

FROM WELLBEING TO WELLDOING

HOW TO THINK,
LEARN AND BE WELL

ABBY
OSBORNE

LOTI
VENABLES

KAREN
ANGUS-COLE

 Sage

Welldoing approach to worry management

Worry is a natural part of the learning process, linked to uncertainty, change, unpredictability and things being beyond our control. Worry could also be viewed as an exaggerated version of the very same skill set that helps us to succeed in our studies, a heightened or unregulated version of our ability to think, critique, analyse and evaluate.

Therefore, some level of worry is expected and can be seen as part of our learning journey. However, when we feel overwhelmed by pressure or stress and are unable to effectively control or manage our worries, we can go into over-thinking overdrive, turning our ability to critique, analyse and evaluate in on ourselves. Being caught in this vicious cycle can become exhausting.

If you are a natural worrier, then you're unlikely to completely get rid of this part of your personality, but you can learn to work with it. The **Welldoing approach to worry management** will help you to better understand why you are prone to worry, how to break this cycle and harness and manage your worries in a way that helps you to problem-solve and move forward. Don't forget to refer to our **Worry work-out template (Template 8)** in **Chapter 10** to make the most of the strategies.

Check in on your Welldoing... Your worry patterns/triggers

It can be useful to try to understand if there is any underlying pattern to your worries.

For example, is there a yearly pattern to your worries linked to the course or the structure of the academic year with peaks of stress (e.g. exams, social pressures associated with a particular time of year)? Are there any other triggers (e.g. hormonal cycle, sleep struggles, social, personal)?



Once we are able to better predict when worry might strike and in what form worries might occur, we can then better anticipate any triggers and pressure points and be more prepared for them. By better understanding the underlying causes of our worries, we can adopt strategies that help us to actively manage them.

Bitesize approach to worries

If we try to tackle a worry as one isolated thing, we might find we become frustrated that we can't find a way of overcoming the worry. Instead, try breaking worries down to help solve them. As an example, if we identified we were worried about doing a presentation this could be several smaller worries, such as the fear of forgetting what

we need to say, fear of people looking at us, fear of not being able to answer a question if put on the spot or the fear of being seen as an imposter. Breaking down the worry into its constituent elements helps us to start to find focused solutions that target specific aspects of one larger worry. This strategy can be particularly useful when combined with the **Worry writing** method below.

Pause for thought



Can you think of any worries that you currently have that you can break down further into bitesize pieces to better understand them?

Worry writing

Writing down your worries can be cathartic. Capturing them on the page can put some distance between you and your worries and enable you to look at them more objectively. Some people like to journal their worries and find free-form writing can help them to work through their worries as the thoughts spill out onto the page. Sometimes a more structured form of **Worry writing** can also be useful, where the worry is more systematically broken down and worked through on the page (see the **Bitesize approach to worries** pages 57 and 58).

Parking worries

If you are a natural worrier, then acknowledging your worries rather than ignoring them can be really important. Acknowledge and register your worry, but try and get into the habit of parking it by either making a mental note or capturing it on paper as a reminder. This will enable you to identify the worry, whilst storing it away to worry about later, at a more convenient time. You might like to then combine this with the **Worry time** strategy (see below) so that you actively ear-mark a time when you can come back to your worry and deal with it then.

Worry time

Sometimes factoring in a specific or designated time and space in your diary, maybe weekly or daily, can help us to manage worries in an effective way. Worries can then

be 'stored' (see **Parking worries** on the previous page) and then revisited when time and space allow. You may find it helpful to limit the time you're allowed to focus on the worry (e.g. ten minutes) so that you can realistically mull it over or unpick it without getting caught up or stuck on the worry (Farrand et al., 2019). If the worry feels that it is still very real and not yet ready to be filed away, then you could revisit it again at the next Worry time.

A worry a day

If your brain naturally flits from one worry to another, it can be useful to try and prioritise your worries, as strange as this may sound! You might find it useful to identify a worry of the week, or worry of the day, which you allow yourself to worry about whilst parking the other worries for later. What's the most important thing to worry about now? Remember that what is important to one person may be different to another so prioritise the worries which are causing the greatest hurdle for you.

Diminishing worries

When trying to deal with a specific worry, it can be useful to think about how that worry might become less overwhelming over time. Ask yourself, will I still be worrying about this in a day, in a week, in a month or in a year? This can be a useful reminder that although a worry can feel significant and overwhelming in that moment, worries often naturally reduce over time. A worry has a limited life cycle. Reminding yourself of this can help to lessen the impact of a worry, even when it is at its peak.

Worry clouds

Many of our worries are transient, and come and go, rather than being fixed and permanent. Some people find that actively visualising their worries and seeing them floating and drifting away like a cloud into the distance, until they are no longer visible, is a useful way of reminding themselves of the temporary nature of many of our worries.

Pause for thought

Give the worry clouds strategy a try yourself right now!



Shape-shifting worries

Sometimes we can feel that as soon as we have solved or mastered one worry, another comes along. When this happens, it can seem that one worry has simply been replaced with a seemingly unrelated worry; one worry morphs into another. However, although not immediately obvious, there may be an underlying pattern which links these worries together. If you look at your worries collectively rather than in isolation, are there any underpinning patterns that start to emerge? Are your individual worries linked to an overarching desire of not wanting to let people down, or are the worries linked to trying to be the best version of yourself at all times? Understanding our worries in this way can help us to better understand where our worries come from and what our worry-related triggers are.

A worry shared is a worry halved

Try talking through your worries with a friend or trusted person. Often people may have the same worries and so it can feel like a relief to vocalise our worries and find out others have the same ones too so we're not alone. Just voicing our worries out loud can also help us to gain a bit of distance and perspective, enabling us to see a way forward.

Harnessing worries

Anticipation of an event or situation which is causing us to worry can often be worse than the actual thing itself. It is quite common to feel an increased sense of apprehension as we get nearer to the source of our worry, such as when an exam or a presentation approaches. It can be helpful to acknowledge this worry and try to view it as something that can actually be harnessed so that we can perform or rise to the challenge. An adrenaline rush can feel uncomfortable but recognising that it can also help to boost motivation and focus is important. After you have done the thing you are worried about, don't forget to take time to reward yourself for facing the worry.

Bear in mind

If you feel your experience of anxiety can be paralysing when trying to prepare for a presentation, then you may also find it useful to look at the strategies to help you thrive at presenting in **Chapter 8**.



Worry work-out

A build-up of worry or stress is often linked to a build-up of adrenaline. This strategy is about using movement to displace built-up stress and anxiety. Physical movement can be used to get rid of adrenaline – try dancing, jumping or shaking your limbs. It can be surprising how quickly your worries can reduce and you can gain a new sense of perspective by physically shaking the worry out! If you are somewhere where you feel you can't move or this would not be appropriate, then even little movements such as tapping your foot or using a fiddle toy might help to displace some of your nervous energy.

The Common sensory approach to worry

In the **Cognitively comfy learning** chapter (**Chapter 2**), we explore how you can use your environment and senses to boost learning. In the same way, we can use this approach when worry is consuming us to re-ground ourselves and connect with the world around us. A stimulus from the physical environment can help to break our thinking and, in doing so, disconnect us from our worries. Try taking a deep breath and feel your feet pushing into the floor. A simple counting exercise or focusing on an object can also help to anchor you. Sometimes an assault on the senses, such as music or movement, can distract your brain and shut down the worry.

Welldoing approach to sleep survival

We are often reminded of the importance of good sleep hygiene habits, such as going to bed at the same time each night and not going on our mobile phones before bed time. But sometimes, in spite of establishing good sleep hygiene, our sleep can still go awry; it can be a frustrating and scary feeling if suddenly we can't sleep, or if our normal go-to sleeping solutions no longer seem to work.

It is important for each of us to develop good sleep hygiene habits, however these habits can sometimes create unintentional added pressure where we strive for the perfect sleep, which may not always be possible. This anxiety can make it worse – we know we should be sleeping but we just can't stop worrying about what knock-on impact this is going to have on our productivity the next day. These thoughts can spiral, and this can in turn make it even more difficult to switch off and sleep. We believe the key to successful sleep is to establish good sleep hygiene habits *and* have a set of sleep survival strategies we can turn to when needed. Use our **Sleep survival template**, in conjunction with the strategies themselves, if you feel your sleep has gone awry (**Template 9, Chapter 10**).