



What? Me Worry!?!

Module 4

Negative Beliefs About Worrying: “Worrying Is Dangerous”

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Introduction

Ask yourself the question: *if you felt your worrying couldn't harm you or wasn't dangerous, how much would your worrying bother you?* Chances are, you wouldn't feel as bad if you thought your worrying was harmless, as opposed to thinking your worrying is harmful. So in this module we will look at changing your beliefs that:



- “Worrying will make me go crazy”
- “If I keep worrying I will have a nervous breakdown”
- “I'll get sick if I don't stop worrying”
- “Worrying will damage my body”
- “I'll go nuts if I keep worrying”
- “Worrying will make me ill”

Changing Your Belief

As in the previous module, before we start changing your belief that worrying is dangerous and harmful, we need to know how much you believe it.

How much do you believe your worrying is dangerous/harmful?
(Circle the percentage that best describes the strength of your belief)

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

If you do not think you hold this belief at all, still work through this module just to be sure, but chances are you can move on quickly from this module to the next.



To change your belief that your worrying is dangerous, you need to do something you are already familiar with from Module 3. That is, **challenge** or dispute your belief. This means dissecting the belief that your worry will cause you physical or mental harm, by evaluating if it really is accurate and true, and examining what evidence you base your belief on. In this way you will be like a detective, trying to get to the facts of whether worrying really is dangerous to you.

Often people can experiment with this belief too, just as you did in the last module. Such an experiment might involve pushing your worrying to the 'max'. This means trying your hardest to lose control of your worrying. Typically people predict that trying to push their worrying to the limit will be awful, and that something terrible will happen. Often people are surprised that nothing bad actually happens and they experience their worry as harmless. However, it is recommended that this approach be used with the guidance of a mental health professional, and so is not used in this information package.

Challenging Your Belief

Below is a list of questions you can ask yourself to challenge whether your belief that worrying is dangerous is really true. Remember, you are a detective examining the evidence for and against your belief. An example is given below of how to use these questions to challenge your belief, and on page 4 you will find a worksheet to help you do this for yourself.

Evidence For

- What makes you think worrying is dangerous/harmful?
- What's the evidence for your belief?
- Exactly how does worrying cause mental/physical harm (be specific)?
- Is the evidence for your belief good/solid/reliable?
- Is there another way the evidence for your belief could be viewed?



Evidence Against

- Is there any evidence that goes against your belief?
- How long have you worried for? What specific physical or mental harm has resulted over this time?
- During a worry episode have you ever become ill or gone crazy?
- Can you think of other people/professions that are constantly under intense stress or anxiety, have they been harmed physically or mentally by their worry? (e.g., students studying for exams, people in stressful jobs – army officers, police, emergency department staff, etc).
- How can you believe that worrying is both dangerous on the one hand and has many positive benefits (motivates, prepares, prevents, etc) on the other hand?

EXAMPLE:

Evidence For	Evidence Against
<p><i>I don't know exactly how it will make me sick, but I have heard stress isn't good for you, so it must be something to do with that.</i> [I haven't got a very strong, specific or scientific argument for worrying being harmful. Maybe I need to look into it more, and get the facts.]</p> <p><i>It just feels like I am going to go crazy, therefore I must be.</i> [This isn't very solid evidence that worrying is going to harm me. It has never actually happened, it is just that it feels so bad at the time, so I assume something bad will happen. Just because I feel it is true, isn't really evidence it is true.]</p> <p><i>When I worry a lot, I get a cold, so worrying must be bad for my health.</i> [There have been times when I haven't worried and have gotten sick. Also when I have worried a lot and gotten sick, I guess I haven't been sleeping well, eating right or exercising. So I guess it might not be the worrying itself that caused it, but how my lifestyle changes when I worry.]</p>	<p><i>How can something be both dangerous and helpful at the same time?</i> [My beliefs about worrying don't match up. Maybe I need to re-think.]</p> <p><i>I have never actually gone crazy or gotten really sick from worrying.</i> [What I am worried about has never actually happened.]</p> <p><i>Plenty of people have worry and stress in their lives. While it doesn't feel great, these people don't break down physically or mentally.</i> [It doesn't tend to happen to other people, so why should it happen to me.]</p>

Challenging Your Belief

Belief: <i>My worry is dangerous</i>	
Evidence For	Evidence Against

Now that you have challenged your belief that worrying is dangerous/harmful:

Rate again how much you believe your worrying is dangerous/harmful?

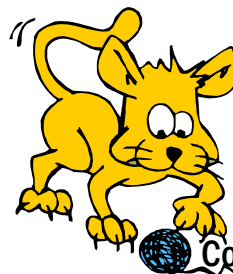
(Circle the percentage that best describes the strength of your belief)

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

If there is some weakening (however small) of your belief that your worrying is dangerous compared to what it was at the start of this module, congratulate yourself. If there's no change yet, that's okay. Remember, changing your beliefs takes time and persistence. Just going over the evidence for and against your belief once may not be enough. You need to practice this strategy until the evidence for your belief is weak and the evidence against your belief is strong. A good gauge of when you have done enough work on this belief may be when your belief is relatively weak – say about only 20%.

Module Summary

- Negative beliefs regarding worrying being dangerous make your worrying worse
- To change these beliefs you can:
 - Challenge them – look at the evidence for and against the beliefs.
- In order to change your belief that worrying will cause you harm, you need to persist until:
 - The evidence for your belief is weak.
 - The evidence against your belief is strong.
- Once you have achieved this ask yourself:
 - **What does all this say about my worrying?**
 - It should show you that your worrying is, in fact, **harmless**.



Coming up next ...

In the next module you will learn how to change the positive beliefs you hold about worry.

About The Modules

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Some of the materials in the modules of this information package were taken from:

Nathan, P., Smith, L., Rees, C., Correia, H., Juniper, U., Kingsep, P., & Lim, L. (2004). *Mood Management Course: A Cognitive Behavioural Group Treatment Programme for Anxiety Disorders and Depression* (2nd ed.). Perth, Western Australia: Centre for Clinical Interventions.

BACKGROUND

The concepts and strategies in the modules have been developed from evidence based psychological practice, primarily Cognitive-Behaviour Therapy (CBT). CBT for generalised anxiety is a type of psychotherapy that is based on the theory that generalised anxiety and worry is a result of problematic cognitions (thoughts) and behaviours. There is strong scientific evidence to support that cognitions and behaviours can play an important role in generalised anxiety, and that targeting cognitions and behaviours in therapy can help many people to overcome generalised anxiety. Examples of this evidence are reported in:

Barlow, D.H., Raffa, S.D., Cohen, E.M. (2002) Psychosocial treatments for panic disorders, phobias, and generalized anxiety disorder. In P.E. Nathan & J.M. Gorman (Eds.), *A Guide to Treatments that Work* (2nd ed., pp. 301-335). New York: Oxford University Press.

Gould, R.A., Safren, S.A., O'Neill Washington, D., & Otto, M.W. (2004). A meta-analytic review of cognitive-behavioural treatments. In R.G. Heimberg, C.L. Turk & D.S. Mennin (Eds.), *Generalized Anxiety Disorder: Advances in Research and Practice* (pp. 248-264). New York: Guilford Press.

REFERENCES

These are some of the professional references used to create the modules in this information package.

Barlow, D.H. (2002). *Anxiety and Its Disorders: The Nature and Treatment of Anxiety and Panic* (2nd ed.). London: Guilford Press.

Heimberg, R.G., Turk, C.L., & Mennin, D.S. (2004). *Generalized Anxiety Disorder: Advances in Research and Practice*. New York: Guilford Press.

Wells, A. (1997). *Cognitive Therapy of Anxiety Disorders: A Practice Manual and Conceptual Guide*. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Wells, A. (2008). *Metacognitive Therapy for Anxiety and Depression*. New York: Guilford Press.

“WHAT? ME WORRY!?!”

This module forms part of:

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