# What? Me Worry!?!

## Module 6

# Positive Beliefs About Worrying

# Introduction

Ask yourself the question: *if you believed worrying is helpful, 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. Worriers tend to hold beliefs that repetitively thinking about negative things can be a helpful thing to do. The idea that worrying is helpful is what starts us worrying in the first place. 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"
"Worrying helps me understand things"
"Worrying is doing something"
"Worrying shows I care"

# 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 worrying is helpful?**
(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 helpful 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 helpful, 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 helpful?
What's the evidence for your positive beliefs?
Can you specifically describe how worrying helps?
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 is the aim of your worrying? Does worrying really achieve this aim?
Can you achieve your aims without worrying? (i.e., problem solving, taking action)
Is it worrying that is helpful or something else? (i.e., problem solving, taking action)
What is the difference between worrying and problem solving?
Have there been situations where you haven't worried, and things have still turned out okay?
Have there been situations where you have worried, and that has actually made things worse?
What are the disadvantages of worrying? How do these fit with it being helpful?

**EXAMPLE:**

| Evidence For | Evidence Against |
|---|---|
| *Worrying prepares me, so that if bad things happen I can cope better.* [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.] | *It isn't the worrying that helps me, but problem solving and taking action.* [I could do these things without worrying]. |
| *Worrying helps me get everything done properly and on time.* [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.] | *Worrying and problem solving are not the same.* [Problem solving focuses on what I can do about a situation, worrying is just repetitively thinking about the situation in a negative way…how can that be helpful?]. |
| *I don't know how worrying stops bad things happening - I just feel it does.* [I don't have any strong, specific or scientific evidence to back my belief. What I am thinking is really very superstitious.] | *Worrying makes me upset, interferes with my ability to concentrate and make decisions, and makes me procrastinate.* [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.] |
| *The fact that nothing bad ever happens is because I worry.* [I have no explanation for how this is possible. How can my worrying actually affect what happens in the world?] | *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 guess these experiences show that the benefits I thought worrying gave me may not be real.] |

# Challenging Your Beliefs

| **Belief:** *Worrying is helpful* | |
|---|---|
| **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 don't hold up.

## Experiment: Up & Down Worrying

In this experiment we want you to alternate between each day of the week, **turning <u>down</u> the volume on worrying** on one day, then **turning <u>up</u> the volume on worrying** the next day. It should look something like this:

Day 1 (**Down Worry**): On the first day, attempt **<u>not to worry</u>** at all or only very minimally for the whole day.  You may want to use the "postponement" strategies you have developed, to enable you to turn down your worrying and <u>leave it till the next day</u>.  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.
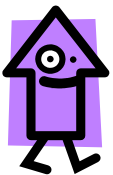
Day 2 (**Up Worry**): On the next day, now **<u>increase your worrying</u>** and re-visit that old habit of excessively worrying about everything, which you had been doing very regularly prior to commencing this information package.  Use the worries you collected over the previous day, as well as worries that present themselves on this day, and have a field day chasing these worrisome thoughts.

On Day 3, turn the worry volume DOWN, and on day 4, turn the worry volume UP 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.  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, you got things done, and note how you felt.

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 perceived 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, but that they felt worse on the days they worried more **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 helpful:

**Rate again how much you believe worrying is helpful?**
(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 worrying is futile, and therefore you wouldn't be losing anything valuable by giving up worrying. We would aim for a 0% belief that worrying is helpful, so keep using the strategies in this module to help you get there.

# Up & Down Worrying Experiment

**Prediction 1:** What do you think will happen on the days you <u>do</u> worry (UP WORRY DAYS)?

_____

_____

_____

_____

**Prediction 2:** What do you think will happen on the days you <u>don't</u> worry (DOWN WORRY DAYS)?

_____

_____

_____

_____

| Day: | ____day | ____day | ____day | ____day | ____day | ____day | ____Day |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **DOWN WORRY** | **UP WORRY** | **DOWN WORRY** | **UP WORRY** | **DOWN WORRY** | **UP WORRY** | **DOWN WORRY** |
| 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 did you feel? | | | | | | | |

Compare your two predictions with what actually happened

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

# Module Summary

- Believing that worrying is helpful and beneficial can 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 an **up & down worrying experiment**, to see if worrying really is helpful

- 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 learn strategies to help you solve problems you are faced with, rather than worrying about these problems. Doing this will help you appreciate the difference between worrying and problem solving.

# About The Modules

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Dr Lisa Saulsman** (MPsych[1]; PhD[2])
*Centre for Clinical Interventions*
**Paula Nathan** (MPsych[1])
*Director, Centre for Clinical Interventions*
*Adjunct Senior Lecturer, School of Psychiatry and Clinical*
   *Neuroscience, The University of Western Australia*
**Dr Louella Lim** (DPsych[3])
*Centre for Clinical Interventions*

**Dr Helen Correia** (MApp Psych[1]; PhD[2])
*Centre for Clinical Interventions*
**Dr Rebecca Anderson** (MPsych[1]; PhD[2])
*Centre for Clinical Interventions*
**Bruce Campbell** (MPsych[1])
*Centre for Clinical Interventions*

[1]*Masters of Psychology (Clinical Psychology)*      [2]*Doctor of Philosophy (Clinical Psychology)*      [3]*Doctor of Psychology (Clinical)*

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

Saulsman, L., Anderson, R., Campbell, B., & Swan, A. (2015). *Working with Worry and Rumination: A Metacognitive Group Treatment Programme for Repetitive Negative Thinking*. Perth, Western Australia: Centre for Clinical Interventions.

## BACKGROUND

The concepts and strategies in the modules have been developed from evidence based psychological practice, primarily Metacognitive Therapy (MCT). MCT is a type of psychotherapy developed by Professor Adrian Well's at the University of Manchester.  MCT is an extension of Cognitive-Behaviour Therapy (CBT) and is based on the theory that repetitive negative thinking, such as chronic worry in generalised anxiety, is a result of problematic metacognitions (i.e., beliefs about thinking) and behaviours. There is good scientific evidence to support that targeting metacognitions and behaviours in therapy can help many people to overcome generalised anxiety. Examples of this evidence are reported in:

McEvoy, P. M., Erceg-Hurn, D. M., Anderson, R. A., Campbell, B. N. C., Swan, A., Saulsman, L. M., Summers, M., & Nathan, P. R. (2015). Group metacognitive therapy for repetitive negative thinking in primary and non-primary generalized anxiety disorder: an effectiveness trial. *Journal of Affective Disorders, 175*, 124-132.

## 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:

Saulsman, L., Nathan, P., Lim, L., Correia, H., Anderson, R., & Campbell, B.  (2015).  *What? Me Worry!?! Mastering Your Worries*.  Perth, Western Australia: Centre for Clinical Interventions.