



# What? Me Worry!?!

## Module 7

### **Letting Go Of Worries**

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## Introduction

In the last module, we took a more active approach to dealing with your worries – we challenged them. Now we will take a different approach to dealing with the specific worries you have. This approach could be seen as more passive in nature, as it involves letting go of your worries. Just because it may be more passive doesn't mean that this technique is any less effective or requires any less practice, effort, or skill. Mastering this technique will take some practice and it can also be an effective way of dealing with your worries.

## What Is 'Letting Go'

So, what do we mean by 'Letting Go' of your worries? To let go of your worries means you are doing the opposite to what you would normally do with your worries, which is to engage with them, chase them, react to them, try to control them, and try to reason with them. Instead, letting go is about releasing your worries, letting your worries pass, and not engaging with or reacting to your worries.

Remember in Module 5 we established that worrying does not have the positive benefits you may have once thought. In fact, worrying is unhelpful and of little use or value. It is important to remember this throughout the module, so you know that you are not losing anything valuable by letting go of worries and giving up worrying.

In some ways you have already done a bit of letting go of your worries, when doing your postponement of worrying experiment. In order to postpone your worrying, you had to make the decision not to worry about something at that particular moment. Instead, you had to bring your attention back to the present and what it was you were doing, with the aim of going back to the worrying some time later. In this module we will take this one step further. The aim will be for you to let go of your worries indefinitely (that is, not plan to return to thinking about them later), and we will focus more on the **attitude** you will need to have towards your worries to be able to let go of them.

## How To Let Go Of Worries

Now that you know what "letting go" is all about, there are a number of things that you can do to let go of your worries.



### Be Aware

The first thing is to be aware and acknowledge the presence of worries. You can't let go of something if you don't know you have it in the first place. So, the first thing you should do is just notice and acknowledge that you are worrying. You might do this by saying to yourself: "Here comes a worry..." or "A worry has arrived..." or "I notice I am worrying..."

### Don't Respond

The next thing to do is not to respond to your worries. As we have already said, normally you would engage with your worries, chase them around, or try and control them in some way. Instead, don't do anything to your worries. Just observe your worries with interest. Don't judge them or react to them. Describe to yourself the thoughts, feelings, and sensations you are experiencing right at that moment. Just allow the worries to be, without responding to them or trying to change them in any way.

## Let Go

Only after fully acknowledging, observing, and describing the worries you have in your mind, can you then make the decision to let the worries go. Think of letting the worries just pass by like clouds moving slowly across the sky or leaves floating in a stream. Release the worries and let them wash over you – let them go. You might do this by saying to yourself: “My worries are not facts, realities, or truths...they are just thoughts...they aren’t helpful to me...I’ll just let them go”.

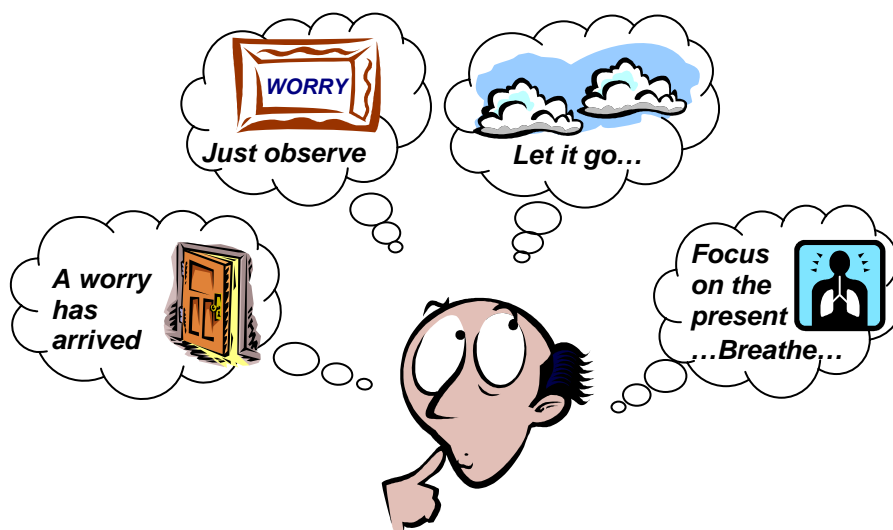
## Be Present-Focused

Once you have told yourself to let the worries go or pass, it is important to focus your attention on the present moment. When you worry, you are focused on the future and bad things that could happen. Instead, if you focus on the simple things happening in the present moment, it is impossible to worry.

Let’s give it a try. Why don’t you start by noticing your breathing and what it is like at that moment. Draw your attention to all the different physical sensations you might feel as you inhale and exhale. Notice the physical sensations you have in your body as you are standing or sitting. Become aware of how your body makes contact with the environment around you (e.g., the chair, the ground, the air) and what these sensations of touch and pressure feel like. For example, notice how your feet feel in your shoes or sandals. Do they feel warm or cool? Do they feel dry or a little clammy? Wiggle your toes a little – how does that feel?

Now ... what did you observe about yourself as you did this exercise? Did you notice that there probably wasn’t a lot of room in your mind for worries?

Being present in the moment may seem a strange concept at first, but it is about increasing your awareness of your breathing, body, and surroundings in the moment as they are happening – something we rarely stop to focus on. This is something that requires a lot of practice, but by focusing on the present moment, you will allow your worries to pass you by.



**Be Aware... Don't React... Let it go... Present focus**

## Deal With A Wandering Mind

When being focused on the present, people might get frustrated when they find their mind wandering away from their focus on their breathing or bodily sensations, and back to worrisome thoughts. This is natural and normal. The important thing to do is to congratulate yourself for recognising your mind has wandered, and just return your attention to the present again and what it was you were focused on. Do this as often as you need to.

On the next page is an example of how you could ‘let go’ next time worrying is a problem for you.

## EXAMPLE

You have a big dinner party planned for the weekend and are worried that everything will go wrong. You are thinking, “Everything will go wrong, I won’t do a good job, they’ll have a bad time.” You are preoccupied by such thoughts and can’t seem to get other important things done. You feel uptight and on edge.

<b>Be Aware</b>	<i>I am worrying about this dinner party.</i>
<b>Don’t Respond</b>	<i>It is interesting to notice that right now my thoughts are predicting bad things. I am feeling anxious, I can’t concentrate, and I feel tense in my stomach and in my hands. I’ll just sit with these feelings a little while...observing and noticing them for a bit.</i>
<b>Let Go</b>	<i>My worries about the party are not facts...they are just thoughts...they aren’t helping me...I’ll just let them go. (Visualise these thoughts floating past you like clouds in the sky or as you breathe out, say under your breath Let go or Release)</i>
<b>Be Present-Focused</b>	<i>I need to bring my attention to the present. I’m noticing my breathing right now. When I inhale I can feel a slight pressure on my stomach as the air fills my lungs. As I exhale I feel a release as the air flows out of my lungs...etc. I now notice my body sitting in this chair, how the seat supports by shoulders, spine, buttocks and backs of my legs...etc.</i>
<b>Deal With A Wandering Mind</b>	<i>Ah, my mind has wandered back to worrying about the party. That’s okay. I’ll just bring my attention back to focusing on the present now. Back to noticing my breathing...</i>

Letting go of worries may appear simple, but it will take practice. The worksheet on page 5 is designed to help you practice this technique.

## Instructions for completing the worksheet:

First, write down what you think will happen when you try to let go of your worries. After that, rate how much of the time you think you will be able to let go of your worries (between 0% and 100%).

Now, try letting go of your worries for at least the next week and see what happens.

For each day of the next 7 days, fill in the day and the date. Follow the prompts on how to let go of your worries every time a worrisome thought rears its ugly head. Record how many times during the day you tried to let go of worries. Write down what happened and whether or not you were able to let go of your worries. Also, rate how much of the time during the day you were able to let go of your worries.

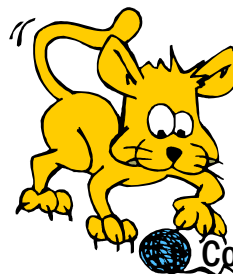
Then, compare what you predicted would happen with what actually happens on those 7 days. Typically people predict they won’t do well, but with some practice they surprise themselves. What did you find?

It is important to remember that **challenging** and **letting go** are two different techniques you can use to deal with the specific worries you have. Certain people prefer one technique over the other, and this will be something you will discover after trying both. Some people like to have both techniques up their sleeve, in case their preferred technique isn’t as helpful for them with particular worries. Also some people like to do the challenging technique first, and then finish by using the letting go technique afterwards. Try both techniques and see which works better for you. But remember, both are skills that require effort and lots of practice to be effective in dealing with the specific things you worry about.



## Module Summary

- Worrying is often about being focused on the future and people generally respond to their worries by engaging with them or trying to control them
- A way of dealing with worries is to be more focused on the present and not respond to worries, but instead let them go
- A certain attitude towards your worries is required to do this, and this involves:
  - Being aware of your worries and acknowledging their presence
  - Not responding to your worries, but instead observing and describing them, and allowing yourself to experience them
  - Acknowledging that your worries are neither reality nor helpful, and making the decision to let them go
  - Moving your attention to the present moment as a means of letting your worries go and focusing on your breathing, bodily sensations, and surroundings at the moment
  - Not getting frustrated when your mind wanders back to worrying, but acknowledge it and draw your focus back to the present
- Practice both the challenging and letting go techniques to see which works better for you when dealing with the specific worries you have.



Coming up next ...

In the next module, you will address something that is common for people with generalised anxiety – having difficulty accepting uncertainty.

## 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* (2<sup>nd</sup> 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* (2<sup>nd</sup> 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* (2<sup>nd</sup> 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:

Saulsman, L., Nathan, P., Lim, L., & Correia, H. (2005). *What? Me Worry!?! Mastering Your Worries*. Perth, Western Australia: Centre for Clinical Interventions.

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

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