



What? Me Worry!??

Module 8

Helpful Thinking

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Introduction

In this module, you will learn more helpful ways of thinking about things that concern you. This is similar to problem solving, which is more action-focused constructive thinking for worries that we can do something about. This module will look at ways we may be able to think differently, in a more helpful way, about some of the things that bother us.

The Thinking-Feeling Connection



What you think, and the thoughts that go through your mind, are very important in determining how you feel. Stop for a moment and think: when you are feeling good, what sorts of thoughts roam around in your head? Conversely, when you are feeling bad, what sorts of thoughts are you having?

It makes sense to most people when we say that:

*It is not the situation you are in that determines how you feel,
but the thoughts, meanings, and interpretations you bring to that situation.*

Here is an example of what we mean. Imagine you are told that you will have a pop quiz on Monday. Below are three different ways of thinking about this same situation and the different emotions, behaviours, and physical sensations that would result from thinking in these different ways.

| Example event: Being told you have a pop quiz | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| | Emotions | Behaviour | Physical |
| <u>Thought 1</u> <i>I love quizzes! I know this stuff quite well so I think I'll do fine.</i> | Happy | Do a bit of revision | Quite relaxed |
| <u>Thought 2</u> <i>I don't know anything, I am going to fail for sure.</i> | Anxious Sad | Try to study hard, can't concentrate, don't get much done | Sick in stomach Tense |
| <u>Thought 3</u> <i>So what? I don't care. This subject isn't important anyway.</i> | Neutral | Do no study | Quite relaxed |

Can you see how what we think can be so important in determining how we feel emotionally and physically, and can influence what we do?

As we have already explained, worrying is a type of thought process where you engage in repetitive negative and catastrophic thinking about things you predict could happen. When such a negative thinking style is constantly hassling you, emotions like anxiety may result, and you may experience unpleasant physical sensations and avoid doing certain things. One way to lift those negative emotions and unpleasant bodily sensations and get you back to doing things, is to challenge those worrisome thoughts. This means that you don't just accept them as true, but question them further, just like the previous detective work you did with your beliefs about worrying.

When To Use Helpful Thinking

Before we outline how to go about thinking in more helpful ways, it is very important to be clear on when this is a helpful strategy to use to deal with worries. Trying to reason with your worries and think in logical and realistic ways, may be something you have tried before. You may have found that often this approach is useless, as the worry just pops back. What we know is that trying to think logically in the moment as soon as a worry pops up is ineffective, as it can be just another way we are trying to control and push away our negative thoughts, but ‘rationalising’ them away! As we know, pushing our worries away, even if the way we go about it seems sensible, just does not work.

Therefore, the helpful thinking that you will learn in this module, should be reserved for your “thinking time” that is part of postponement. You may be tempted to use what you learn in this module to talk back to the worries as soon as they pop up, as a way of trying to put them in their place. But doing this is just giving the negative thoughts time and attention, and getting into that ‘push-pull’ ‘tug-o-war’ that gets you stuck in worry in the first place.

So remember, when a worry pops up, postponement is still your way of responding to it in the moment. Only later in thinking time, and only if something is still bothering you, should you then turn to using more helpful thinking strategies. The aim is that either problem solving or helpful thinking, will be the type of thinking strategies you can use during your allocated ‘thinking time’ that is part of worry postponement. Most people don’t do their “best thinking” in the moment when a worry pops up and emotions are high. Acknowledge this, and save problem solving and helpful thinking to your thinking time. You may be surprised about the productive and helpful thinking you are able to do.

Helpful Thinking Diary

We would like to introduce you to a ‘Helpful Thinking Diary’ to guide you in developing more helpful ways of thinking. If this way of thinking is new to you, then following a step-by-step guide can be useful. Even if you are familiar with this approach, putting pen to paper can free your mind, making it less cluttered so you are able to think more clearly



On the next page is an example of how to complete a Helpful Thinking Diary, and following that is a blank copy for you to practice on. The Diaries guide you through how to put your worrisome thoughts out on paper.

The Diary will first ask you to write down information about your worries (**My Worries**). For example:

- What am I worrying about?
- List my worrisome thoughts.

After seeing these worrisome thoughts written down, you’ll then need to ask yourself:

- What am I predicting is going to happen? Usually you are predicting that something bad is going to happen, so be specific and write down exactly what it is you fear might happen.
- How strongly do I believe this will happen? Rate the strength of your belief between 0 and 100%
- What emotion(s) am I feeling?
- How intense are these emotions? Rate the intensity of your emotion(s) between 0 and 100%

You are not just going to get those worrisome thoughts out on paper, you are also going to start looking at the situation from different perspectives and try out some more **Helpful Thinking**. Here are some useful questions to ask yourself to get the ‘helpful thinking juices flowing’:

- What is the evidence for my prediction?
- What is the evidence against my prediction?
- What is the worst that could happen? And what could I do to cope?
- What is the best that could happen?
- What is the most likely thing that will happen?
- What are the consequences of worrying about this?
- What is a more helpful way to view the situation? What advice would I give to a friend feeling this way?

Based on your answers to the questions in your Diary, you will then come to a more **Helpful Conclusion** by asking:

- What would be a more balanced and helpful thought to replace my worry?

The final step is to:

- Re-rate how much you now believe the original prediction you were making.
- Re-rate how intense the emotions are that you were originally feeling.

If you follow through with this strategy, it is likely that you will experience a decrease in your belief in the negative predictions you were making and a decrease in the intensity of your emotions. If it has been useful in this way, then great, you can put the worry to rest. However, if this process hasn’t led to more helpful thinking, then continue to postpone the worry. Because remember, as we know from our work on the positive beliefs about worry...worrying about it will serve no purpose.

In general, keep practicing more helpful thinking during your thinking time when needed. It will take time, persistence, and practice, but being able to see life in a more balanced way will be very rewarding.

Helpful Thinking Diary (Example)

My Worries

| What am I worried about? | What am I predicting? | What emotion(s) am I feeling? (Rate the intensity 0-100%) |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| A work project | I won't meet the deadline. I won't do a good job. My boss won't be happy with me. | Anxious (80%) Depressed (50%) |
| List my worrisome thoughts | How much do I believe it will happen (0-100%)? | |
| Will I be able to meet the deadline? What if I don't do a good job? What if I don't get it in on time? What will my boss do to me? | 80% | |

Helpful Thinking

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| What is the evidence for my prediction? I am very busy, so getting the project done will be a challenge. My boss hasn't been very friendly of late. | What is the evidence against my prediction? I have always finished on time before. My work is generally of a high standard. I have worried about stressful work situations before and gotten through them okay. My boss either praises my work or doesn't say anything - they have never really criticised my work. |
| What is the worst that could happen? And what could I do to cope? I could get fired. But, I could find another job - I'd be O.K. financially until I did. If my boss criticised my work it wouldn't feel good, but I guess I could take it constructively. It wouldn't be the end of the world, I'd get over it. | What is the best that could happen? I could do such a good job that I get lots of praise from my boss. I may even get a bonus. |
| What is the most likely thing that will happen? | |
| I'll get it done on time, and the quality of my work will be O.K. My boss will either be happy or neutral about it. | |
| What are the consequences of worrying about this? | |
| Worrying about this doesn't do any good, it just makes it worse because I find it hard to focus on getting the job done. | |
| What is a more helpful way to view the situation? What advice would I give to a friend feeling this way? | |
| I have done this sort of thing before, so I can probably do it again. I am good at what I do, so I'll probably do a good job - it doesn't have to be absolutely perfect. I could tell my boss I am under a lot of pressure - they don't expect me to be a 'superhero'. Other people's work is not as good as mine, and they don't get fired. I can be happy with just getting it in on time, and doing a good job - I don't also need my boss to praise me. | |

Helpful Conclusion

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A more balanced and helpful thought to replace my worry is: Worrying about this is unhelpful. I know I can do this job on time and well. All my past experiences show me that. I should remember that, rather than thinking the worst. | |
| How much do I believe my prediction now (0-100%) 40% | How intense are my emotions now (0-100%) Anxious (40%) Depressed (10%) |

Helpful Thinking Diary

My Worries

| | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| What am I worried about? List my worrisome thoughts | What am I predicting? How much do I believe it will happen (0-100%)? | What emotion(s) am I feeling? (Rate the intensity 0-100%) |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|

Helpful Thinking

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| What is the evidence <u>for</u> my prediction? | What is the evidence <u>against</u> my prediction? |
| What is the worst that could happen? And what could I do to cope? | What is the best that could happen? |
| What is the most likely thing that will happen? | |
| What are the consequences of worrying about this? | |
| What is a more helpful way to view the situation? What advice would I give to a friend feeling this way? | |

Helpful Conclusion

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| A more balanced and helpful thought to replace my worry is: | |
| How much do I believe my prediction now (0-100%) | How intense are my emotions now (0-100%) |

Module Summary

- How you think affects the way you feel emotionally and physically, and also affects the way you behave
- Worrying is a negative thought process that makes you feel anxious and tense, and makes you avoid things
- If certain worries that you have postponed still bother you at thinking time, then one way to deal with them is to try thinking in more helpful ways, which usually involves looking at the situation from a different perspective
- For worriers, practicing more helpful thinking is best done at thinking time, rather than in the moment as soon as a worry pops into their head
- You can practice thinking in more helpful ways using the **Helpful Thinking Diary**
- Using the Diary, write down what it is you are predicting, and rate how much you believe it. Also rate your emotions
- Then question your worries by asking yourself:
 - What is the evidence for and against my prediction?
 - What is the best, worst (could I cope?), and most likely scenarios?
 - What are the consequences of worrying about this?
 - How else could I see things? What would I say to a friend?
- By asking these questions, you can develop a more balanced/helpful thought to replace your worries
- Finally, re-rate your belief in your worries and re-rate your emotions, to see if your Helpful Thinking Diary has been useful in dealing with your worry. If it has been helpful...great! If not, continue to postpone.



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:

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 Wells 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.

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

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“WHAT? ME WORRY!?!”

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