

Lesson 7

Assigning 'Worry Time' to Address Anxiety

Introduction

It may seem counterintuitive but setting a time of day during which you can embrace your worrying thoughts, can help you take the control back over anxiety. Let's think about it, if your worries are popping into your mind several times a day and affecting your work, relationships, or enjoyment, why *wouldn't* you want to consider them at a time when you can give them your full attention...?

For this strategy to be effective, it's important to identify a time when you're most likely to be able to give your worry/problem the best chance of receiving your full attention. Afterall, isn't your mental wellbeing worth you devoting 100% of your undivided attention for only a few minutes a day?

If you choose your Worry Time to be at 7pm, but your worries keep entering your mind throughout the day, acknowledging they're there and reminding yourself that you'll be examining them later when you can give them your whole attention is better than trying to stop thinking about them. If possible, decide to do something relaxing, such as exercise, crafts, or meditation to help refocus your mind on the here and now, rather than your worries.

The science

Studies from cognitive therapy show that it's best to choose a time when you can give your 'worries' your full attention and a specific length of time, for instance, 15 minutes, to be able to problem solve them efficiently.

Sticking to the 'time' rule is important, as if you start extending the duration of your 'worry time,' or doing it at different times of day, you're likely to miss the slot and if you miss two days in a row, you're more likely to 'give up' altogether. So as not to interfere with your sleep, choose a time that's not too close to bedtime.

Trying to deny worrying thoughts tends to make them stronger.

Some people find that they don't need to use their Worry Time.

Why this helps

Postponing worries until you can deal with them fully helps keep you focused on the task in hand and can result in greater productivity and more meaningful relationships.

Delaying your worries gives you a sense of control over them and enables you to go about your daily business.

Exercise (Downloadable Worries for Today sheet - last page of this doc)

1. Use a notebook and pen to write down each problem, worry, or fear.
2. Ask yourself if you can solve it.
3. Prioritise your worries, and focus on the one of most concern first, dismissing less urgent concerns until the next 'Worry time.'
4. If it's easy to solve the problem, brainstorm and write down what you can do and how quickly you can do it. If you think it's an immediate action, do it straight away, then 'Let Go' of the worry.
5. If you've dealt with your worry, simply remind yourself that you've addressed it as far as you can, and use distraction techniques by shifting your attention onto something else, whether it's exercise or meditation.

In our video, we use a visualisation technique to help enforce the controlled worry period.

Video

Let's imagine being at work during break time, and everyone's chatting and busying themselves making cups of tea and coffee and we hear part of a conversation that triggers our anxiety about a forthcoming event. We suddenly feel sweaty, feel as if we're not in the room, have a feeling of dread, our mind's racing, and we can't string a sentence together when a colleague asks us a simple question.

We've already made time to think our worry through, which is 7pm tonight, when we'll be writing down what our present worry is, how we'll manage it, and when, then let go of it.

We can imagine a scene in which we visualise the worry on a leaf, picking it up, taking it down to the river and putting it in the water. We remind ourselves that we'll be giving it our undivided attention at 7pm, then watch it float away. No matter how many times the worry arises, we notice it and postpone it until our Worry Time.

Bonus Tips

If taking action will easily solve/reduce your anxiety/worry, it's best to do this at your earliest opportunity. In the meantime, if the worry continues, remind yourself that you've made a plan as to when you'll be able to address it, then redirect your attention onto something else.

Writing a quick note on the worry as it occurs can help it stop interfering with your attention on the present, so keep a small notebook and pen on your person.

When you identify a worry that's outside of your control, you have no option but to 'Let Go' of it, as worrying won't help. You can remind yourself that everyone worries; it's a normal thing to do as a human; then use distraction techniques each time the worry occurs until it's extinguished.

What have you learnt?

Saying to yourself, 'This is another worry that I'll deal with at X O'Clock tonight,' or writing a brief note down, for example, 'phone venue,' will help banish the worry until your Worry Time.

Worrying is normal and it's ok to give yourself permission to set a time to work on it. You're not allowing it to consume you for your whole day and night.

If you try to stop thinking about a worrying thought, it has a nasty habit of coming back until you have a plan to deal with it. Remind yourself of the 'Worry time,' then use distraction or visualisation techniques.

What next?

Over the next week, have a go at identifying your Worry Time and suspending your worrying until then.

During Worry Time, use the form in the exercise to help you through your worries.

If you're constantly worrying and feel like you're losing perspective in your life, the next lesson considers how to regain your control using a method that is achieving world-wide popularity.

Worries for Today

Worry 1

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.....

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.....

.....

Can I Solve It?

Yes



What Can I Do?

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.....

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No



"Let It Go"

(Remind yourself that
it's natural to worry)

When Can I Do It?



Immediately

Do it right away.
If the worry continues,
remind yourself that
you've dealt with it.
Then, distract with an
enjoyable activity.



Soon

Do it when you can. If
the worry re-enters
your mind, remind
yourself that you're
going to tackle it. Then
redirect your attention
onto something else.