





LivFull Psychology

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What is Worry?

Everyone experiences worry from time to time, but for some people worry can become troublesome. Excessive worry can make it challenging for people to do daily duties, lead to physical problems, interfere with sleep, and increase irritability. Even if someone has a tendency to worry, it's crucial to realize that it can be controlled so that it doesn't become a problem.

There are two kinds of worry: useful worry and unhelpful worry. When our worrying is helpful and relates to actual, ongoing concerns under our control, we may prepare and concentrate on the problems that require attention. It's important to understand that this kind of worry can be beneficial only when it is transformed into a plan for taking action. For instance, if I'm concerned about missing an appointment, it may prompt me to take action, such as dressing more quickly or skipping breakfast to make up for the time spent in bed.

Unhelpful worry, on the other hand, is centred on speculative or potential (or 'hypothetical') events that are out of our control and may not be affected by whatever action we can pragmatically take. For instance, worrying that a friend might crash their bicycle or that your child will become very ill. Unhelpful Worry is often improbable, unmanageable, and unclear, and can cause meta-worry, or worrying about worrying.

Psychologists have made an interesting observation that excessive worrying is often associated with an individual's intolerance to uncertainty. People differ in their ability to tolerate uncertainty, and some individuals are more intolerant of uncertainty than others. People who struggle to tolerate ambiguity tend to engage in unhelpful/unproductive worry, which may include meta-worry, i.e., worrying about worrying. This means that those who find it difficult to deal with unpredictability tend to spiral into an endless cycle of worrying and behaviours that can be counterproductive to their well-being, for instance, they may engage in seeking excessive reassurance from others (that does not resolve the worry), list-making,

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double-checking, refusing to delegate tasks to others, procrastinating, suppressing or controlling worry, and distracting themselves.

Psychologists have identified various behaviours that individuals engage in when they struggle with tolerating uncertainty. These include:

- **Seeking excessive reassurance from others:** This may involve constantly asking for opinions or feedback from friends and family. While seeking reassurance can provide temporary relief from anxiety, it can also create a dependence on others for reassurance and prevent individuals from developing confidence in their own decision-making abilities.
- **List-making:** Can serve as a way to eliminate uncertainty by creating a sense of structure and control.
- **Double-checking:** A common behavior, where individuals may repeatedly call loved ones to ensure that they are safe, or reread emails multiple times to ensure perfection.
- **Refusal to delegate tasks to others:** Feeling that they cannot trust anyone else to do the job correctly.
- **Procrastination or avoidance:** A common behaviour that individuals may engage in when they experience uncertainty, as avoiding the situation can help to temporarily reduce anxiety.
- **Suppress or control worry:** Research has suggested that this can actually make the worry stronger by causing it to intrude into their thoughts more forcefully.
- **Distraction:** Another strategy that individuals may use to cope with uncertainty, by keeping themselves constantly busy to avoid thinking about uncertainty.

Uncertainty is an unavoidable part of life, and learning to cope with it is essential. Although we can't get rid of uncertainty in our life, we can learn to accept that we cannot control everything and practice being more tolerant of uncertainty. We can also learn to identify unhelpful worry and manage it by focusing on helpful worry that is related to real problems. This can make it more possible to keep worry in proportion and manage it more effectively.