

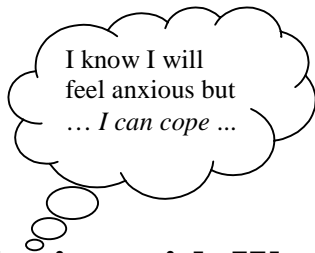
Managing Worry



One of the worst things about worry is the way it seems to completely take over a person's life. It can paralyse thinking and activity. Nobody likes to lose their sense of control. So understandably most habitual worriers would like to be completely rid of their anxiety. They are often overwhelmed by it or they 'worry about worry', fearing that it will lead to something worse.

Yet trying to quickly and totally eliminate habits of worry that go back many years is unrealistic. The trick with worry is to lower your sights and aim to *manage* it.

A combination of the following strategies will work better than relying on just one or two. The more you practice them, the stronger your sense of control over worry.



Coping with Worrying Thoughts.

See the cut-out over the page. Keep it in your wallet or purse. Rehearse the self-statements until they become an automatic response to worry. Again, the goal is to manage rather than master worry - to accept a certain degree of anxiety after taking steps to reduce, rather than eliminate it. So, at worst, your experience of worry is difficult or unpleasant but not immobilising. ('Difficult or unpleasant' anyone can cope with.) More likely though you will experience fewer and shorter episodes of worry.

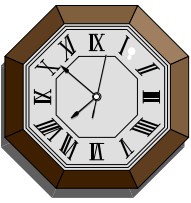


Thought-stopping.

If the instructions on the cut-out don't allow you to cope, add thought-stopping. Sit down somewhere quiet and practice your intrusive thought. By the way, doing this reinforces the idea that you have control over it.

When you really have it in your head yell 'Stop!' to yourself under your breath. Then say the message on the cut-out to yourself. If you feel silly or begin to laugh - all the better. Focusing on any amusing or ironic effects of your intrusive thought provides a healthy balance.

You may have to use thought-stopping up to 3 times in as many minutes. If it continues and it is a serious source of stress for you, then seek out a suitably qualified person.



Organising worry: 'Worry-time and worry-place'.

It can help to set aside a certain time each day for worrying beforehand. If you like write them down and save them on paper until your worry-time.

Divide your worry-time into two parts.

- (i) worry about problems for which you can plan constructively. Think about realistic solutions.
- (ii) worry about problems you can't solve e.g. the weather, wars, the road toll etc.

You may wish to gradually shorten your worry-time from, say, daily 10 minute periods to 5 minute, then 2 minute segments, then every other day and so on.

It can also help to set aside a special place where you will do your worrying. Don't worry in any place but that place. A bed is not a good place. It will become associated with worry and make getting to sleep difficult. Good places might be a garden shed, a walk-in cupboard, or little-used and difficult to get at corner of your yard or work place.

The effect of both these strategies is to give you control over worry by controlling the where and when of worry. Combined with other strategies that give you more control of your thoughts, you are postponing further worry until your designated worry time. If you begin to make a joke of your new habit with other people, then that's all the better.



COPING WITH WORRYING THOUGHTS

Many stress-producing thoughts or images start automatically in your head but they do not keep going automatically.

You have a choice in the matter. Worry is a useless and stress-producing exercise. Nothing has ever changed as a result of worrying about it.

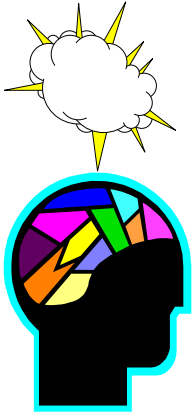
As soon as you catch yourself beginning to dwell unnecessarily on stressful thoughts, fantasies or pictures read the following words and follow your own instructions.

"I know I will feel anxious when I think about future bad events, but **I can cope** with feeling anxious and I don't have to exaggerate it by dwelling on those thoughts.

I can take **constructive steps** to prepare for coming events and that's as much as anyone can do. Now I will think of something else or **do something active** to fill my mind.

I can even choose to **act in some way that is in direct conflict with my worry**. That will convince me of the folly of my unrealistic fears in the most compelling way of all - by facing them. That way I will find they were not what I imagined.

I'll learn through experience that with effective thought and actions, **I can cope**."



Test your worry thinking.

Worry solves nothing!

A study from Columbia University has provided scientific evidence to support this common sense belief.

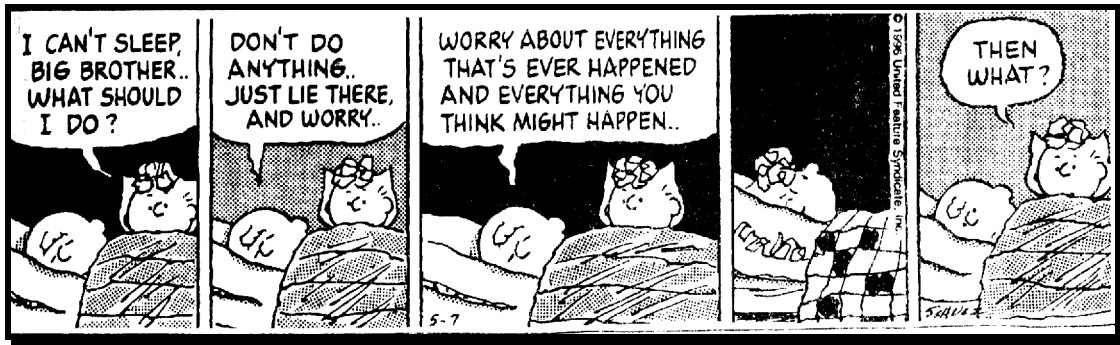
It showed that:

- ☞ 40% of what we worry about never happens!
- ☞ 30% of problems are over and done before we start to worry about them!
- ☞ 12% of our worries are about non-existent health problems!
- ☞ 10% of our worries are actually focused on the wrong things!

This leaves just 8 out of every 100 worries worth bothering about!

"O.K. so 92 % of the time I'm dead wrong. But ... (and professional worriers usually ask this!) ... what about the other 8%?!"

Then, as Charlie Brown would probably have suggested to Sally, do a **Worry Test**.



In no more than 60 seconds answer all 4 questions below.

1. ***How likely is it that this will happen?***

Rate this from 1 = Extremely improbable to
5 = Virtually certain.

2. ***How accurate is my information?***

Rate this from 1 = Highly doubtful to
5 = Absolutely reliable.

3. ***Are there practical steps I might take to prevent or solve this should it happen?***

Rate this from 1 = Many practical steps to
5 = No way of improving matters.

4. ***How serious are the likely consequences?***

Rate this from 1 = Not very serious to
5 = Catastrophic.

SCORING

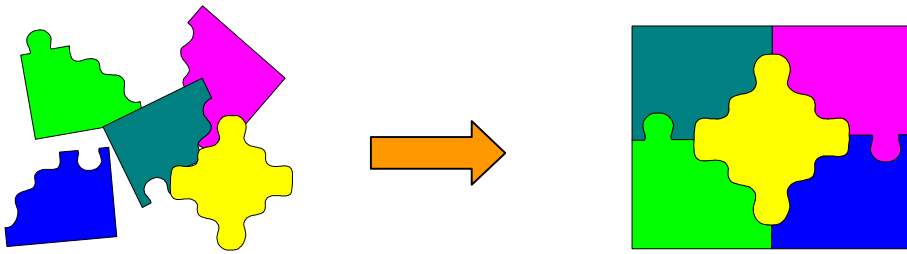
If your score was ***between 5 and 10*** the worry is too trivial to waste further time on.

A score ***above 16*** suggests that the problem is so intractable, nothing you do is likely to improve matters, so you might as well stop worrying.

A score ***between 11 and 15*** justifies concern, but only as a spur to action.

Take practical steps to improve the situation by:

- Finding out more about what is happening.
- Developing a strategy for avoiding or lessening the consequences.



Focus on solving the problem not on your “what if...?” thoughts and images.

If the problem you are worried about is one you can do something about, conserve your emotional energies and focus them on what can be done using this step-by-step approach to problem-solving:

Step 1: What is the problem/goal?

Think about the problem/goal carefully, ask yourself questions. Then write down exactly what the problem/goal is.

Step 2: List all possible solutions

Start 'brainstorming'. Write down all ideas, even bad ones. List the solutions *without being critical of them* at this stage.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Step 3: Assess each possible solution

Quickly go down the list of possible solutions and assess the *main* advantages and disadvantages of each one.

Step 4: Choose the "best" or most practical solution

Choose the solution that can be carried out most easily to solve (or to begin to solve) the problem.

Step 5: Plan how to carry out the best solution

List the resources needed and the major pitfalls to overcome. Practice difficult steps, make notes of information needed.

Step 1. _____

Step 2. _____

Step 3. _____

Step 4. _____

Step 6: Review progress and be pleased with any progress

Focus on achievement first. Identify what has been achieved, then what still needs to be achieved. Go through steps 1 to 6 again in the light of what has been achieved or learned.

What has been achieved?

What still needs to be done?

Once you have completed these steps either apply them or wait until you need to. Then occupy yourself with some absorbing activity.



TGH Psychology

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