

In times of high stress, we may find ourselves feeling anxious or worrying more than normal. When we are feeling stressed or anxious, we may have a tendency towards negative thinking. This may look like running through “what if” questions in our mind, or thinking of the worst-case scenarios. Not only do we often overestimate the worst-case scenario (or at least the likelihood of it happening), we also tend to underestimate our resilience.

At first, you may not even be aware that you are worrying. If we can start to catch our worries, we can start to challenge them. We can also remind ourselves of our resilience, so that even if our worry comes true we know we can get through it.

Many of us believe that worrying actually makes us more prepared, that it allows us to plan for the worst-case scenario. Challenge yourself in this thought, and explore whether worrying is really helping you plan or if it is keeping you stuck feeling anxious. If you still believe your worry is helping you, consider limiting the time you spend thinking about it. Write down your worry and your plan for how you would like to handle it if it comes true. Then put it aside and focus your attention on something else.

Noticing Worries

When we are feeling stressed we may not even be aware of our worries. They may be running at the back of our mind while we move throughout our day; however, if we can start to notice our stress, we can catch our thoughts and work on changing them. It is likely there are some tell-tale signs that you are feeling stressed or worried.

Think about what you are like when you feel stressed. What do you notice about yourself?

What I notice in my body when I feel stressed:

What I notice in my behaviour when I feel stressed:

What others might notice about me when I feel stressed:

Try to check in with yourself throughout the day, or have someone else check in with you. If you notice signs of stress are present, ask yourself why that might be. Are you feeling worried?

Challenging Worry

If you can catch yourself feeling worried, you may notice thoughts like “What if....” or “I am worried that....”

My thought: *I am worried that none of my friends or family will care enough to check in with me and I will feel really alone.*

Now ask yourself the following:

What is the evidence for the thought? *I have been feeling lonely.*

What is the evidence against the thought? *So far, at least one person has checked in with me each day. One friend even asked if we can write letters to each other, which shows she cares.*

What are some other (more positive) possibilities? *My friends and family will keep checking in with me and I will feel cared for. I will make the effort to check in with others so they feel cared for too. Being more thoughtful and intentional about connecting with the people I love may bring us closer. We might think of some creative ways to connect.*

What is the evidence for the other possibilities? *I'm not that close with the friend that asked to write letters, but this has made me feel very cared for and I think we are already becoming closer. This is also a creative way to connect.*

You may notice that there is not a lot of evidence to support your worry, or that there are other ways to view the situation.

You may also notice that there is evidence for your worries and not many other possibilities. If this is the case, think about your resilience. For example, think of a time in the past when you dealt with a really hard situation.

How did you feel? *I remember feeling scared and helpless.*

How did you cope with the situation? *I cried a lot. It was hard to get out of bed some days. But I also asked for support from people in my life. I did my best to take it one day at a time, and make sure that I was making an effort to eat, drink water, and get enough sleep.*

What would you do differently next time? *I would try to remember what is, and is not within my control. I would try to let go of worries about what is outside of my control, and focus on what I have control of.*

What did you learn from this situation? *That even if it doesn't feel like I am coping well with a situation, I am still able to survive it and that is what matters most. I am stronger than I think.*

Now, taking in to account both possibilities to your worry as well as your own resilience:

What is a more balanced thought? *I might feel lonely at times, but I am not alone. We are all going through this. I have people that care about me and we will do our best to check in with each other.*

You might not completely believe the more balanced thought at first, which is okay. Try to repeat the more balanced thought to yourself a few times. When you notice the worry return, say the more balanced thought to yourself.

Challenging Worries

If you can catch yourself feeling worried, you may notice thoughts like “What if...” or “I am worried that...”

My thought

Now ask yourself the following:

What is the evidence for the thought?

What is the evidence against the thought?

What are some other (more positive) possibilities?

What is the evidence for the other possibilities?

You may notice that there is not a lot of evidence to support your worry, or that there are other possibilities present.

However, you may notice that there is evidence for your worry thought and not many other possibilities. If this is the case, think about your resilience.

Think of a time in the past when you dealt with a hard situation.

How did you feel?

How did you cope with the situation?

What would you do differently next time?

What did you learn from this situation?

Now, taking in to account both other possibilities to your worry as well as your own resilience:

What is a more balanced thought?

You might not completely believe the more balanced thought at first, which is okay. Try to repeat the more balanced thought to yourself a few times. When you notice yourself have the worry, say the more balanced thought to yourself.