

## ***STOPPING THE CYCLE OF WORRY***

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Below are several useful coping skills to help you intervene when worry surfaces.

### **Three Rules Of Worry**

Following these three simple rules can help you take control of worry.

- 1) **Never Worry Alone** - Isolation increases the potential for worry. As you spend time with others you are less likely to be preoccupied with worry thoughts. Also, being with people offers opportunity to check out the validity of your worry with them. Take care not to worry out loud as you talk with people.
- 2) **Get the Facts** - Worry is fueled by uncertainty. Getting the facts about the situation will help you move from worry back into reality and onto problem solving.
- 3) **Make a Plan** - Problem solve, decide what you can realistically do. Then, if appropriate, put together an action plan to help you do something constructive about the problem. Here is a simple step-by-step approach to action planning.
  - A) Create the action plan.
  - B) Put plan into action.
  - C) Evaluate the effectiveness of the plan.
  - D) Adjust the plan to improve it.
  - E) Put the adjusted plan into action.
  - F) Continue the process of evaluating and changing the plan as needed.

### **Do Something Different**

Whenever you find yourself worrying, following this simple step-by-step approach can help you refocus on the present moment.

- 1) **Catch Yourself When You Are Worrying** - Worry is so habitual that you can easily get lost in it without even realizing it. To help with this, listen to what you are saying to yourself. Catch the words you use as you worry.

Your body will also tell you when it's happening, as most people feel more physical symptoms (tight chest, racing heart, sweaty, shortened breathing, body tension, etc.) when they worry. Also, you are likely to feel more nervous, anxious, frustrated or angry as worry occurs. Notice your behavior as it surfaces, especially nervous habits. Use any of these warning signs to catch yourself.
- 2) **Thought Stop** - Once you've caught it, stop the worry process by saying "STOP" to yourself or, if appropriate, out loud. You can also see a red stop sign in your mind as you say stop. This process of engaging your thoughts constructively leaves little room in your conscious mind for worry.
- 3) **Take Slow Deep Breaths** - Taking deep abdominal breaths can help you feel more relaxed and at ease. Deep breathing can stop worry. Try doing the 5-second breath exercise described below.
- 4) **Focus Your Attention Positively** - Now that you are calmer, direct your attention where you need or want it to go. These things can include your work duties, family needs or whatever brings you a greater sense of stability or pleasure.

## ***STOPPING THE CYCLE OF WORRY***

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### **Deep Breathing**

The practice of deep abdominal breathing on a regular basis can help you feel more relaxed and at ease. Deep breathing increases oxygen flow to the body and brain, decreases negative thinking, including worry. It improves concentration, and promotes the excretion of bodily toxins. Below is an easy and useful deep breathing exercise.

### **The 5-Second Breath**

- 1) Take a slow deep breath that fills about 5 seconds of time for each breath (about 2½ seconds inhale, 2 ½ seconds exhale).
- 2) You can use the second hand on a clock or watch to time your breath. Use of the second hand can help direct your attention away from worry, focusing instead on the deep breath and your experience of relaxation.
- 3) Your chest, torso, and stomach will expand on the inhale and contract on the exhale. As you expand on the inhale, your lungs fill deeply.
- 4) Breathe through your mouth or nose, whichever feels more comfortable.
- 5) Try taking 1 minute of the 5-second breaths. Or you can take sets of 5 or 10 of the 5-second breaths. Try either approach 3-5 times per day for maximum effect.

### **Writing Your Worries – Taking Control Of Worry**

Your worries are important to you. Give them their due, but do so constructively, in a manner that you control. Set aside 15-20 minutes per day to write down your worries. This will help you focus your thoughts constructively. This can be a time of problem solving or just a way to unload unwanted thoughts. It is important to do the following as part of your writing session:

- 1) End your writing session on a positive note.
  - problem solving
  - action planning
  - coaching yourself
  - recalling pleasant times & events
  - practicing gratitude
- 2) Have a positive activity planned for after the session.
  - go for a walk
  - spend time with family & friends
  - engage in your favorite hobby
  - cook a meal
  - listen to music

As worry pops into your mind throughout the day, manage it by using thought stopping & other coping skills.

### **Resources**

*The Relaxation & Stress Reduction Workbook* by Matthew McKay,  
*The Anxiety & Phobia Workbook* by Edmund J. Bourne  
*The Worry Control Workbook* by Mary Ellen Copeland.

Also, see [www.worrybank.com](http://www.worrybank.com).