Worry beliefs experiment

Compare practical preparation with your usual extra worry. Do not deliberately increase worry for this exercise.

Editable PDF: replace or delete the fictional examples. Blank PDF: print and write. Guidance follows.

Belief about worry / prediction (0-100%)

Practical preparation only - tried

What I did / usual pattern

What it contributed to the task

Outcome and how I coped

Extra worry - usual pattern

What I did / usual pattern

What it contributed to the task

Outcome and how I coped

What I learned / what is still uncertain

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Using this resource

Worry beliefs experiment

What this helps with

People often dislike worry and still believe it helps them care, prepare or prevent mistakes. It can be useful to separate repeated mental rehearsal from the practical actions that actually help. This exercise explores one belief using an everyday task. It does not ask you to stop caring or abandon preparation. You are examining whether extra worry adds useful information after a reasonable plan is in place.

How to use it

1. Complete the sentence: "Worry helps me because..." and rate belief 0-100%.
2. Choose a low-stakes task and define the practical preparation it reasonably needs.
3. Predict what will happen if you do that preparation without deliberately continuing the mental rehearsal.
4. Afterwards compare preparation, repeated worry, outcome and coping. Consider other explanations before drawing conclusions.

A fictional worked example

Maya believes, "If I keep worrying about a family visit, I will remember everything," at 85%. She plans the necessary preparation: check the time, choose food and write a short shopping list. Her prediction is that leaving further rehearsal alone will mean forgetting something important. She notices worry returning, acknowledges it and goes back to her evening rather than trying to force the thought away. The next day she forgets napkins, borrows some and still enjoys the visit. She learns that useful preparation and flexible coping mattered; continuing to worry was not the same as being caring or organised.

Keep in mind

Do not deliberately increase distress to create a comparison day. Use observations of your usual pattern and a low-stakes alternative. Keep responsibilities and necessary checks. If the exercise becomes a rule that you must never worry, discuss this in therapy and adjust it.

Sources and attribution

Dugas, M. J., Gagnon, F., Ladouceur, R., & Freeston, M. H. (1998). Generalized anxiety disorder: A preliminary test of a conceptual model. Behaviour Research and Therapy, 36(2), 215-226.

Dugas, M. J., et al. (2022). Behavioral experiments for intolerance of uncertainty: A randomized clinical trial for adults with generalized anxiety disorder. Behavior Therapy, 53(6), 1147-1160.

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