Worry

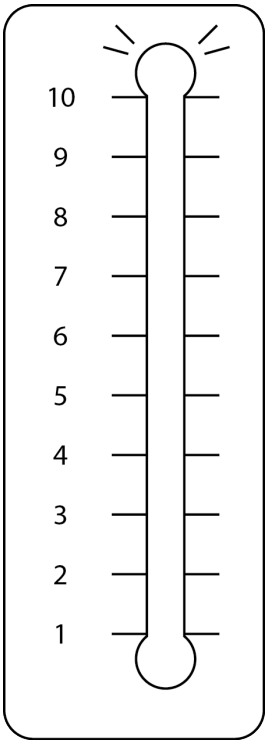
Welcome back to CALM

Calming Anxiety Living Mindfully

Chapter 5

My Anxiety Meter

Please think back on the past week, and rate your weekly average on this scale of 0-10.



10 - Highest anxiety/distress you have ever felt, unable to function

9 - Extremely anxious/distressed, highly affecting performance

8 - Very anxious/distressed, significantly impacting performance

7 - Quite anxious/distressed, moderately impacting performance

6 - Elevated anxiety/distress, some impact with performance

5- Moderate anxiety/distress, uncomfortable, can still perform well

4 - Mild/moderate anxiety/distress, hard to ignore, fairly uncomfortable

3 - Mild anxiety/distress, no interference with performance

2 - Minimal anxiety/distress

1 - Alert and awake, concentrating well

0 - Totally relaxed

Check-in:

What were you experiences of anxiety this week, and how did managing these moments go?

How did being mindful of emotions or urge surfing go this week?

3-Minute Breathing Space Meditation

Adapted from Segal et al., 2002

"Worry pulls us into the future and distracts us from what is happening in the present"

– Orsillo & Roemer, 2011

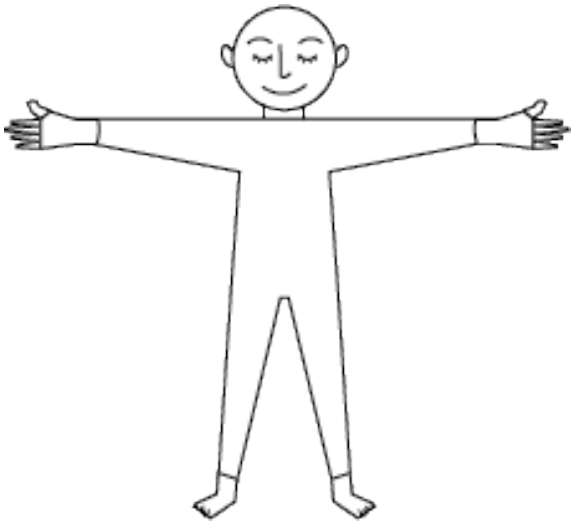
Worry & Your Body:

Muscle tightness and soreness tend to accompany worry. Most people are unaware their body is physically reacting while worrying, and just notice feeling sore later. Being more mindfully aware of your body, and practicing the body scan meditation, are useful skills for coping with worry.

Discussion:

Where do you carry worry in your body?

(Where does your body tighten when stressed?)



Mindfulness Activity: Body Scan Meditation

Discussion Questions:

What benefits do you see in worrying?

What are the drawbacks?

How do you tell if worrying is helpful?

The 7 Rules of Highly Worried People

One of the world's leading experts on the treatment of worry, psychologist Robert Leahy, has identified 7 major steps to "stop worry from stopping you" based on decades of clinical research. You can learn more by reading his book "The Worry Cure." Let's review the 7 rules Dr. Leahy identified that keep people stuck and overwhelmed with worry.

Please check ones that you can relate with:

- ☐ If something bad could happen…then it's my responsibility to worry about it
- ☐ Don't accept any uncertainty
- ☐ Treat all of my negative thoughts as if they were really true
- ☐ Anything bad that could happen is a reflection of who I am as a person
- ☐ Failure is unacceptable
- ☐ Get rid of any negative feelings immediately
- ☐ Treat everything like an emergency

Discussion: Which of these rules play a role in your relationship with worry?

Productive versus Unproductive Worry

How can you tell whether you are problem solving or worrying in unhelpful ways?

It requires identifying productive worry from unproductive worry.

Productive worry moves you closer to resolving your concerns by providing helpful insight and steps to move forward.

Unproductive worry typically involves problems that haven't happened, may never happen, or concerns you have no control over. This can also involve dwelling on problems you're not willing to take action on, even when you know steps that could help. Unproductive worry keeps you spinning over and over in a cycle that leads to no solutions, and increased suffering.

When we are able to mentally step back and expand our awareness, we can see the process as it's happening:

"When our thoughts are circling in an endless loop,
never getting closer to a resolution,
we are caught in a worry cycle"

– David Emmert

Have I Developed a Worry Habit?

Another characteristic of worry is that you may have similar patterns of reacting even with totally different worries. Do you have a similar worry habit regardless of whether you are thinking about school, relationships, or your health?

Reflection Questions:

Do very different worries feel a lot alike?

Across different worries, do you notice similar negative thoughts or cognitive distortions that tend to pop up?

Don't Feed the "What-If" Monster!

Image: Pixabay.com

There's an endless amount of "What-if" questions you could worry about. The more time and energy you spend worrying about the countless "What-ifs," the more you feed and strengthen your worry habit ("monster").

To weaken it, determine whether this worry is helping you find solutions, or just feeding your worry monster. When you realize you're caught in a worry cycle, remind yourself of the bigger picture, that this loop brings suffering, not solutions. Use mindfulness to reconnect to the present.

Worry Monster Tips:

- You can weaken the "What-if" monster by accepting more uncertainty in life.
- Separate possible from probable and consider, "How likely is this to happen?"
- Remind yourself: "I'm resourceful and resilient. I'll manage whatever challenges come up as best I can."

"Worry is a sign of imbalance between anticipating the future and accepting it's uncertainty"

– Orsillo & Roemer, 2011

What is "Grounding?"

Grounding techniques can help you disconnect from intense emotional pain in a healthy way, by connecting with your environment, through your 5 senses, in the moment.

By focusing on the external world, you can feel less swept away by panic, worry, or sadness and become more centered, stable, and "grounded."

Grounding skills give you the option and ability to "anchor" yourself to the present when being swept away with emotional pain or fear, or disconnected from yourself or the world.

Grounding can be done anywhere anytime!

Grounding Skill: Self-soothing with the 5 senses

We can use any of our senses as a way to soothe ourselves and get through difficult moments, like feeling anxious or overwhelmed. Let's consider a few examples from each of our senses:

Vision: Notice 3 things you usually wouldn't, find beauty "in the ordinary;" watch the stars; view comforting and beautiful images online; and _____

_____

Hearing: Listen to music that soothes you; practice mindfulness of sounds around you; play an instrument; put on nature sounds; sing; and _____

_____

Smell: Notice pleasant aromas like coffee or lavender; use your favorite shampoo, lotions or aftershave; cook with mindfulness of smell; get fresh air; and _____

_____

Taste: Enjoy a favorite food mindfully; sip a cold or warm drink; snack on something sweet, like fruit; notice changes in taste across your tongue; and _____

_____

Touch: Notice how air feels on your skin; massage tight muscles; take a warm shower; give a friend a hug; run water on your hands; use lotion; pet your animal; and _____

_____

Based on Linehan, 2015

Mindful Eating

People are often not present while eating. Instead, many find their minds replaying events of the past, worrying for the future, or totally focused on their phone or the T.V. It's easy to go on "autopilot," hardly aware of eating. It's also far too easy to label foods as simply "good" or "bad" rather than truly experiencing them.

How Do I Eat "Mindfully?"

Use ALL of your senses to truly experience eating

- Bring your attention to tastes, sounds, smells, texture, shapes and colors of the food

Mindful Eating = Engaging all your senses in the moment

Notice where your mind wanders, and focus back on your senses (again and again!).

- "I just checked out for a minute thinking about my ex again. I've never noticed how many flavors and colors are in this salad I always get. It's sweet and tangy, and smells like oranges and cilantro. It sounds and feels so crisp and crunchy."

Mindful Eating = Describing versus Judging

Tips: Try pretending this is the first time you have tasted this food. Let go of expectations and judgments, and describe all your senses. Your mind WILL drift from the moment many times! Have compassion for this and remember that returning to the moment, over and over again, strengthens your mindfulness practice.

Group Activity: Mindful Eating!

Please avoid eating anything you are allergic to!

Worry & Sleep

Many who struggle with worry also struggle with sleep. As we try to go to sleep, late at night, we are often depleted and have less distraction from our thoughts. This can be a time when worry takes hold and is especially hard to manage.

Discussion:

What tends to gets in the way of you getting better sleep?

What helps you sleep well?

Please review the "Skills for Better Sleep" in the appendix for tips when you are having any difficulties with your sleep

Finally, let's review the techniques below which you can try over the next week

What is ***Worry Time?***

To reduce the power around your worry, choose a period of time (perhaps 20 minutes), and a location, to focus on your current concerns. Let yourself focus on all your worries and everything you fear could possibly go wrong during your worry time. Pay attention to themes of your worry, and any observations and insights you may have after practicing.

What are ***Worry-Free Zones?***

You can't control when worry comes to mind, but you can control how you respond to it! Whether you're noticing unproductive worry, or practicing Worry Time, consider using the technique of worry-free zones.

During worry-free zones, you still notice worry-related thoughts and images when they pop up, but instead of continuing down this path, you allow them to pass by mindfully.

Instead use mindfulness and grounding to focus awareness on where you are and what you are doing right now. Remind yourself, "I'll worry about that later, during my worry time".

Based on Rygh & Sanders, 2004

Group Activity: Let's Practice Worry Time!

Skill: The "What-Went-Well" Exercise

The field of positive psychology focuses on optimal wellbeing and examining what makes us thrive. A technique from a founder of this approach (Dr. Martin Seligman) that may be helpful to try before going to sleep is the "What-Went-Well" exercise.

> Try this for one week:
>
> Before going to bed, reflect on 3 things that went well today AND why they went well

What-Went-Well Examples:

"I got an A- on my essay because I worked really hard, got tutoring, and started early."

"I had a good talk with my friend since we really support each other and I reached out today."

• • • •