

CHANGES MODULE 9: Why worry?



Worry is a type of anxious thinking often occurring in response to stressful situations and everyday hassles. Common sources of worry include: relationships, money troubles and the demands of work or study.

Physical Effects of Worry

Worry can also cause physical symptoms like chest pains, sweating or headaches. As physical symptoms can cause us to worry further, there is a danger of becoming locked in a vicious circle. To avoid this situation, it can help to split worry into two types:

non-actionable and actionable.

Non-actionable worry

This is a type of worry you simply cannot change. Often these worries are a product of unhealthy thinking (negative feelings you have about yourself or the world) or come from a wish to have certainty over things we can't control. Coping techniques to help you accept these worries include:

- Writing them down in a list of “things to accept”
- Practice accepting uncertainty in the present
- Focus on the problems you can solve

Some worries might be “non-actionable” in the present but you can do something about them in the future. For these it can be useful to “delay” them, make a note and set a date for when you will come back to them.

Actionable worry

Many worries signal that something is wrong and that something needs to be done. These “actionable” worries can be addressed through using a range of tools, including the following:

A) Challenge your thinking

Think of reasons why the things you are worrying about might never happen. Make a list of these reasons.

For example: if you are worrying about your partner wanting to split up with you, the first point on this list might be “*My partner is always telling and showing me how me they love me*”.

B) Prioritise and test your worries

If you have a number of problems, try to put them into order, then deal with them one at a time. They pose less of a threat when tackled individually.

Now, ‘reality test’ your worries, asking yourself:

- What is the worst that can happen?
- How bad would it really be?
- How many times have I thought the worst before and been wrong?
- What would I say to a friend who had this worry?

It may also help to gain insight from someone impartial, getting their view to help you see exactly ‘what is what’.

C) Problem-solve

1. Describe the problem - what exactly are you worrying about? Is this type of worry non-actionable or actionable? If 'actionable,' go on to step two...
2. Find answers – as many problem-solving options that come to mind
3. Evaluate – weigh up the risks and benefits of each solution and choose the best option
4. Take action – the longer you wait, the more likely you are to worry

D) Schedule 'worry time'

Postpone worries until a certain time of day where you try to problem-solve them. Schedule a 15 minute worry period, preferably at the same time each day.

E) Practice Mindfulness

Worrying is usually focused on the future (what will happen) or on the past (rehashing what happened).

Mindfulness is about practicing being in the present. Stay focused on the now: how your body feels and the rhythm of your breathing. Try to let each worry go as it arrives by bringing yourself back to the present moment.

F) Get Moving

Healthy physical activities are a natural antidote to worry. Exercising releases chemicals into the brain which make you feel good and aid relaxation. Eating healthily and limiting caffeine are also beneficial for managing worries.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Have you been worrying about anything today?
2. Can worrying be useful?
3. How do you know you are worrying too much?

Further Resources:

Moodjuice anxiety guide: <http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/anxiety.asp>

The Worry Cure: Seven Steps to Stop Worry from Stopping You by Robert L. Leahy