



What? Me Worry!?!

Module 5

Positive Beliefs About Worrying

Introduction	2
Changing Your Beliefs	2
Challenging Your Beliefs	3
Worksheet: Challenging Your Beliefs	4
Experimenting With Your Beliefs	5
Worksheet: Up & Down Worry Experiment	7
Module Summary	8

Introduction

Ask yourself the question: *if you believed your worrying has many benefits, how willing would you be to give it up?* Your answer is probably that you wouldn't be very willing, as you might feel like you would be losing something valuable and that giving up worrying would be very costly to you. So in this module, we will look at changing your positive beliefs about worrying, such as:

- “Worrying helps me cope with things”
- “If I keep worrying, bad things will not happen to me”
- “Worrying helps me solve problems”
- “If I worry, I will be motivated to do things”
- “Worrying prepares me for anything”

Changing Your Beliefs

By now you know the drill. Before we start changing your positive beliefs about worrying, we need to know how much you believe them.

How much do you believe your worrying has positive benefits?
(Circle the percentage that best describes the strength of your belief)

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

Through the work you have already done, you may have already come to the conclusion that worrying has little benefit. Do continue to work through this module just to be sure.

As with your negative beliefs about worrying, to change your positive beliefs about worrying, you can do two things.



Firstly, you can challenge or dispute your beliefs. That means dissecting your beliefs about the benefits of worrying, by evaluating if they really are accurate and true, and examining what evidence you base your beliefs on. In this way you will be like a detective, trying to get to the facts of whether worrying really is beneficial to you.

Secondly, you can experiment with your beliefs. That means doing things to see if worrying really does have many positives. If you are able to do things that show your beliefs are not true, that in fact your worrying has no benefits or can get in the way at times, it is going to be hard to hold on to your beliefs. In this way you will be like a scientist with a prediction that worrying is beneficial, which needs to be tested.



Challenging Your Beliefs

Below is a list of questions you can ask yourself to challenge whether your positive beliefs about worrying are really true. Remember, these questions are to help you do your detective work. An example is given below of how to use these questions to challenge your beliefs, and on page 4 you will find a worksheet to help you do this for yourself.

Evidence For

- What makes you think worrying is beneficial?
- What's the evidence for your positive beliefs?
- Exactly how does worrying help you prevent or avoid bad things?
- Exactly how does worrying help you cope/solve problems?
- Is the evidence for your beliefs good/solid/reliable?
- Is there another way the evidence for your beliefs could be viewed?



Evidence Against

- Is there any evidence that goes against your positive beliefs about worrying?
- What are the disadvantages of worrying?
- How can you believe that worrying has many positive benefits on the one hand (motivates, prepares, prevents, etc) and many disadvantages on the other (distressing, interferes, doesn't help, makes things worse)?
- Have there been situations where you haven't worried, and things have still turned out okay?

EXAMPLE:

Evidence For	Evidence Against
<p><i>Worrying prepares me, so that if bad things happen I can cope better.</i> [What is the good in always being prepared for the worst, which never seems to happen...it just ends up making me feel awful all the time – and how can that be good coping? Maybe if I didn't worry, I would still have been able to cope if something bad had happened.]</p> <p><i>Worrying helps me get everything done properly and on time.</i> [Sometimes I worry so much that I am unable to do things, so how does this fit with my beliefs? Maybe if I didn't worry, I would still get things done well – maybe I should try it and see.]</p> <p><i>I don't know how worrying stops bad things happening - I just feel it does.</i> [I don't have any strong, specific or scientific evidence to back my belief. What I am thinking is really very superstitious.]</p> <p><i>The fact that nothing bad ever happens is because I worry.</i> [I have no explanation for how this is possible. How can my worrying actually effect what happens in the world?]</p>	<p><i>Worrying makes me upset, interferes with my ability to concentrate and make decisions, and makes me procrastinate.</i> [What my worrying actually does to me does not match with my positive beliefs that worrying makes me cope, helps me solve problems and motivates me – maybe I need to re-think things.]</p> <p><i>There have been times when I haven't worried and bad things haven't happened/ I have been able to cope/ I have gotten things done properly and on time.</i> [I guess these experiences show that the benefits I thought worrying gave me may not be real.]</p> <p><i>The things I worry about are unrealistic things that have such a small chance of happening.</i> [How can worrying about unrealistic things occurring be positive, helpful, and beneficial to me?]</p>

Challenging Your Beliefs

Belief: <i>My worrying has positive benefits</i>	
Evidence For	Evidence Against

One thing you may have written down when challenging your positive beliefs about worrying, is that the things you worry about are unrealistic and never happen in reality, and so how can worrying about these things be in any way helpful to you? Here's something you can do that will strengthen this particular challenge to your beliefs.

- Pick a situation that you have worried about either in the past or the present
- Write out in detail all the things you worried would happen – all the disastrous scenarios and outcomes you had going through your head
- Once the situation you worried about has passed, write out in detail what actually happened – the facts
- Now compare what you predicted would happen to what actually happened. Chances are, what you predicted was pretty inaccurate and did not happen in reality
- You might want to do this with a few worry situations you have had
- When you have finished ask yourself, “If what I worry about is inaccurate and unrealistic, how can it be helpful, valuable or beneficial to me?”

Try recording this exercise in this mini worksheet.

Worries vs. Facts Exercise

What's a situation you were (are) worried about?
What did (do) you think would happen? (Write down all the things that went through your mind – the disastrous scenarios and possible things that might have happened)
What actually did happen? (Write down only the facts about what happened)
Compare what actually happened with what you were worried would happen
What conclusions can you make from this? What can you learn from this?

Experimenting With Your Beliefs

Having challenged your beliefs, it is now experiment time!

If you believe that worrying is helpful, beneficial, and valuable to you, then you need to compare what happens when you increase your worrying with what happens when you decrease your worrying.

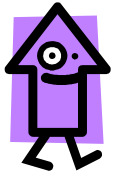
It makes sense that if things don't change between when you worry and when you don't worry, or if things are worse when you worry and better when you don't worry, then your beliefs about the positive benefits of worry are false.

Experiment: Up & Down Worrying

In this experiment we want you to alternate between each day of the week, turning down the volume on worrying on one day, then turning up the volume on worrying the next day.



Day 1 (Down): On the first day, attempt not to worry at all or worry only very minimally for the whole day. You may want to use the “postpone worrying” strategies you have developed, to enable you to turn down your worrying and leave it till the next day. Note: in this experiment, postpone your worrying until the next day rather than until a certain time the same day as you have been doing until now.



Day 2 (Up): On the next day, now increase your worrying and re-visit that old habit of excessively worrying about everything, which you had been doing very regularly prior to commencing this information package. Use the worries you collect over the previous day, as well as worries that present themselves on this day, and have a field day chasing these worrisome thoughts.

Day 3 (Down): Then the next day, attempt not to worry again (or worry only very minimally).

Day 4 (Up): Then the next day go back to worrying excessively again. And so on.

The idea is to turn the volume down on your worrying one day, and then turn the volume up on your worrying the next day. Keep alternating each day between turning down your worrying and turning up your worrying.

Before you start the experiment, complete the worksheet on page 8 in as much detail as you can and then continue filling it out as you go along.

Instructions for completing the worksheet:

First, write down what you think will happen on the days you worry, and what you think will happen on the days you don't worry. If you think worrying has many positive benefits, then you should predict better outcomes on the days you worry, namely that bad things won't happen, you will be able to cope better, you will solve problems more effectively, you will be more motivated, you will do a better job and get more things done, etc.

Now just give the experiment a go and see what happens.

For each of the next 7 days, fill in the day and the date. Make sure you take note of whether it is a turn down or turn up worrying day. At the end of your day, assess whether positive things happened, negative things happened, you coped during the day, you solved problems that arose, and you got things done. Also rate how much you believe your worrying has positive benefits.

Then, compare what you predicted would happen with what actually happened on those 7 days. Typically people predict that if they don't worry they will not experience any of the benefits worrying has to offer. Often people are surprised that there is either:

- No difference in terms of bad things happening, getting the job done, coping, etc, between days they worried and days they didn't, **OR**
- That in fact the reverse is true, and they experienced more benefits on the days they didn't worry (e.g., being better able to concentrate and therefore more and better work was accomplished).

What did you find?

Now that you have challenged and experimented with your beliefs that worrying is beneficial:

Rate again how much you believe your worrying has positive benefits?
(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 worry is beneficial compared to what it was at the start of this module, congratulate yourself. If there's no change yet, that's OK. Remember, changing your beliefs takes time and persistence. Just going over the evidence for and against your beliefs once or experimenting with your beliefs once may not be enough. These are ongoing strategies you can practice until the evidence for your beliefs is weak, the evidence against your beliefs is strong, and you have shown yourself that worry does not have the positive benefits you first thought, and therefore you wouldn't be losing anything valuable by giving up worrying. A good gauge of when you have done enough work on these beliefs may be when your beliefs are relatively weak— about 20%.

Up & Down Worrying Experiment

Prediction 1: What do you think will happen on the days you worry?

Prediction 2: What do you think will happen on the days you don't worry?

Day: Date:	____ day	____ day	____ day	____ day	____ day	____ day	____ Day
Worry Volume	DOWN	UP	DOWN	UP	DOWN	UP	DOWN
Did positive things happen?							
Did negative things happen?							
Did you cope during the day?							
Did you solve problems that arose?							
Did you get things done?							
How much do you believe your worry has positive benefits? (0% to 100%)							

Compare your two predictions with what actually happened

Module Summary

- Believing that worrying is beneficial, helpful, and valuable to you make you reluctant to give up worrying
- To change these beliefs you can:
 - Challenge them – look at the evidence for and against the beliefs.
 - Experiment with them – set up an **up & down worrying experiment**, to see if worrying really is beneficial
- In order to change your beliefs that worrying has many positive benefits, you need to persist with both techniques until:
 - The evidence for your beliefs is weak
 - The evidence against your beliefs is strong
 - You have shown yourself that worrying doesn't bring you the positive benefits you first predicted
- **Once you have achieved these three things ask yourself:**
 - What does all this say about my worrying?
 - It should show you that your worrying is in fact **useless, unhelpful, and of no value.**

Coming up next ...

In the next module you will deal with the specific things you worry about – learning how to challenge your specific worries and think differently about them.

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.

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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!?!”

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We would like to thank Mandy Nathan for the suggestion of a "worry puss" for the theme character of this Information Package