

The Worry Tree

How to worry less and live more effectively



<https://www.talkplus.org.uk/>

What do we mean by “Worry?”

- **Worrying** means thinking negatively and repeatedly about problems or unpleasant things that might happen
- Often we get lost in a stream of hypothetical “What ifs” and this can make us feel worse
- Worrying is different from **problem-solving**
- **Problem-solving** means going through a problem constructively. You work towards a practical solution ending up with a helpful “I can” idea after which you often feel better



Are you a worrier?



- Do you spend a lot of time in your head thinking about problems or potential problems?
- If so, this presentation could help you

Notice when you're getting caught up in worrying

Ask yourself what the worry is really about

Can you do something about it that is likely to be helpful?



Step 1 *Notice when you're getting caught up in worrying*

Become more **mindful** of your thinking

Look out for getting lost in your thoughts, particularly if they involve a lot of "what ifs" and are making you feel tense or anxious

What if I haven't enough money
to pay the bills?
What if I upset my friend?
What if there is a war?

Step 2 *Ask yourself what the worry is really about*

If you could imagine a speech bubble coming out of your head as you worry, what would it say?



Step 3 *Ask yourself "Can I do something about it that is likely to be helpful?"*

This is the key question that can make a huge difference.

Imagine you were worried that war would break out tomorrow. This might well be a concern, but is there anything helpful you can do about it? Unless you are a politician, the answer is almost certainly "No."



Step 3 *Ask yourself "Can I do something about it that is likely to be helpful?"*

Now consider a different example. You have an important interview and a friend has asked you out for a drink. You know that with this particular friend this means *several* drinks. You are worried that you might have a hangover tomorrow. Is there anything helpful you can do about this worry?

Yes! You can decline the offer of a drink.



Step 4 Respond appropriately depending on whether or not there is something helpful you can do

What if I'm hungover at the interview

Now is the time to say No to the pub!

Yes
Now or Later?
Now
Decide on action & do it
Let the worry go

Step 4 Respond appropriately depending on whether or not there is something helpful you can do

What if I'm not prepared for the interview?

I can't do it now so I need to schedule action

After supper I will spend an hour preparing

Yes
Now or Later?
Later
Decide when to act & schedule it
Park the worry

Step 4 Respond appropriately depending on whether or not there is something helpful you can do

What if there is a war?

There's nothing helpful I can do about that worry - I should neglect it

Which strategy shall I use to help me neglect this worry?

No
Decide which strategy to use to enable you to neglect the worry
Neglect the worry

How to Neglect a Worry

Experiment to find out which of these methods, singly, combined or adapted, works best for you:

- Remind yourself that worry isn't helping
- Redirect your attention to an engaging task

More strategies to help you neglect a worry

Mindfulness

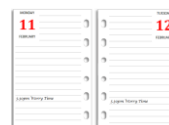
- Watch the thoughts you wish to neglect gently pass through your mind like **leaves on a stream**.
- You don't need to push your worries away, if you ignore them they will just pass through your mind of their own accord.



More strategies to help you neglect a worry

Worry time

- You set aside 15 minutes at a specific time each day (for example from 600pm to 615pm). At that time you are allowed to worry as much as or as little as you like
- At other times you postpone the worry to your worry time



More strategies to help you neglect a worry

Living with Uncertainty Pep-talks

- Live in the here and now
- Don't cross bridges before you come to them
- Work with what **is** not what **might be**

Living with Uncertainty Pep-talks

- Que Sera Sera, Whatever Will Be Will Be
- I've done what I can with the facts that I've got – I can do no better
- I'll cope with the unexpected like I always do

Which strategy shall I use to help me neglect this worry?

Experiment to find out which of these methods, singly, combined or adapted, works best for you:

- Remind yourself that worry isn't helping
- Redirect your attention to an engaging task
- Mindfulness
- Worry Time
- Living with Uncertainty Pep Talks

Troubleshooting

- “Not sure how best to neglect the worry” experiment with the different techniques.
- “Not remembering to use the worry tree consistently”
 - Print a copy of it and put it on your fridge!
- It can help to keep a written record of your progress (the worry tree record)

Take Home Message

- The Worry Tree teaches us to
 - **Problem-solve** when we can do something helpful about worries
 - **Neglect worries** when we can't do anything helpful about them and to
 - Learn the difference between these **2 different types of situation**

Next Steps

- Practice
- If you think the worry tree could help you we suggest you try it out on a problem today
- Make using the worry tree a habit
- Set time aside for using this technique on a regular basis
- Use the worry tree record
- This will help you see which techniques work the best for you
- Tell someone else about this technique. Teaching someone is a great way of learning things yourself – and helping them
 - All worksheets and a PDF are freely available at <http://www.talkplus.org.uk>