

WORRYING

Worry can overwhelm us at times and prevent us from living our best life. We may hold false negative and/or positive beliefs about worrying, which both limit our experiences. For example, a negative belief can be that worrying is uncontrollable and, "if I continue to worry like this, I will feel even more out of control!" An example of a positive belief, which is equally counterproductive, is "Worrying stops bad things from happening."

We do not have to experience feeling more out of control by worrying more. Equally and sadly, worrying does not prevent bad things from happening.

AVOIDANCE AND THOUGHT CONTROL

Avoidance is an approach that some use to deal with worries. Avoidance can be used to avoid a feared outcome e.g. giving a speech; or to avoid the worry itself e.g. not listening to any negative news as it may trigger the worry. This approach does not support us to disconfirm our negative and false beliefs about worrying if we never face our worries and consider other possible experiences that may support us more.

Another approach to deal with worry is to use our thoughts to suppress the experience.

This can again be counterproductive as whenever we try to stop ourselves from thinking about "the pink elephant", what do we indeed start thinking about??



DEVELOPING A MINDFUL APPROACH TO DEAL WITH WORRY

An approach used in Mindfulness, when we start to worry, is to recognise quite simply that the thoughts have "arrived." This allows us to become separate from our thoughts and enable us to become "observers" of them as they "visit" us.

Worry thoughts are the same as any other thoughts, but may appear more serious to us because we tend to worry about things that we deem important to us which we may perceive to be threatened. We may worry about the safety of a loved one who is making their way home or we may worry about the health of a loved one who is susceptible to feeling sick.



THE WORRY HABIT - A MINDFUL APPROACH

A MINDFUL TECHNIQUE

Our worry thoughts can arrive habitually because they wish to protect us in some way. However, when they arrive, it can feel quite overwhelming at times and not be helpful. To address this feeling and to support us, we can try this exercise:

1. When the worry thoughts come, we can gently and calmly acknowledge that “worrying thoughts are here.” We can take several deep breaths to support ourselves.
2. This allows us to take control. We are telling our pre-frontal cortex, our logical part of our brain, that we recognise these thoughts have arrived and that thoughts are not always facts.
3. To bring ourselves from our minds into our bodies and into the present moment, where we can dissipate the worrying thoughts, we can take a mindful moment to ask ourselves: “What do I see, hear, feel, taste and smell in this present moment?”
4. Notice how this has made us feel: “Did I observe the thoughts more clearly? Where did I feel the worry thoughts in my body? What did I feel when I focused on what I could see, hear, feel, taste and see?”
5. Practise, practise, practise – The more we practise this, the more we can notice our thoughts, and the more we can create a mindful space between who we actually are and these “visitors.”

THOUGHTS ARE NOT FACTS.
PAY ATTENTION, ON PURPOSE, TO THE PRESENT MOMENT; NOT TO THE PAST OR THE FUTURE, WHERE WORRIES
MAY TAKE YOU.
YOU ARE HERE NOW.