constructive behaviour may come from or be the result of “worry”—when it is focused on understanding and finding a solution for a problem (i.e., solution-focused). For example, it can:

- be used to organize and prioritize tasks
- motivate people to improve performance or effectiveness
- help people recognize what is important in life
- be a signal that there is a need for problem-solving
- remind people to be appropriately cautious
- provide short-term relief from painful feelings

## The Costs of Problematic Worry

When repetitive thoughts about an actual or potential problem are not solution-focused (i.e., worry), they can:

- impair performance
- intensify distress
- make it difficult to concentrate
- make you tense
- make you irritable
- interfere with my sleep
- make you feel unwell
- give you the impression that you are problem-solving
- distract you from important emotional issues
- give you the impression that you are preventing something negative from happening
- give the impression you are preventing disappointment if something negative happens
- give you the impression that you are preparing for the worst
- take attention away from my family, friends, work, academics
- distract from emotional issues or topics. By worrying, people avoid issues that actually need attention and feelings that need to be acknowledged. While this is usually unconscious, it keeps people from doing the processing that they need to do.

# The Results Of My Thinking

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CONSIDER THE IMPACT OF YOUR THINKING. IS IT REASONABLE AND SOLUTION-FOCUSED? OR IS IT PROBLEMATIC WORRY?

### My thinking is helping me to:

- recognize what is important in my life
- be a more cautious person
- know when I need to problem-solve
- organize myself
- know when I need to take action
- prioritize tasks

### My thinking:

- impairs performance
- creates distress
- makes it difficult to concentrate
- makes me tense
- makes me irritable
- interferes with my sleep
- makes me feel unwell
- gives me the impression I’m problem-solving
- distracts me from important emotional issues
- gives me the impression I’m preventing something negative from happening
- gives me the impression I’m preventing disappointment if something negative happens
- gives me the impression I’m preparing for the worst
- takes attention away from my family, friends, work, academics

# Faulty Beliefs About How Worry is Helpful

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THE FOLLOWING ARE COMMON BELIEFS OR UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT WORRY AND HOW IT IS “HELPFUL” (WILSON, 1996).

## **“MY WORRY MOTIVATES ME.”**

Many people report that their anxiety and worry get them to work harder and achieve more; across time they have mistakenly come to associate worry with doing well, performing at a high level and they are afraid that if they don't worry, feel extremely anxious, then their performance will suffer.

## **“IT HELPS ME TO SOLVE PROBLEMS.”**

In contrast, research suggests that worry serves to generate rather than solve problems (your head becomes a “worry generator”). As well, there is a tendency for the worrier to confuse worry with conscious, deliberate efforts to solve their problems. Worry alone does not address a situation.

## **“IT HELPS ME TO PREPARE FOR THE WORST.”**

The worrier may believe that the worrying will make them better prepared should “the worst” (the distressing diagnosis, the failed exam, a loved one's death, etc.) actually happen.

## **“IF I KEEP WORRYING ABOUT THESE TERRIBLE THINGS, THEN THEY WON'T HAPPEN.”**

This is either a superstitious process (“the worry keeps me safe”) or a belief that by worrying enough a useful strategy for the distressing situation will be found.

*There is NO good evidence for any of these beliefs—  
they are only rationalizations that help the worrier to continue to do more of the same....worry.*

## What Maintains the Worry?

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- A belief that the process of worry is somehow solving problems.
- Some of the other mistaken beliefs, misperceptions about the usefulness of worry.
- A belief in both one's ineffectiveness and one's lack of control: those who worry have been found to have less confidence in their ability to solve problems than others and to perceive themselves as having less control over problem-solving than others who do not worry.
- Worry tends to suppress some of the physical symptoms of anxiety, which leads to a short-term advantage of worry. However, it also reduces the ability to process the (anticipated) event emotionally, making a constructive solution less likely.
- The self-fulfilling prophecy component—the worrier becomes caught up in these worried thoughts and has fewer resources at those times for the task(s) at hand. This can compromise performance and bring about some of the feared consequences (e.g., poor performance).
- A worrier begins to increasingly focus on information or data that are consistent with their perspective (which is already overly pessimistic) and ignore information that is inconsistent with this perspective of worry (e.g., positive, non-threat information). The worrier begins to perceive the world in a narrow way—as a threatening place—and then worry even more. It becomes a negative spiral.

“Worry is not a predictor of outcome.”

# My Underlying Beliefs About Worry

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A NUMBER OF FACTORS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO KEEPING THE WORRY GOING, INCLUDING FAULTY BELIEFS. TO UNDERSTAND YOUR WORRY BETTER, REFLECT ON THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

Does my problematic worry really motivate me?

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Do I associate worry before an event and a positive (or less negative outcome)?

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What problems does my worry really help me to solve?

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Do I come up with even more problems when I worry? If so, what are they?

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What do I believe my worry is helping me prepare for?

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What terrible things, events do I believe my worry is helping to prevent?

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What are the short-term benefits of my worry?

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What does worrying help me to avoid?

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In what ways does my thinking become even more negative as I worry?

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# A Closer Look At Worried Thoughts

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## Identifying Types of Worries

We will now examine some of the components of problematic worry. Often, there are two basic ways that the worry is faulty or “noisy.” It is important to understand these in overcoming your worry (Brown, O’Leary and Barlow, 2001). Problematic worry involves:

1. **Probability overestimation:** overestimating the likelihood of a negative BUT RARE event—something that is actually unlikely to occur (e.g., worry about failing an upcoming exam when you have rarely, if ever, failed an exam); can include making a faulty assessment of the imminence of a negative event (i.e., overestimating how likely it will happen in the near future).
2. **Catastrophic thinking:** imagining terrible consequences that will follow a relatively minor event or underestimating your ability to cope with negative events (catastrophic thinking); having a tendency to see an event as intolerable or completely unmanageable and beyond one’s ability to cope with successfully, when in actuality it is much less “catastrophic” than it may appear on the face of it.

Catastrophic thinking can also include:

- Thoughts that involve extreme conclusions (“It will ruin my friendships if I...”)
- Thoughts relating to a strong need for perfection, a tendency to take excessive personal responsibility for things, or thoughts of the “terrible” result of not being perfect (“If I fail this exam, my career will be ruined.”)

These two types of worry, though slightly different, do often work together in a “chain of worry,” creating the uncontrollable worry.

Another way to categorize problematic worry (which may assist you in identifying the nature of your worries) is as follows:

- “What if” worrying (“What if my mom dies?”)
- Harsh self-criticism (“I’m a loser.”)
- Helplessness (“I can’t change this.”)
- Perfectionism (“I have to get it right.”)

*(Bourne, 2000, pp. 73-74.)*

## Catching Yourself Worrying

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- Spend some time imagining the situation in detail. Ask yourself, “What did I picture happening in that situation that made me tense up?”
- Use any increase in anxiety level as a cue to self-monitor your thoughts. This means that when you start to feel even the least bit anxious, this is a good opportunity to get in touch with your thinking and the specific thoughts or worries that are going through your mind.
- Consider the questions below. Ask yourself
  - Is this “what if” thinking?
  - Is this self-criticism?
  - Am I telling myself I’m helpless?
  - Is this perfectionistic thinking?

# Identifying My Worries

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PAYING ATTENTION TO YOUR SPECIFIC WORRIES AND LEARNING HOW TO EXAMINE YOUR THINKING IS A CRITICAL STEP IN OVERCOMING CHRONIC WORRY. THE QUESTIONS BELOW WILL HELP YOU TO EXAMINE YOUR THINKING.

Am I overestimating the probability of \_\_\_\_\_ happening?

Am I more focused on the stakes vs. the actual odds of \_\_\_\_\_ happening?

Am I imagining that terrible consequences will follow a relatively minor event?

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What did I just picture happening that made me tense up?

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Am I underestimating my ability to cope with \_\_\_\_\_ ?

Am I seeing \_\_\_\_\_ as intolerable or completely unmanageable?

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Am I creating extreme conclusions?

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Am I expecting perfection?

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Am I assuming responsibility for something I needn't?

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Am I focusing on "what if?"

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Am I using harsh self-criticism?

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Am I assuming that I'm incapable or helpless?

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# Confronting Problematic Worry

NOW THAT YOU HAVE IDENTIFIED YOUR WORRIES (AN IMPORTANT STRATEGY IN AND OF ITSELF) AND HAVE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE NATURE OF WORRY, YOU ARE READY TO USE SOME MORE STRATEGIES TO HELP YOU OVERCOME THE WORRY AND DIFFICULTIES IT BRINGS.

## Strategy #1:

“Counter” the worry

## Strategy #2:

Prepare some supportive/calming self-statements for yourself

## Strategy #3:

Engage in worry behaviour prevention

## Strategy #4:

Use gentle detachment

## Strategy #5:

Write, sing or tape your worries

## Strategy #6:

Do some worry exposure—DO MORE OF THE SAME???

## Strategy #7:

Create a “worry time” for yourself

## Strategy #8:

Postpone your worry

## Strategy #9:

Imagine yourself coping

## Strategy #10:

Use success imagery

## Strategy #11:

Develop relaxation skills

## Strategy #12:

Improve your sleep

## Strategy #13:

Enlist the Help of Family and Friends

## Strategy #14:

Manage Setbacks

## Strategy #15:

Look toward the future...when worry is no longer a problem

## Strategy #16:

Do More Reading on Worry Management

## Strategy #1:

### “Counter” the worry

Once you have identified your specific worries, it is very helpful to engage in a thorough and systematic process of “countering” these thoughts. Specifically, you need to examine the validity of your interpretations and predictions involved in your worry so that they can be replaced with more realistic, evidence-based cognitions or thoughts.

Our thought patterns (including our worries) can be changed, even though they may have been learned over a long period of time and may seem or be habit-like and hard to break. By engaging in repeated, systematic “countering” of these thoughts, they can be unlearned and replaced with more accurate thoughts and predictions. It just takes practice.

One method involves these steps:

1. Treat thoughts as hypotheses (i.e., as inherently flexible, as needing validation through the use of available evidence). Remember that your thoughts are not unchangeable facts that are written in stone. Examine the evidence “for” and “against.”

“For”	“Against”
What makes me think this?	What are the odds...really?
What factors support my fears?	Is there another explanation?
	Is this way of thinking helpful?
	Would I talk to a friend this way?

2. Use as much evidence as you can from all time periods (past and present) to evaluate the validity of those thoughts.
3. Explore and generate all possible alternative predictions or interpretations of an event or situation—be honest with yourself about the true odds, likelihood of this event actually happening.

# Countering Worry Worksheet

METHOD #1

1. Identify the specific worry:

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2. What is the evidence "for" this particular worry (What makes me think/believe this)?

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3. What is the evidence "against" this worry (What are some other possibilities)?

a. What are the odds?

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b. Is there another explanation?

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c. Is this way of thinking helpful?

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d. Would I talk to a friend this way?

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4. What could I say to myself that would work better than the worry?

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# Countering Worry Worksheet

METHOD #2

1. Identify the specific worry:

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2. Ask yourself:

Then what?

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And then what?

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And then what?

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How I could cope with this:

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# Countering Worry Worksheet

METHOD #3

1. Identify your specific worry:

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2. Rate how much you believe this:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 \_\_\_\_\_%  
Not at all For certain

3. Ask yourself:

Am I overestimating the probability?  Yes  No  Maybe

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Are there reasons to believe I might be overestimating the probability?

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Realistically, what is the actual probability? \_\_\_\_\_%

Is my specific worry statement consistent with the actual probability?  Yes  No  Maybe

What could I be saying to myself instead?

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# Strategy #3:

## Engage in worry behaviour prevention

Worry behaviours are those that the worrier engages in as a result of the worry, the things he/she does in response to or as a way to manage the worry/anxiety. They usually reduce the person's anxiety or bring relief in the short-term. These can include:

- phone calls to a person you are worried about to reassure yourself that they are ok
- deciding not to read obituaries, watch or listen to the news
- reading the obituaries, watching or listening to the news
- avoiding driving on the freeway or a highway

The problem with these behaviours is that they can be negatively reinforcing—they can actually lead to an increase in the worry because they lead to feelings of relief. When these feelings of relief are paired often enough with the initial worry, the person begins to engage in the worry because they realize that, on a less than conscious level, they will get some feelings of relief as part of the process.

This strategy, then, is about stopping yourself from engaging in these behaviours, making these decisions that bring about relief and a temporary reduction in your level of anxiety.

So, if you avoid listening to the news because you are afraid someone you care about will have been injured in a car accident (and experience relief when you make the decision not to listen to it) or seek out the news (so that you can reassure yourself that nothing terrible has happened and get relief that way)—you have to stop doing this.

Begin by identifying all the worry behaviours you engage in. Then practice forcing yourself either to not engage in that behaviour or to engage in a competing behaviour (e.g., force yourself to listen to/watch the news if you were previously avoiding doing so).

This helps you to learn to tolerate the anxiety. You will also begin to lose the association that has developed between the anxiety/worry, the behaviour that results, and the accompanying relief.

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This helps you to learn to tolerate the anxiety. You will also begin to lose the association that has developed between the anxiety/worry, the behaviour that results, and the accompanying relief.

## Worry Behaviour Prevention Worksheet

My Worry behaviours and the situations in which I use them:

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Worry behaviour I can prevent:

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How I plan to handle these situations differently:

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## Strategy #4:

### Use gentle detachment

When you catch yourself worrying, you can give yourself permission to “let go” of the worries. Begin by identifying the worry. Briefly acknowledge to yourself the concern(s) you have in this area. Then, gently and calmly say this (or something like it) to yourself: “I am letting this worry go.” Repeat it to yourself as many times as is necessary, all the while engaging in the diaphragmatic, calming breathing that you have learned. Imagine yourself greeting and recognizing these thoughts and then letting them go in a calm, assured manner.

Statements I will use:

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“I am letting this worry go.”

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“There is a worry and I’ll let it pass.”

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“I can release this thought.”

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## Strategy #5:

### Write, sing or tape your worries

When you begin to experience worries of any sort, decide either to let them go (e.g., gentle detachment) or to (literally) write, sing or tape them. If you choose to continue the worries:

#### WRITING:

Pull out some paper (you can get started with the space below) and a pen. Write down every single worry that comes to mind (even if its repeated). Continue this until you are so tired of worrying that you want to make the decision to let the worry go.

#### SINGING:

Decide what the theme of your worries is (or there could be more than one) or choose one or more phrases that capture your worry really well. Sing these worries repetitively using a simple tune. Continue this for as long as it takes for you to become less emotionally involved with the thoughts—even if that’s several minutes. Alternatively, continue until you make the decision to let the worry go.

#### RECORDING:

Record your worries (verbatim as much as possible). Once you are finished, replay them back to yourself repeatedly. Continue listening until you begin to feel much less emotionally involved with them or until you make the decision to let the worry go.

The basic idea behind these strategies is that you give the worry up because you get bored and extremely sick of it. You will also gain some objectivity by doing the exercise and the worries will have less power.

## Strategy #6:

### Do some worry exposure—DO MORE OF THE SAME???

Having identified the areas or “spheres” of your worry and taking one area at a time, “practice” worrying about this issue. Specifically, set aside a period of time (approximately 25 to 30 minutes) during which you consciously engage in worry, forcing yourself to consider (vividly) the worst possible outcome in that sphere (e.g., you fail the Math exam you are so worried about because you get every single question wrong). At the end of the 25 to 30 minutes, switch your focus to generating other outcomes for this area of worry. Come up with as many alternatives as you can (i.e., other than this worst possible scenario). Repeat for the other areas/

spheres of worry. Repeat this exercise until your anxiety is reduced by at least half.

This may actually seem like the process you already engage in with the worries (i.e., letting yourself engage in the worries). But there is a subtle, but important difference—usually you move quickly from one worry to another in a worry “chain” which prevents any real processing of the worry. You never really take the opportunity to work through or analyze the worry. This strategy/exercise will help you to become more objective about the nature of your worry in this area and help you to step back from the intense anxiety.

## Strategy #7:

### Create a “worry time” for yourself

Choose one or two relatively brief (i.e., 10 min each) worry times for yourself each day. During a given worry time, choose to worry about one issue and do so for the entire time. While you are doing so, make no effort to stop the worrying or to talk yourself out of the worries (i.e., do not argue their irrationality with yourself). Don’t attempt to consider other, more positive outcomes/alternatives. Allow yourself to become as anxious as possible during your worry

time—feel free to catastrophize. Remember to use the entire time—even if that means repeating yourself because you’ve run out of new worries related to that issue. When you reach the end of the set time period, remind yourself to let go of the worries. You may find it helpful to use some “calming breaths” and then return your attention to other activities

## Strategy #8:

### Postpone your worry

When a worry comes to mind, make a commitment to engage in that worry and decide on a specific time in the future (e.g., tomorrow from 6 to 6:15 pm) when you will do just that—worry

about it! As the specified “worry time” approaches, you can either decide to engage in the worry or postpone it yet again to another time. Choose the postpone option as often as you can. If you should decide to engage in the worry, consider following Strategy #6 during the worry.

## Strategy #9:

### Imagine yourself coping

Once you have a clear idea of what specifically is worrying you, spend some time imagining the ways that you would cope with or manage each of those situations or events. Reflect on, or even write down, the ways that you would cope with or adapt if the

threatening or feared event actually happened. Include as much detail as you can.

- My specific worry:
- Here is a description of how I successfully cope:

## Strategy #10:

### Use success imagery

This strategy gives you an opportunity to expand your thinking patterns a bit...to focus on the positive alternatives, rather than just the narrow set of negative outcomes that you may more typically consider.

1. Close your eyes and visualize yourself having just finished the task or dealing with the event. It has gone perfectly, better than you could ever have hoped for. Try not to focus on how you have reached the goal, just that you have reached your goal and very successfully. Allow yourself to enjoy the pleasure that comes with your accomplishment.
2. Close your eyes. Actively visualize yourself accomplishing your task, getting through the event effortlessly and without discomfort. Go through the image a second time.
3. Close your eyes and see yourself moving through your task. Begin by imagining yourself having some of the typical discomfort that goes with this task. Then, having rehearsed these ahead of time (as in the exercise above), revisualize yourself in the situation and using some particular coping skills that will help you to take care of yourself while you are in this distressing situation. Further, visualize these skills, these efforts working successfully.

## Strategy #11:

### Develop relaxation skills

The key benefit to relaxation is that, during this time of relaxation, the physical sensations that lead to increased anxiety and worry are reduced or even eliminated.

Some common ways to elicit a relaxation response are as follows:

- respiratory training (also called abdominal breathing)
- guided imagery
- progressive muscle relaxation
- meditation
- visualizing a peaceful scene
- (Bourne, 2000, pp. 73-74)

*To develop your relaxation skills and for more ideas about relaxation strategies, refer to the reading list (Strategy #16).*

# Strategy #12:

## Improve your sleep

Sleep deprivation has an important impact on mood generally and anxiety and worry specifically. Adequate sleep is necessary for keeping your mood relatively stable and for reducing vulnerability to anxiety. Think of adequate sleep as one of your resources and that, without it, you will become more vulnerable to worry and its accompanying anxiety. Taking a look at sleep is also important because many people who have trouble with worry also have trouble sleeping.

If you are having difficulty sleeping, or have sleep habits that could be improved, consider the following strategies:

- Establish a regular sleep-wake schedule (i.e., a regular time to go to bed and to get up in the morning), particularly a regular time of rising in the morning. Try to make this schedule as consistent as possible (e.g., same on weekends as during the week).
- Maintain a comfortable sleep environment. Many people find that a dark, quiet bedroom is conducive to good sleep. Use a comfortable bed (e.g., not too lumpy, big enough, etc.). Avoid temperature extremes in the room. Try to minimize sleep interruptions (e.g., put your cat outside).
- Avoid using your bedroom as a place to work, study, eat, or socialize with friends. Over time, you may begin to associate your room with these activities, instead of sleep.
- Try to avoid large, heavy dinners late in the evening, and snacks that may give you heartburn or indigestion (e.g., spicy, fatty, or garlic-flavoured foods). Some researchers suggest that a light bedtime snack that is high in tryptophan can help promote sleep. Milk, bananas, cheese and chicken are some foods that contain this naturally occurring amino acid.
- Wind-down before bed. Stop working or studying at least 30 minutes prior to going to bed. Spend this time enjoying a relaxing activity such as listening to music or reading a favourite novel.
- Fear of not being able to fall asleep or return to sleep after awakening can prolong sleep problems. This anxiety is accompanied by increased autonomic arousal (e.g., increased heart rate), which is conducive to continued wakefulness, not sleep. The more you are concerned about not sleeping, the more difficult it will be to sleep. Practice diverting your thoughts from your worry about insomnia (e.g., imagine yourself engaging in a pleasant activity, count sheep). In addition, you may find it useful to turn or cover your alarm clock to avoid watching the time pass as you prepare to fall asleep.
- Practice deep breathing. Slow, abdominal breathing promotes relaxation and can make it easier to fall asleep.
- Exercise on a regular basis. Twenty to thirty minutes of exercise, several times per week may help promote sleep. Exercise should not occur within 3 hours of bedtime, as the autonomic arousal that accompanies exercise may delay the onset of sleep.
- Eat nutritious meals. People who lack proper nutrients in their diet can have problems with insomnia.
- Avoid excessive use of caffeine. As little as two cups of coffee or two cola drinks consumed in a day can interfere with sleep. Choosing not to consume caffeine (e.g., coffee, tea, cola, chocolate) after the noon hour may help you to avoid disruption in sleep.
- Stop smoking. The nicotine in cigarettes is a stimulant, which can produce or aggravate insomnia.
- Do not use alcohol as a sleeping aid. Many people believe that a “night cap” will help them to fall asleep. However, even a single drink within two hours of bedtime often causes fragmented sleep. Moreover, there is a danger of slipping into alcohol dependency. Chronic or excessive alcohol or drug (e.g., cocaine) use interferes with sleep, as can drug withdrawal. If you have a problem with substance abuse, seek a referral to a health professional who can assist you in this regard.
- There are times when sleeping medication may be of benefit (e.g., during periods of intense grief). This medication is intended for short-term use, as there is a risk of drug dependence. If you and your doctor decide that sleeping medication may be helpful, use it with caution. Sleeping medication can have a negative impact on your functioning the next day (e.g., less able to perform tasks with speed and accuracy), can have unpleasant side-effects (e.g., nausea, digestive upset, dizziness) and can cause “rebound insomnia” (i.e., disturbed sleep that can occur for several nights after discontinuing the use of sleeping medication). Never mix alcohol and sleeping medication. This can be fatal.
- Don't stay in bed too long. The longer you stay in bed beyond your normal average sleep time (approximately seven to eight hours for most adults), the worse you may sleep. Over time, your sleep can become more shallow and less restorative as you try to “catch up” by spreading your sleep over a longer period. Hence, extending the time you spend in bed will not likely help you overcome your sleep difficulties.

# Strategy #13:

## Enlist the Help of Family and Friends

Enlisting the help of a trusted friend or family member can be useful as you work to better manage your worry. Having the support and encouragement of someone who cares about you can help you to stay motivated to continue to make change. Here are some tips:

- Confide in those you trust and know will be supportive of you. (This is not the time for unsolicited advice or criticism.) Tell those you trust about your struggles and your successes.
- Offer to provide your support person with information about worry and the specific strategies you are using to better cope. Show her/him the information from these sessions.
- Work to ask for and accept the support you need and deserve (e.g., Will s/he exercise with you?).
- Ask for honest (and gentle!) feedback. Your support person may be able to offer ideas about distorted thinking, avoidance behavior and emotional issues that may be perpetuating your worry.
- Explain to your support person that an important part of what you need to do is tackle your worry “head-on” and that reassurance (that this terrible thing won’t happen) may only bring short-term relief, interfere with you discovering your ability to cope on your own, and keep you from critically examining your worries.
- Remind your support person that worry takes time and effort to manage. You won’t simply “get over it.” Patience is called for.
- Avoid expecting your support person to become your therapist. Make sure the relationship is a mutual one and involves a balance of you both listening and sharing. Also, if you can, confide in more than one support person.
- Have fun together.
- Recognize and accept that some people, however well intentioned, will be unable to provide what you need. Seek another source of support.

These are the people from whom I will seek support

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# Strategy #14:

## Manage Setbacks

As you work to better manage your worry, consider the following points about setbacks:

- Setbacks are normal and to be expected.
- Setbacks can only occur if first there has been some progress. Setbacks are signs that you have already made some positive change, already moved forward.
- Setbacks do not mean you have to start all over again. You have learned some strategies to manage worry. Get back to or continue to use the strategies that you have used to bring about change so far.
- Setbacks are temporary.
- Setbacks are opportunities to learn new skills, to try something new. Setbacks can give you further information about what makes you vulnerable to worry.
- Setbacks are signals to:
  - Examine your thinking.
  - Figure out if you are doing something to keep the worry going.
  - Do some problem-solving.
  - Review what has worked in the past.
  - Keep doing what works.
  - Take care of your physical health.
  - Get support.

*Based on Markway et al. (1992)*

This is what I plan to do if I experience a setback:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

# Strategy #15:

## Look toward the future...when worry is no longer a problem

It will be clear to you by now that there are effective strategies that you can master in order to decrease or eliminate problematic worry. Many, many people have been successful in overcoming excessive anxiety and worry. When your anxiety and worry are better managed, you will be more able to meet your potential and live a more satisfying and stimulating life. Spend some time reflecting on how your life will be different as you begin to manage your worry. Go ahead...imagine a life without worry.

## What will your life be like when anxiety is no longer a problem?

When I better manage my worry my relationships will

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When I'm more relaxed I will

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When worry is no longer a problem I will be

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When I meet my goal it will be

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Less worry will free me to

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Just wait until I

---

When I overcome this worry \_

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Being more relaxed will mean

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When I am better managing, I will

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The most exciting thing about managing worry better is

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It will be such a relief when

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Being calm and confident will impact my work by

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When I feel better about myself

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Successfully managing worry will show me that

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# Strategy #16:

## Do More Reading on Worry Management

You may find the following additional resources helpful in managing your worry. These are only a few of the available self-help resources on anxiety and worry. Some, more than others, may seem more useful to you and your particular situation. Find what works for you.

### Books:

Babor, S. & Goldman, C. (1996). *Overcoming Panic, Anxiety, and Phobias: New Strategies to Free Yourself from Worry and Fear*.

Duluth, MN: Whole Person Associates.

Bourne, E. (2000). *The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook (3rd Ed.)*. Oakland CA: New Harbinger Publications.

Bourne, E. & Garano, L. (2003). *Coping with Anxiety: 10 Simple Ways to Relieve Anxiety, Fear and Worry*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

Copeland, M.E. (1998). *The Worry Control Workbook*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

Foa, E. & Wilson, R. (2001). *Stop Obsessing: How to Overcome Your Obsessions and Compulsions (2nd edition)*. New York: Bantam.

Greenberger, D. & Padesky, C. (1995). *Mind Over Mood: A Cognitive Therapy Treatment Manual for Clients*. New York: Guilford Press.

Hallowell, E. (2002). *Worry: Controlling it and Using it Wisely*. New York: Ballantine.

### Websites:

Canadian Psychological Association facts:

[www.cpa.ca/factsheets/GAD.htm](http://www.cpa.ca/factsheets/GAD.htm)

National Institute on Mental Health:

[www.nimh.nih.gov/anxiety/gadri1.cfm](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/anxiety/gadri1.cfm)

# Some Final Thoughts...

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- Make frequent use of the strategies that you have learned.
- Practice, practice, practice.
- Decide to take charge of better managing your worry.
- Arrange for a medical screen to rule out any physical health problems.
- Think about what may be contributing to your worry. Is there anything you can do about the contributing factors (e.g., reduce stress, resolve conflict with family members)?
- Make an attitudinal change. Remember, the most effective way to overcome anxiety is to face it. Accept anxiety as part of your life experience instead of seeing it as your enemy.
- Practice deep breathing.
- Challenge those aspects of your behaviour that are keeping the worry going.
- Think about your thinking. Recognize the negative predictions, harsh self-criticism and thinking that is characterized by a sense of helplessness or perfectionism that fuels the anxiety and the worry.
- Challenge negative self-statements using questions like: "What are the odds of the worst really happening?" "Would I talk to a friend this way?"
- Develop self-statements that are supportive and believable (e.g., "I can let these worries go. I can decide to think more positively. I can use some helpful strategies to overcome my worry").
- Eat well, exercise and get adequate rest.
- Seek help if you abuse alcohol or drugs.
- Learn to recognize, accept and appropriately express all of your feelings.
- Discover which strategies work best for you.
- Seek and accept support.
- Read about worry and how to overcome it.
- Open yourself to taking risks.
- Imagine your success.
- Be patient. Lasting change usually takes time.
- Remember that some amount of worry and anxiety are normal.
- Give yourself credit for taking charge and helping yourself cope.
- Expect setbacks. Don't give up.

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