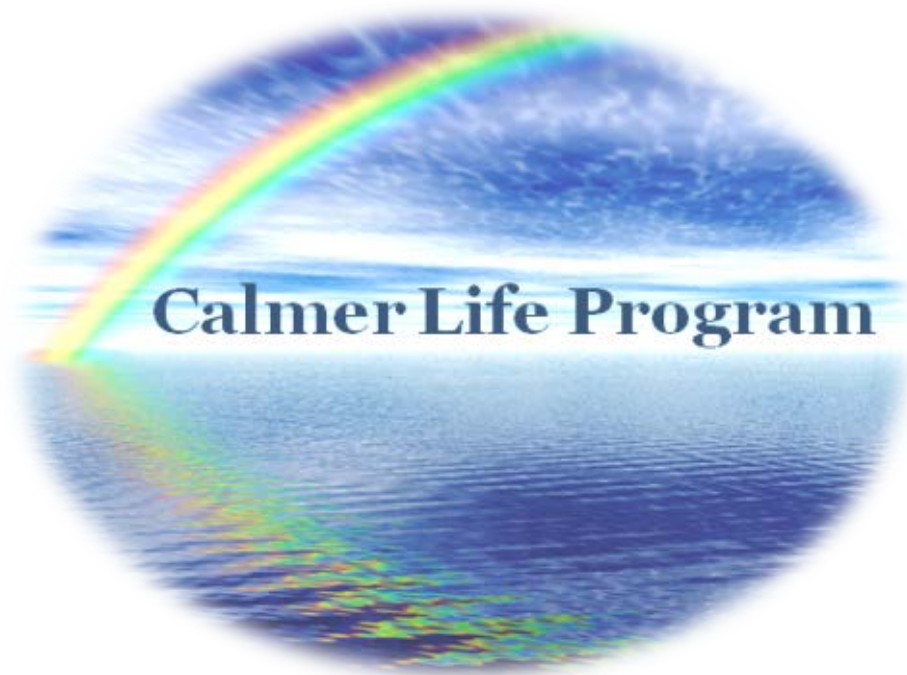


Calmer Life Program



Self-Help Workbook

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INTRODUCTION

Calmer Life Self-Help Workbook

This workbook is designed for older adults who find it hard to manage their worry/stress. It includes information from the Calmer Life program. This workbook is intended as a self-help tool to help you learn skills to manage worry/stress on your own. Below is some information about worry, as well as the skills described in this workbook, to help you decide whether it may be useful for you.

What Is Worry?

There are many different types of anxiety. For example, some people have anxiety about giving a speech in public, while others may have anxiety about flying. Worry is one type of anxiety. Individuals who worry tend to be concerned or fret about a lot of different things in their lives. For example, they may frequently have concerns that something bad might happen to themselves or others. They may worry about many different things, including finances, employment, children, health of loved ones or their own health. People who worry too much often have trouble controlling their worrying, and it can cause problems in their lives.

To help you understand what worrying too much may look like for others, here are a few examples of older adults who experience problems with worry:

Geraldo is 68 years old and has had a lot of stressful things happen to him recently. His wife left him, his mother passed away, and he has a lot of concerns about his health and finances. He has been retired for about five years and, although he can live on his savings, he constantly thinks about things that might go wrong in the future. He worries what will happen if his health gets worse, and how he will be able to afford treatment. He worries about where he will live if he can no longer afford his house payments. He finds it difficult to stop thinking about all these problems, and these thoughts often keep him up at night. Even though he is very worried about his finances, he cannot bring himself to open bills when he receives them in the mail, and they are beginning to pile up. He notices that, since he has been worrying, he often feels sick to his stomach.

Mariella is 72 years old. She has a daughter who has three children. Her daughter recently experienced a difficult divorce and is in danger of losing custody of Marielle's grandchildren due to her problems with alcohol use. Mariella often cares for her three grandchildren, whom she enjoys; but she is finding it difficult to keep up with the demands of caring for young children. She has back pain, which gets worse with frequent movement and doesn't seem to be responding to the medication she gets from the doctor. Her muscles are tense, and she feels like she can never relax. She worries that, if her back pain gets worse, she will be unable to care for the grandchildren. She worries what will happen to them, and if her daughter will ever stop

drinking. When she starts worrying about her family and her health, she finds that she is unable to stop. She notices that she is smoking and eating more junk food lately to try to get her mind off her worries.

Geraldo and Mariella both experience worry that is causing problems in their lives. Though their lives are very different, they have many similarities in their worrying. They both worry about a number of different topics or issues. Both experience physical feelings because of their worry – Geraldo feels sick to his stomach, and Mariella feels tension in her muscles. Their worrying affects not only their mood, but also their behaviors. While Geraldo tends to avoid things that he is worried about, Mariella tends to use unhealthy behaviors like smoking and eating too much.

Do you worry a lot about a lot of different things? Does your worrying cause unpleasant physical symptoms? Does it change your behavior in ways that may not be helpful? If so, you may be worrying too much.

Note: We use the terms *worry/stress* throughout this workbook. Some people may have other words to describe their worrying: anxiety, nervousness, fears, concerns...feel free to mentally substitute *worry/stress* with whatever term makes most sense to you.

Connection Between Worry and Stress

Worry and stress often go together. People tend to experience stress in response to a threat – for example, if someone experiences a stressful event, like, coming face-to-face with a wild animal, his/her body will get into a “fight or flight” mode so that he/she can fight off the animal or flee from the situation, both of which might help him or her survive. Similarly, when faced with other stressful experiences, such as not being able to pay the mortgage and facing the threat of losing one’s home, people may experience the same stress response reaction.

Individuals can also experience stress when they have worrisome thoughts. For example, just the thought of not being able to pay the mortgage can cause stress. Therefore, people experiencing a lot of stressful events in their life can experience increased worry. Due to this overlap, we use the words *worry* and *stress* together throughout this workbook.

CONSEQUENCES OF WORRY/STRESS

Too much worry/stress can not only affect mood, but also physical health. Worry/stress are linked with many negative health problems, including sleep difficulties, depression, lower quality of life, problems with thinking and memory, and increased pain. Worry/stress have also been linked to increased disability, use of medical services, and mortality. So reducing your worry/stress is also important for your physical health.

Treatment Options for Worry/Stress

Worry/stress (as well as depression) are often treated with medication. Though this workbook does not include information about using medication for reducing worry/stress, it does include information about how to talk with your doctor about worry symptoms and what you are learning in this workbook. This is an important way to learn whether additional treatment may be necessary. At the end of this introduction (pages 16 and 17), you will find a worksheet you can fill out and bring to your next doctor's visit to help guide a discussion about your worry/stress.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is another way to manage worry/stress that involves two steps: learning 1) how to better understand and recognize worry/stress, and 2) how to use coping skills to manage them. CBT is effective for reducing worry and depression, and improving quality of life, in older adults. This program is designed to help you learn coping skills on your own, though some people benefit from seeing a therapist or counselor individually. Again, your doctor can help you decide if you may need more support than this workbook can provide.

The Calmer Life Workbook

This is a self-help workbook to help you manage worry by learning coping skills. You can choose from a selection of modules, each describing different skills that may be helpful for reducing your worry/stress. The workbook includes a brief description of each coping skill and worksheets to help you practice the skills so that you can start to work the skills into your daily life.

Option to Include Religion/Spirituality

Some people find their religious/spiritual (R/S) beliefs to be a comfort that helps them manage worry/stress. Throughout this program, you can work any R/S beliefs you may have into the skills you are learning. In the first module, we describe how including R/S beliefs may be useful for some. The choice is yours, and you can choose to include, or not include, R/S in any skill. Throughout this workbook, text for incorporating optional R/S elements is presented in *italics*. If you do not want to incorporate R/S beliefs, simply skip text in *italics*.

Module Overview

This workbook includes different modules, each of which involves learning coping skills to manage your worry/stress. Most people find the first three modules, as well as the final module ("Maintaining a Calmer Life"), to be helpful, so we recommend that everyone complete these modules. All other modules are optional and may be more helpful for some people than others. Below are descriptions of each of the modules:

1. “Becoming Aware of Worry/Stress”

The first module includes an exercise designed to help you better understand your reason for wanting to reduce worry/stress, as well as information about the different symptoms of worry/stress. You will learn how to become more aware of when you have these symptoms. You will also learn how using calming skills (like the ones described in this workbook) can help with worry/stress. You’ll begin using a practice exercise designed to help you increase your awareness of worry/stress symptoms, which you can use throughout this workbook. We recommend that everyone complete this module.

2. “Learn How to Relax”

The second module teaches you the first calming skill – learning how to relax with deep breathing. When you worry or are stressed, your breathing tends to become quick and shallow. This can cause you to feel more anxious. Learning how to breathe slowly and deeply is a coping-based skill that helps with worry/stress. We recommend that everyone complete this module.

3. “Using Calming Thoughts to Manage Worry/Stress”

The third module involves learning another calming skill to manage anxiety, calming thoughts. Worrying thoughts tend to be negative and can lead you to feel more worried and stressed. On the other hand, thoughts that are calming or soothing can decrease worry/stress. When you find yourself worrying, using a calming statement such as, “Everything is going to be okay,” or “I know I can handle this” can be a good coping strategy. We recommend that everyone complete this module.

4. “Changing Your Behavior to Manage Depression”

Worry and depression often occur together. This module involves learning how your behaviors relate to your mood, and how to change your behavior to improve your mood. If you are experiencing a depressed mood in addition to worrying, this module may be helpful.

5. “Changing Your Behavior to Manage Worry/Stress”

Many people with worry/stress tend to change their behavior to try to manage their worry/stress: for example, they may avoid situations that cause them anxiety (for example, by putting things off, like Geraldo), or they may do things too much or too frequently to try to manage anxiety (for example, smoking too much, like Linda). Both behaviors serve as

ways to try to avoid worry/stress but aren't very helpful. This module may be useful for you if you tend to avoid things or notice yourself repeating anxiety-related behaviors.

6. "Problem-Solving"

Problem-solving is a skill that helps you to learn how to think through a problem and come up with solutions. It may be useful if you are facing significant problems in your life that you are unsure how to manage (for example, you may have problems in communicating in your relationships or managing your finances).

7. "Progressive Muscle Relaxation"

Progressive muscle relaxation is a skill that helps you learn how to relax your body. You will learn to pay attention to tension that builds up in your body and learn tools to relax. You will tense and relax different muscle groups and learn how your body feels when it is tense and when it is relaxed.

8. "Thought Stopping"

Thought stopping helps with repeated negative thinking. You will learn to focus on your environment and experiences to distract you from worry thoughts. This simple skill helps quickly and may be useful if you notice yourself getting "stuck" in worrisome thinking patterns.

9. "Changing Your Thoughts to Manage Worry/Stress"

This module helps you to identify unrealistic thoughts that increase or cause worry/stress and change them to more realistic thoughts. This skill may be useful if you have serious problems with worry/stress, or if you notice that your thinking may be unrealistic.

10. "Maintain a Calmer Life"

The final module reviews the skills learned throughout the Calmer Life workbook, describing how you can maintain the skills throughout your life. We recommend that everyone complete this module.

You can use page 11 to design the Calmer Life Program in a way that works best for you by selecting modules you would like to complete.

Skills Practice Exercises

At the end of every module are worksheets to help you practice the new skill. The more you practice the skills you learn in this workbook, the more you will benefit from them. Remember when you first learned how to ride a bike or make sweet potato pie? Once you learned how to ride the bike or how to make the pie, practicing the skill over and over again helped you get better at it. The repeated practice helped you learn the material and remember it better. This is similar to the benefit of using the worksheets in this workbook – the more you use them, the more you will learn and remember what you’ve learned. Throughout the workbook, you will see recommendations on how often you should practice each skill to become comfortable with it, and how to best practice it.

Developing Your Calmer Life Program

In the following week, think about which topics could help you achieve your goals and experience a calmer life. Modules 1, 2, 3, and 10 are useful for most. The other modules cover other topics. Read the descriptions of the topics in the remaining modules and choose those that may be most helpful to you, based on your most important problems and current goals.

TOPIC	OVERVIEW	MY MODULES
1. Becoming Aware of Worry/Stress	Learn about worry/stress. Become aware of your own physical signs, thoughts, and actions.	✓
2. Learn How to Relax	Reduce worry/stress with slow, deep breathing.	✓
3. Using Calming Thoughts to Manage Worry/Stress	Manage your worry/stress by using calming statements.	✓
4. Changing Your Behavior to Manage Depression	Get involved in activities you may avoid because of sad mood.	
5. Changing Your Behavior to Manage Worry/Stress	Stop engaging in repetitive behaviors. Get involved in activities you may avoid because of worry/stress.	
6. Problem Solving	Solve problems through effective steps. This is useful for times when worry/stress gets in the way of finding solutions.	
7. Progressive Muscle Relaxation	Pinpoint and release muscle tension. Learn progressive muscle relaxation.	
8. Thought Stopping	Stop dwelling on worry/stress thoughts.	
9. Changing Your Thoughts to Manage Worry/Stress	Identify negative and unrealistic thoughts and replace them with more realistic thoughts.	
10. Maintaining a Calmer Life	Review your progress, and develop a plan to continue living more calmly.	✓

MODULE 1: Becoming Aware of Your Worry/Stress

Becoming Aware of Your Worry/Stress

Orientation to the Calmer Life Workbook

The Calmer Life Self-Help Workbook has two goals. First, you will become more aware of your worry/stress symptoms. Second, you will learn new skills to cope with worry/stress. Each module will deal with different calming skills you can learn to help manage your worry/stress. To benefit from this workbook, you will need to practice the new skills each day. At the end of each module, you will be given practice exercises to complete during the week to practice the new skill.

Assessing Your Motivation for Change

Worry/stress is natural. Everyone experiences it, and it is part of being human. It can even be a good thing, in certain situations. For example, when planning an event, packing for a trip, getting ready for guests to come over, etc., a little worry can be helpful for getting things done. However, worry/stress can become a problem when it is experienced:

- Too frequently (for example, spending several hours a day worrying)
- Too intensely (for example, becoming extremely upset or distressed when worrying)
- Long past a frightening situation
- When you can't control it (or can't stop it once it starts)
- In a way that prevents you from accomplishing desired behaviors or life goals.

In your own words, why do you need help with worry/stress?

❖ _____

❖ _____

❖ _____

When trying to change your worry/stress, it can be important to think about what is involved with making changes in life. There are good things and not-so-good things about staying the same. And there are usually good things and less good things about change as well. Sometimes it can be helpful to look at the pluses and minuses of not only changing but also of staying the same.

What are some good things about staying the same? When we stay the same and don't change, we don't have to try very hard. We are used to behaving and thinking in a certain

way, and we don't have to spend extra time thinking about changing our approach to deal with worry/stress in a new way.

What are some not-so-good things about staying the same? Though it may appear to be easier to behave and think in the same way we always have, the way we are handling things currently may really be less helpful in dealing with worry/stress. If we don't try to change anything, we will never know if we can reduce worry/stress in our lives. Worry/stress may be having a negative impact on our health, relationships, and overall well-being.

Are there short-term versus long-term pluses/minuses? For example, sometimes a strategy may seem helpful because it allows you to avoid more worry/stress in the short term but is actually not helpful because it just creates more worry/stress in the long term.

Below, take some time to list some benefits and obstacles you may experience when trying to change your worry/stress.



Benefits and Obstacles



BENEFITS	OBSTACLES
1. <i>No need to spend time thinking about how to change my situation</i>	1. <i>I need to find time in my busy schedule to practice new coping skills</i>
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

How to Reduce Worry/Stress

There are two steps in reducing your worry and stress. The first step is becoming more aware of situations that create worry/stress and symptoms that indicate for you when worry/stress is present (for example, physical symptoms, thoughts, and behaviors).

The second step in reducing worry/stress is to learn new coping skills to use when you're about to face a worry/stress-producing situation. You'll learn some skills in this workbook that will give you a "toolbox" of skills that you can pull from whenever you see worry/stress coming your way. You may choose to use the same skills most of the time; or you may choose different skills, depending on the situation or the symptoms you're experiencing at the time.

Let's focus on the first step: understanding how you experience worry. This may be something new that you haven't really thought about. Take time now to think about how worry/stress can express themselves.

Worry/Stress consists of three types of symptoms:

Physical (how the body reacts)....

When we worry or feel stressed, our bodies respond in certain ways. Common physical symptoms associated with worry/stress are muscle tension, fast pulse, shortness of breath, shaking/trembling, sweating, and butterflies in the stomach. You may experience other physical sensations associated with worry/stress aside from these.

It's important to get better at recognizing the difference between physical, bodily sensations (for example, tightness in the chest) and feelings (for example, emotions like anger or stress). Geraldo, from the previous module, felt sick to the stomach; and Mariella experienced muscle tightness, which are examples of physical symptoms of worry/stress.

Thoughts (what's going on in the mind, or concerns)....

Worry/stress is often accompanied by thoughts, often negative thoughts. These thoughts tend to be based in the future and include fears that something negative might happen. If you have trouble identifying a thought, it may help to ask questions, such as "Why was I stressed (or angry/worried, etc.) about this situation?" or "What was I concerned might happen?" The answers are usually thoughts.

Behaviors (avoiding situations or doing something time consuming to reduce worry/stress)....

Behaviors are actions you take that are driven by worry/stress. These behaviors can become habits but are more than that – you do them to reduce worry and stress. Some people avoid certain actions to manage worry/stress (for example, putting off opening mail, or not attending social events), while others may carry out behaviors repetitively? to manage

worry/stress (for example, checking something over and over again to make sure it is correct, or “stress eating”). Remember Geraldo and Mariella from the introduction of this workbook? Geraldo avoided opening bills because of his worries about finances. Mariella used smoking and eating too much to avoid thinking her worrisome thoughts.

People sometimes have trouble telling the differences between physical symptoms, thoughts and feelings. Physical symptoms are sensations we have in the body, such as tightness in the chest, or sweaty palms. Thoughts are negative beliefs, expectations, or concerns about a situation or event. Feelings are emotions, such as happiness, sadness or anxiety. Although these are separate, they often go together. For example, imagine you are about to give a speech in front of a crowd. If you have the thought, “Oh no, I am going to say something wrong, and everyone will laugh at me,” you will likely have the feeling of anxiety, and feel physical sensations of heart racing and palms sweating. If you have the thought, “I’m not worried about this; I’ve done it a million times,” you will likely feel calm, which may lead to a physical sensation of relaxed muscles.

How to Talk to a Doctor about Worry/Stress

Talking to your doctor about your worry/stress can be very helpful. Asking people for help can be hard, so talking to your doctor about worry/stress is a courageous step toward getting well.

Preparing for the Appointment with the Doctor

Below is a form to help you plan your talk with your doctor. The form will help you document your symptoms and feelings related to worry/stress. You can also choose to take a list of all the medications you are taking so that the doctor can make necessary recommendations. Consider completing this form and taking it with you, or ask a family member or someone to help you.

I will let my doctor know I am experiencing these symptoms and feelings of worry/stress and/or depression and how long I have felt this way.

Symptoms/Feelings	How Long These Symptoms Have Been Experienced

Learn How to Relax II
Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)
Skills Practice

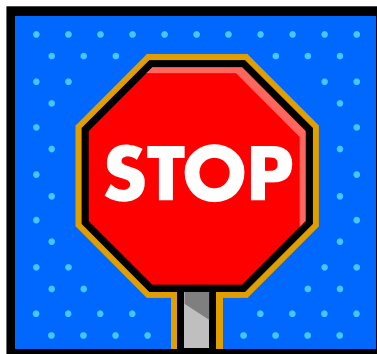
Day of the Week	Did you practice PMR today?	Was this skill helpful?	Did you use PMR in a worry/stress situation today?	If so, was it helpful?	Describe any ways that you included religion/spirituality in your practice of the skills:
Day 1: _____	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	
Day 2: _____	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	
Day 3: _____	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	
Day 4: _____	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	
Day 5: _____	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	
Day 6: _____	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	
Day 7: _____	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	

MODULE 8: Thought Stopping

Thought Stopping

Thought stopping is a skill that helps to reduce worry/stress by stopping worry/stress thoughts. For this skill to work, you need to be aware when you are having a hard time controlling worry/stress thoughts. Remember from Module 1 that these thoughts tend to be negative and future-oriented and run through your mind over and over. Thought stopping involves using words or images as cues to stop worry/stress thoughts and then redirecting or changing your attention from your worrisome thoughts to activities that involve various senses (for example, the sights and sounds in your environment). Here are the steps for thought stopping:

1. Be aware of worry/stress thoughts.
2. Disrupt the worry/stress thoughts by telling yourself (silently or out loud) “STOP!” Try to picture a big, red stop sign or a big pink eraser).
3. Direct your attention to other things going on around you, right away.
 - a. Focus on the people around you, traffic nearby, or objects in the room. Pay attention to details. For example, look around in the room and make note of the color of the walls, pictures that are hanging in the wall, details of the pictures and contrast of the colors in the pictures with the color of the wall. Count how many windows are in the room. Look outside the window and pay attention to details of what you see outside.
 - b. Or do something that heightens your senses; for example, try smelling a scented candle to enhance your sense of smell, or touching a soft blanket to enhance your sense of touch.
 - c. *You can also meditate or pray.*



Thought Stopping Skill Practice

Instructions for Practice

Picture yourself in a worry/stress situation. Your awareness worksheets may be a good source of information for this exercise. Remember, even routine circumstances can slightly increase your stress, like when you realized that you forgot to send a birthday card to your childhood friend. Imagine where you were, who you were with, and what was going on around you. Try to put yourself back in the situation, and see if you can bring up some of the worry/stress thoughts that ran through your mind at that time. Once you are remembering these worry/stress thoughts, tell yourself to “STOP!” and picture a big, red stop sign, or a big, pink eraser. Then focus on the details of what is going on around you. Or, focus on activities you may be in the middle of doing. For example, notice what you are doing with your hands. Let’s say if you are cooking, notice how the spatula feels in your hand, smell the aroma coming from the dish you are making, notice the heat coming from the stove, check to see how the food taste in your mouth. Or, if you are sitting in the living room watching TV, notice how the sofa feels on your body, notice cushion next to your back, run your hands on the sofa and notice how it feels. *You can even meditate or pray.*

Try practicing this skill several times in the way described above. Then, try practicing the skill in an anxiety-producing situation – the next time you feel worried/stressed. Remember that the more you practice the skill, the more you will get out of it. The Skills Practice form on the next page will help you keep track of your practice of this new skill.



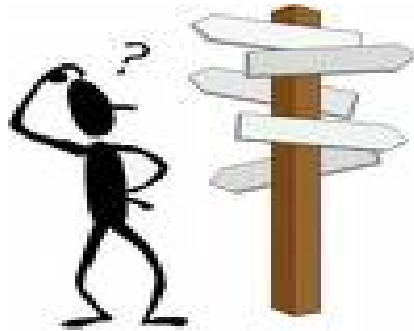
Thought Stopping Skills Practice Form

Day of the Week	Did you practice thought stopping today?	Was this skill helpful?	Did you practice this skill in anxiety-producing situation?	Was this skill helpful?	<i>Describe any ways that you included R/S in your practice of the skills:</i>
Day 1: _____	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	
Day 2: _____	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	
Day 3: _____	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	
Day 4: _____	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	
Day 5: _____	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	
Day 6: _____	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	
Day 7: _____	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	___ YES ___ NO	

MODULE 9: Changing Your Thoughts to Manage Worry/Stress

Changing Your Thoughts to Manage Worry/Stress

The way we think about, interpret, or view things influences how we feel and what we do. For example, if someone goes to a social event with the thought, “I will have nobody to talk to because nobody likes me,” he/she will likely have very different feelings and behaviors than someone who attends a social event with the thought, “I am so excited to make new friends!” The person with the more negative thought is likely to feel down or anxious and behave accordingly – maybe he/she won’t try to speak to new people or will leave the event early. Not talking to people or leaving an event early are both anxiety-related avoidance behavior. The person who is excited about making new friends will likely feel better and may have fun at the event and may actively seek new people to meet. Sometimes we have unrealistic worry/stress thoughts that make us more upset than we need to be. We may think that something will be worse than it is or that something bad will happen.



1. Identify Worry/Stress Thoughts.

The first step is to identify thoughts associated with worry/stress. This is part of becoming more aware, which you have been working on since Module 1. Try to notice when you have thoughts that are overly negative, or thoughts that “predict” the future – for example, “I’m sure that things will not go well when...”

2. Evaluate Your Thoughts.

The next step is to think very carefully about how realistic these thoughts are. Begin to think of your thoughts as guesses or possibilities, not facts. Sometimes your thoughts will be realistic, and sometimes they won’t. The next few pages describe examples of unrealistic thoughts. See if any of your thoughts are unrealistic. Ask yourself the key questions that follow.

3. Replace Worry/Stress Thoughts with Realistic Thoughts.

When thoughts are not realistic, replace them with more realistic ones. More realistic thinking will lead to less stress. We don’t want to just replace all negative thoughts with positive ones – for example, going from thinking “it’s going to be a terrible time” to “it will be a wonderful time.” Instead, we want to change the

Examples of Unrealistic Thoughts

For Sure Thoughts: When we believe that something bad is going to happen for sure, our worry/stress increases. This type of thinking focuses on the extremes. It allows no room for the “middle ground.” If you are thinking something bad will absolutely happen, you may be overestimating how likely it is. This could lead you to feel more worried or stressed than you would otherwise.

Examples: “If I disagree with someone, he/she will never want to speak to me again.”

“I made a mistake at work - I will definitely get fired!”

Should Thoughts: We sometimes set strict rules about how we or other people should behave. Unrealistic rules can create a lot of stress or lead you to feel responsible for events out of your control. Or you might believe that things should turn out a certain way. If you have unrealistically high expectations, you will probably be disappointed often.

Examples: “I should always be able to stop what I am doing to help a friend.”

“People should always return phone calls immediately.”

Big Deal Thoughts: Sometimes people worry/stress about things that, even if they did occur, would not be a big deal. Do you often “make a mountain out of a molehill?” If so, you may be creating unnecessary worry/stress for yourself.

Examples: “It would be absolutely horrible if I arrived late for this appointment!”

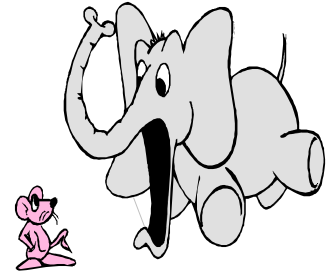
“I couldn’t stand it if I did something embarrassing in front of others!”

Have you noticed yourself having any of these types of unrealistic thoughts? Your awareness practice exercise forms may have good examples of the types of thoughts you have when you are worried/stressed. See if any of these thoughts resemble those in the examples above.

Evaluating Thoughts

Once you have identified a thought that is making you feel worried/stressed, it is important to examine how realistic the thought is. You can do this by asking yourself some key questions.

- “Am I thinking that something negative will happen?”
- “Are there other possible ways this situation could turn out?”
- “Are my expectations reasonable?”
- “Is my thought about a rule someone else ‘should’ follow?”
- “If this happened, would it really be the worst thing in the world?”



Many people also examine whether their thoughts fit with their R/S beliefs. You might want to ask yourself the following questions. (NOTE: You may fill in the blanks with whatever words fit best for you, such as God, the Bible, “my religion, my spirituality.”)

- “Does ___ say that I can know 100% what will happen?”
- “Have I been protected or spared in difficult situations like this one?”
- “Does ___ say I must always (or never) [fill in the blank with the expectation]?”
- “According to ___, am I responsible for controlling what others do?”
- “Would ___ want me to get so upset about this?”
- “Is it possible that there is a bigger purpose for this situation?”

Finding Realistic Thoughts

If asking the questions above shows you that your thought is unrealistic, you can come up with a more realistic thought that will help you feel less worried/stressed.

For Sure Thoughts: With For Sure Thoughts, it is important to try to think realistically about how likely it is that the negative event will occur. You can also think about other ways the situation might turn out. If you are making an extreme prediction about what will happen, try to seek some middle ground. Phrases to help make For Sure thoughts more realistic are, “It’s more likely that...” and “The chance of ___ really happening is....”

Example: “I don’t know that I will get fired for sure. It’s more likely that I will just get in a little trouble and have to fix the mistake.”

Should Thoughts: With Should Thoughts, it is important to think about the exceptions to the rule and to decide whether your rule is really just a personal preference. People have

their own ways of doing things that work for them. Phrases to help make Should Thoughts more realistic are “It would be nice if...but...” and “Unfortunately ... but thankfully...”

Example: “It would be nice if I could always stop what I am doing to help my friends, but sometimes I have to take care of myself.”

Big Deal Thoughts: Remember that many times even the worst thing that could happen is something you could cope with. Try to avoid making a mountain out of a molehill. Phrases to make Big Deal thoughts more realistic are “It won’t be the end of the world if...” and “Even if the worst case happens, I can handle it.”

Example: “It is not the end of the world if I am late for this appointment.”

On the next page is an example of a completed thought record, followed by a blank form for you to practice filling out on your own.

Changing Your Thoughts to Manage Worry/Stress Skills Practice Form Example

Instructions for Practice: Change your worry/stress thoughts by first identifying them. Then evaluate how realistic they are. Watch out for Unrealistic Thoughts: For Sures, Shoulds, and Big Deals. Think carefully about the questions on the Skills Practice (Thought Record). Check “yes” or “no” to indicate whether your thoughts are logical. Then identify a more realistic thought, and record it on your form. Complete the Skills Practice (Thought Record) once a day for three to five days.

Remember: This is not an easy skill to learn, especially if you have thought a certain way for a long time. For Sures, Shoulds, and Big Deals are thought habits that may have formed over a long time. It takes time to break these habits. Just like the other skills you’ve learned, changing your thoughts to manage worry/stress requires lots of practice!

Step 1: Identify Your Worry/Stress Thought.

My daughter-in-law is furious with me because she did not answer my phone call.

Step 2: Evaluate Your Thought.

Take a moment to think about each question individually before you answer it.

Am I thinking that something negative will happen? YES NO
Are there other possible ways this situation could turn out? YES NO
Are my expectations reasonable in this situation? YES NO
Is my thought about a rule someone else “should” follow? YES NO
If this happened, would it really be the worst thing in the world? YES NO
Does this thought fit with my R/S beliefs or faith? YES NO

Step 3: Replace Worry/Stress-Producing Thoughts with Realistic Thoughts.

Provide a more realistic thought or thoughts. *Include R/S thoughts, if applicable.*

It is possible that my daughter-in-law is angry with me and that is why she didn't answer the phone, but it could also have nothing to do with me – she could be busy or not at home.

**Changing Your Thoughts to Manage Worry/Stress
Skills Practice Form
Day 1**

Instructions for Practice: Change your worry/stress thoughts by first identifying them. Then evaluate how realistic they are. Watch out for unrealistic thoughts: For Sures, Shoulds, and Big Deals. Think carefully about the questions on the Skills Practice (Thought Record). Check “yes” or “no” to indicate whether your thoughts are logical. Then identify a more realistic thought, and record it on your form. Complete the Skills Practice (Thought Record) as often as possible over the next week.

Remember: This is not an easy skill to learn, especially if you have thought a certain way for a long time. For Sures, Shoulds, and Big Deals are thought habits that may have formed over a long time. It takes time to break these habits. Just like the other skills you’ve learned, changing your thoughts to manage worry/stress requires lots of practice!

Step 1: Identify Your Worry/Stress Thought.

Step 2: Evaluate Your Thought.

Take a moment to think about each question individually before you answer it.

- Am I thinking that something negative will happen? YES NO
Are there other possible ways this situation could turn out? YES NO
Are my expectations reasonable in this situation? YES NO
Is my thought about a rule someone else “should” follow? YES NO
If this happened, would it really be the worst thing in the world? YES NO
Does this thought fit with my R/S beliefs or faith? YES NO

Step 3: Replace Worry/Stress-Producing Thoughts with Realistic Thoughts.

Provide a more realistic thought or thoughts. *Include R/S thoughts, if applicable.*

**Changing Your Thoughts to Manage Worry/Stress
Skills Practice Form
Day 2**

Instructions for Practice: Change your worry/stress thoughts by first identifying them. Then evaluate how realistic they are. Watch out for unrealistic thoughts: For Sures, Shoulds, and Big Deals. Think carefully about the questions on the Skills Practice (Thought Record). Check “yes” or “no” to indicate whether your thoughts are logical. Then identify a more realistic thought, and record it on your form. Complete the Skills Practice (Thought Record) as often as possible over the next week.

Remember: This is not an easy skill to learn, especially if you have thought a certain way for a long time. For Sures, Shoulds, and Big Deals are thought habits that may have formed over a long time. It takes time to break these habits. Just like the other skills you’ve learned, changing your thoughts to manage worry/stress requires lots of practice!

Step 1: Identify Your Worry/Stress Thought.

Step 2: Evaluate Your Thought.

Take a moment to think about each question individually before you answer it.

- Am I thinking that something negative will happen? YES NO
Are there other possible ways this situation could turn out? YES NO
Are my expectations reasonable in this situation? YES NO
Is my thought about a rule someone else “should” follow? YES NO
If this happened, would it really be the worst thing in the world? YES NO
Does this thought fit with my R/S beliefs or faith? YES NO

Step 3: Replace Worry/Stress-Producing Thoughts with Realistic Thoughts.

Provide a more realistic thought or thoughts. *Include R/S thoughts, if applicable.*

**Changing Your Thoughts to Manage Worry/Stress
Skills Practice Form
Day 3**

Instructions for Practice: Change your worry/stress thoughts by first identifying them. Then evaluate how realistic they are. Watch out for unrealistic thoughts: For Sures, Shoulds, and Big Deals. Think carefully about the questions on the Skills Practice (Thought Record). Check “yes” or “no” to indicate whether your thoughts are logical. Then identify a more realistic thought, and record it on your form. Complete the Skills Practice (Thought Record) as often as possible over the next week.

Remember: This is not an easy skill to learn, especially if you have thought a certain way for a long time. For Sures, Shoulds, and Big Deals are thought habits that may have formed over a long time. It takes time to break these habits. Just like the other skills you’ve learned, changing your thoughts to manage worry/stress requires lots of practice!

Step 1: Identify Your Worry/Stress Thought.

Step 2: Evaluate Your Thought.

Take a moment to think about each question individually before you answer it.

- Am I thinking that something negative will happen? YES NO
Are there other possible ways this situation could turn out? YES NO
Are my expectations reasonable in this situation? YES NO
Is my thought about a rule someone else “should” follow? YES NO
If this happened, would it really be the worst thing in the world? YES NO
Does this thought fit with my R/S beliefs or faith? YES NO

Step 3: Replace Worry/Stress-Producing Thoughts with Realistic Thoughts.

Provide a more realistic thought or thoughts. *Include R/S thoughts, if applicable.*

**Changing Your Thoughts to Manage Worry/Stress
Skills Practice Form
Day 4 (Optional)**

Instructions for Practice: Change your worry/stress thoughts by first identifying them. Then evaluate how realistic they are. Watch out for unrealistic thoughts: For Sures, Shoulds, and Big Deals. Think carefully about the questions on the Skills Practice (Thought Record). Check “yes” or “no” to indicate whether your thoughts are logical. Then identify a more realistic thought, and record it on your form. Complete the Skills Practice (Thought Record) as often as possible over the next week.

Remember: This is not an easy skill to learn, especially if you have thought a certain way for a long time. For Sures, Shoulds, and Big Deals are thought habits that may have formed over a long time. It takes time to break these habits. Just like the other skills you’ve learned, changing your thoughts to manage worry/stress requires lots of practice!

Step 1: Identify Your Worry/Stress Thought.

Step 2: Evaluate Your Thought.

Take a moment to think about each question individually before you answer it.

- Am I thinking that something negative will happen? YES NO
Are there other possible ways this situation could turn out? YES NO
Are my expectations reasonable in this situation? YES NO
Is my thought about a rule someone else “should” follow? YES NO
If this happened, would it really be the worst thing in the world? YES NO
Does this thought fit with my R/S beliefs or faith? YES NO

Step 3: Replace Worry/Stress-Producing Thoughts with Realistic Thoughts.

Provide a more realistic thought or thoughts. *Include R/S thoughts, if applicable.*

**Changing Your Thoughts to Manage Worry/Stress
Skills Practice Form
Day 5 (Optional)**

Instructions for Practice: Change your worry/stress thoughts by first identifying them. Then evaluate how realistic they are. Watch out for unrealistic thoughts: For Sures, Shoulds, and Big Deals. Think carefully about the questions on the Skills Practice (Thought Record). Check “yes” or “no” to indicate whether your thoughts are logical. Then identify a more realistic thought, and record it on your form. Complete the Skills Practice (Thought Record) as often as possible over the next week.

Remember: This is not an easy skill to learn, especially if you have thought a certain way for a long time. For Sures, Shoulds, and Big Deals are thought habits that may have formed over a long time. It takes time to break these habits. Just like the other skills you’ve learned, changing your thoughts to manage worry/stress requires lots of practice!

Step 1: Identify Your Worry/Stress Thought.

Step 2: Evaluate Your Thought.

Take a moment to think about each question individually before you answer it.

- Am I thinking that something negative will happen? YES NO
Are there other possible ways this situation could turn out? YES NO
Are my expectations reasonable in this situation? YES NO
Is my thought about a rule someone else “should” follow? YES NO
If this happened, would it really be the worst thing in the world? YES NO
Does this thought fit with my R/S beliefs or faith? YES NO

Step 3: Replace Worry/Stress-Producing Thoughts with Realistic Thoughts.

Provide a more realistic thought or thoughts. *Include R/S thoughts, if applicable.*

MODULE 10: Maintaining a Calmer Life

Maintaining a Calmer Life

Take some time to go back through this workbook, and briefly review all the new skills you have learned to cope with worry/stress. Now you have a “tool box” of calming skills. You can use these skills when you find yourself in a worry-/stress-producing situation. Some calming skills may become your “favorites,” and you will use them more frequently than others. You may find that some skills work best in certain situations, while others work best in different situations.

Now it is your job to continue practicing the skills and incorporating them into your daily life.

With practice most people continue to decrease their worry/stress. You may find that your worry/stress and your ability to manage it continue to improve. You may want to set aside a certain time each day to review what you learned during the program. Or you may find it helpful to keep note cards with cues or reminders to use certain skills. The important thing is to come up with a plan that works for you.



In the next section, you will be able to identify common situations that cause you to be worried/stressed and coping skills you have found to be helpful, and come up with a plan on how to deal with worry/stress in the future.

Maintaining a Calmer Life Skills Practice Form Example

Instructions for Practice

You have now completed the Calmer Life Workbook. You have learned many new skills to decrease your worry/stress. At this point, it is very important that you continue to practice your skills to make them part of your daily life. One way to maintain the progress you have made is to plan ahead for situations that have made you worried in the past.

Here is an example to get you started:

How do you know if you are getting worried?

Situations	Thoughts, physical symptoms, behaviors	Calming Skills
<i>Conflict with family</i>	<i>“This will never end,” chest tightness, avoiding family members</i>	<i>Calming thoughts, deep breathing, changing behavior</i>
<i>Unpaid bills</i>	<i>“I can’t handle this,” butterflies in stomach, avoid opening bills</i>	<i>Make a SMART plan to face my fear and tackle the unpaid bills</i>

What are some signs that you might need additional help?

<i>I start avoiding necessary tasks, like, paying bills or making a doctor’s appointment.</i>
<i>I start feeling shortness of breath, muscle tightness and feel tired.</i>
<i>I start getting into arguments with my daughter frequently.</i>

If you do need additional help, what are some resources that you can contact?

Name of Resource	Contact Information
<i>Health Care Provider</i>	
<i>Church friends</i>	

Maintaining a Calmer Life Skills Practice Form

At this point, it is very important that you continue to practice your skills to make them part of your daily life. One way to maintain the progress you have made is to plan ahead for situations that have made you worried in the past.

How do you know if you are getting worried?

Situations	Thoughts, physical symptoms, behaviors	Calming skills

What are some signs that you might need additional help?

If you do need additional help, what are some resources that you can contact?

Name of Resource	Contact Information