

Worry as a Stressor

Most of the things you worried about never happened and those things that did happen should prove to you that worry is a waste of time. It's really mental garbage that fills your mind and creates a great deal of stress. Worry is thinking that you can do something about something you can't do anything about. As long as you keep worrying you delude yourself into believing that the worry will do some good. I would like to make a distinction between *worry* and *concern*. The distinction is important because when you're worried, the worry controls you and when you are concerned, you are in control. For example, we all have concerns that we must keep in mind; paying the mortgage, getting reports in on time, getting a sticker for your car, getting to work on time, etc. You have certainly control over all of these concerns.

Characteristics of a Worrier First-Class

The *Worrier First-Class* has some of the following characteristics:

- Once worry begins, it can't be stopped
- Can't fall asleep because of worry
- Can't fall back to sleep when awakened because worry begins
- Catastrophizes by imagining the worst possible result about the worry problem
- Worries about the big stuff and the small stuff
- Worries about life's insecurities and doesn't understand that life is an insecure experience
- Is so addicted to worry that resolving problems and letting them go is impossible
- Worry is so intense they become physically ill (gastrointestinal problems, dermatological problems, etc)
- Believe that worrying about a problem will prevent it from happening

If you said yes to 4 or more of these characteristics, then you classify yourself as a *Worrier First-Class*.

The most frustrating thing about a *Worrier First-Class* is when they are told, "Don't worry so much". That statement really doesn't help. It is impossible to consciously stopping the worry and it seems to have the opposite effect. For example, if I told you now, "Don't think of a red balloon", notice how difficult it is not to think of it when you make a conscious effort to do so.

The worry usually kicks in when a particular circumstance, event or person comes into our lives and creates stress. If we can view this problem objectively and avoid "negative self-talk" then unnecessary worry can be avoided. However, if you get involved with "negative self-talk", you will not see the problem as it really is because your "negative self-talk" has stimulated your thoughts and emotions and the worry begins. Once the thoughts and emotions get involved with worry, it is difficult to see things as they really are. The paradigm for worry is as follows:

*Stressor (circumstance, event or person) = Worry = Physical and Mental Reaction
(thoughts and emotions blurs what reality is) = Increased Worry*

In the paragraphs which follow, you will discover the many forms that worry takes along with some mental and physical techniques to interrupt the above paradigm, begin to worry and thus manage the stress it creates.

Worry We Can Control

Circumstance, events or people come into our lives and creates problems and this kicks in worry. The result is a feeling of uneasiness (worry) and this emotion seems to be closely related to fear. The more we get into worrying, the more helpless and out of control we feel. However, we do have control over some of the things we worry about. When we fail to accept the *responsibility* and don't take steps that can alleviate these worry problems, then that is stress provoking. For example, worrying about:

- Forgetting your anniversary
- Putting on weight
- Drinking too much
- Smoking too much
- Eating too many fried foods
- Being in a bad relationship
- Cheating on your spouse
- Not knowing how to relax

Each of these worry problems have a solutions. All you have to do is accept the responsibility and do something about it. The solution may be difficult, distasteful, painful etc, and if you can't solve it by yourself, you might need some outside help to get it done; but there is a solution. If you need help and you don't get it, that doesn't mean you're strong, it means you're stupid. When you recognize that you need help and you get help to solve your worry-problems, then you are on the way to managing your stress.

Worrying About Past Experiences

This is the most useless kind of worry that still controls us in the present. The worry revolves around past experiences such as: past failures, bad habits etc. that happened in the past and we have difficulty letting those experiences go For example:

- You were not much of an athlete in high school and this was a disappointment. This does not mean that with some help, now as an adult, you can't develop some athletic skill to the best of your ability.
- When you were younger, you failed in a business venture because you were not business wise and inexperienced. However, at the present time with your experience and maturity, you could be successful.

- You had a failed marriage and you hesitate to establish another relationship that may lead to marriage. The past failure does not necessarily predict future results. A careful realistic analysis of the baggage both of you are bringing into the marriage can alleviate some of the worry.
- When you have conflict with your spouse, you always react with anger whether you are right or wrong or the event is big or small. You understand that you have always done this since high school and you worry that this behavior may hurt your marriage. Don't worry; get some help with anger management.

Unfortunately, many of our past experiences have become part of our belief system. However, many of these beliefs, created in the past, are no longer valid and still exert an influence on how we perceive reality in the present.

Worry as a Habit

On a slow day, the *Worrier First-Class* can always find something to feed his worry habit. At times, the worry seems to revolve around "What ifs" For example: What if:

- My indigestion is really colon cancer
- They find a letter in my post office with anthrax
- My headache is really a brain tumor
- The pilot of this plane is on drugs or drunk
- I have a flat tire on this lonely desolate road; I'll die
- Tomorrows meeting with my boss is to be terminated

Notice how the above "What ifs" are quite catastrophic in nature and the *Worrier First-Class* becomes attached to this catastrophic worry. In the midst of great success, the *Worrier First-Class* can always find a glimmer of disaster to feed his habit. Most of the "What ifs" don't happen and the odds of them happening are the same as a meteor striking your house.

Techniques to Control Worry

1. Analyze the focus of your worry using the follow scale: great control, little control or no control. If you have great control, take some action and do something about it. That will stop the worry. If you have little or no control, then **let it go**. Below are some techniques that can help you let it go:
 - Interrupt the worry by saying to yourself very emphatically STOP! It may take a number of stops to interrupt the catastrophic thinking. However, persevere, it will work.
 - Interrupt the worry by thinking of something pleasant.
 - Interrupt the worry by snapping a rubber band on your wrist and have the slight pain detach you from the worry.

2. To stop the constant worry about every thing and anything, it might help if you decide to designate a time, place and duration of time specifically for worrying. Thus, when the worry comes into your mind, you can displace the worry by telling yourself you will worry about this when the time comes.
3. Relaxing with a tape doing self-hypnosis or meditating are other techniques you can use to displace yourself.
4. Some worriers find it very helpful to write their worries down. This gives the worry a concrete form rather than having it run aimlessly through the mind over and over again. A study reported in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* in 1999, subjects wrote down their worries for twenty minutes for three consecutive days and 50% of the participants experienced an escape from the worried that lasted for several months
5. Laughter is another way to displace your worry. Watch a funny movie or television program, go to a comedy club or go online and find a web site that has jokes.
6. Displacing worry with exercise is also successful. The exercise may be aerobics, exercise with or without a trainer, strength training or as simple as walking.

These are just a few techniques that can help you detach from your worry and displace it with a more productive activity. However, keep in mind that getting rid of the worry, no matter what techniques you use, will take time, effort and commitment on your part. If you don't apply these techniques and give them a chance, you will continue to get what you are getting now.

References and Bibliography

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