

How to Manage Unhelpful Worry

Worry is a natural, human emotion

We're in uncharted territory with this global health pandemic, our brains don't have experience on which they can fall back. The lack of clarity in what the future holds tasks our brains to interpret information and fill in the blanks - keeping our brains caught in a cycle of heightened arousal.

Unpredictability triggers worry, sadness and unease as we struggle to make sense of our seemingly ever-changing world. Our brains tend to spin stories of fear and worst-case scenarios.

It's natural to be worried. Sometimes, worry is even helpful. However, if you feel your anxiety is taking over your life, you can manage the unhelpful worry and create an island of sanity: a time to rest and recover.

Worry can be helpful

Real Problem worries are about actual problems that are currently affecting you. In the context of the concern about this outbreak, helpful solutions such as regular handwashing and social distancing are constructive. Additionally, worrying about children being off from school or not having enough food in the house helps to incentivize us to plan ahead, problem solve, and cope.

Worry can be unhelpful

Hypothetical worries are about situations that don't currently exist, but *might* happen in the future. You might be imagining worst case scenarios about the outcome of this crisis - worrying that many friends and family will die, you'll lose your job, or if you get sick, you'll end up on a ventilator. This type of thinking is known as catastrophizing – it's not helpful, leaves us feeling demoralized, and gets in the way of living the life we want to lead.

How to manage unhelpful worry

The first step is to determine the type of worry you are currently experiencing. The decision tree on the next page can help you. If you discover you're experiencing lots of hypothetical worry, remind yourself that your mind is not focusing on a problem you can solve right now, and look for ways to let the worry go and focus on something more constructive. Just that pause in the day offers a respite

Decision Tree to Help Differentiate Between Real Problems vs. Hypothetical Worries

