

ELSA Guide



MR. WORRY

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Repetitive thoughts about current or potential events that are deemed as threatening as they seem unmanageable

Have you ever told someone your worry and they've said "You don't need to worry about that" or "Just stop worrying"? For a while this might give you comfort and you tell yourself that you're being silly and you don't need to worry but then what happens? You start worrying about something else or you might still have the same worry. This is because we all worry about different things.

So why do we worry? To answer this question we have to go back in time to when man first existed. In order to survive men would need to hunt for food but whilst they were out hunting they also needed to be aware of the dangers that surrounded them.

Their worry about being eaten by a wild animal made them take time to think of a plan to help them survive and hunt safely. So their worry actually kept them safe and made them more aware of the dangers around them.



This is exactly the same as us now, worrying is natural and can sometimes keep us safe for example you might think; "I'll just cross the road here instead of using the pedestrian crossing" but then you begin to worry that you might not be able to see a car coming and may get knocked down so decide not to cross there. This is your brain warning you of the dangers which makes you worry about what could happen and in turn allows you to make a plan that will keep you safe.

So, worrying can sometimes be a good thing however if we worry about a lot of things, all the time this isn't so good as worry produces negative emotions such as stress.

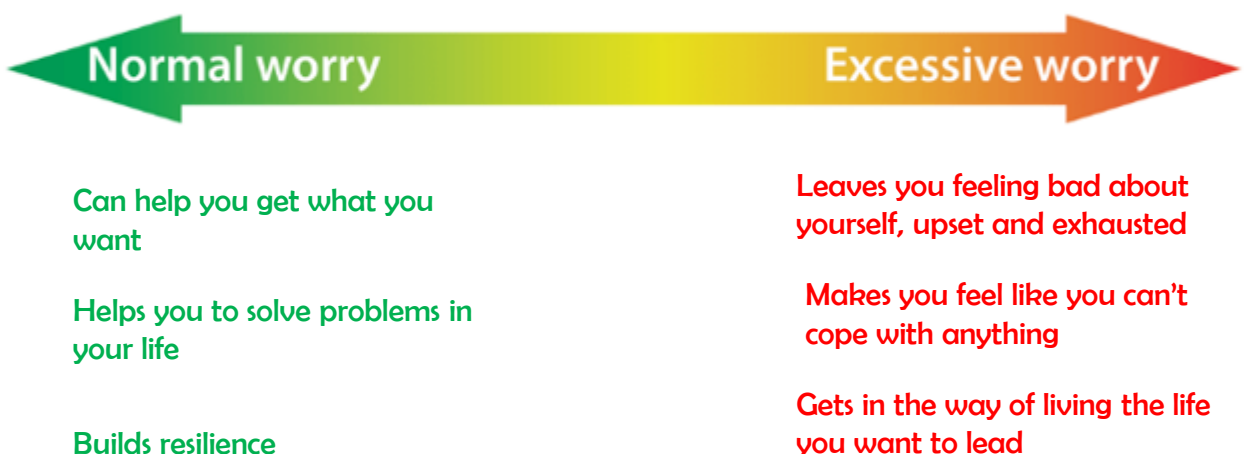
Worry vs Anxiety



People often say that they are feeling anxious when what they actually mean is that they are really worried about something. It's important to understand that although worry and anxiety are really closely connected they are two different things.

- Worries are thoughts that float around in our heads but anxiety is something that we feel physically.
- Anxiety makes our body react in certain ways; you may begin to sweat, shake, have a headache or you may feel sick.
- We all become anxious about some things which is OK because this can build resilience when we overcome the thing we are anxious about.
- Worries tend to come and go whereas anxiety stays with us for a long time.
- Anxiety can take over your life and stop you doing every day things that other people are able to do without thinking it about it.
- Anxiety produces lots of negative emotions that can be difficult to manage.
- Worries can usually be solved easily but people with anxiety may need help from professional people.

Everyone worries and there is no 'right' amount of worry, some people worry more than others. Worry becomes a problem when it stops you from living the life you want to live or if your worries make you feel really bad about yourself, really upset or exhausted.



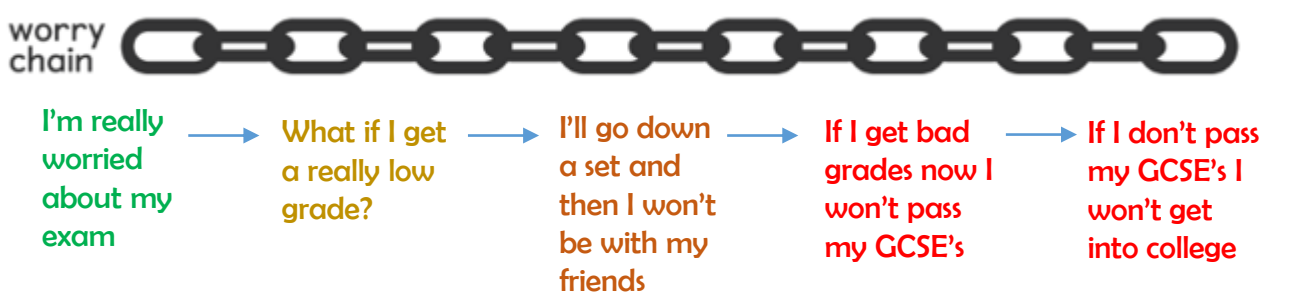
When we worry we tend to work through lots of events in our head and before we know it we have made a whole story up about our original concern. This is our brains way of trying to predict the future and to make us think about any dangers we might face (thinking back to our caveman being eaten by a wild animal). However this is when our worries can become unhelpful or even not true so we need to start rationalising our thoughts.

Rationalising means that you need to look at your ‘worry story’ and work out which parts are real or which parts are likely to happen. For the parts that are real you can start putting a plan in place.

When we are making up our ‘worry story’ we often think of the worst thing that can happen, this is called castastrophizing (making things seem bigger or worse than they actually are).

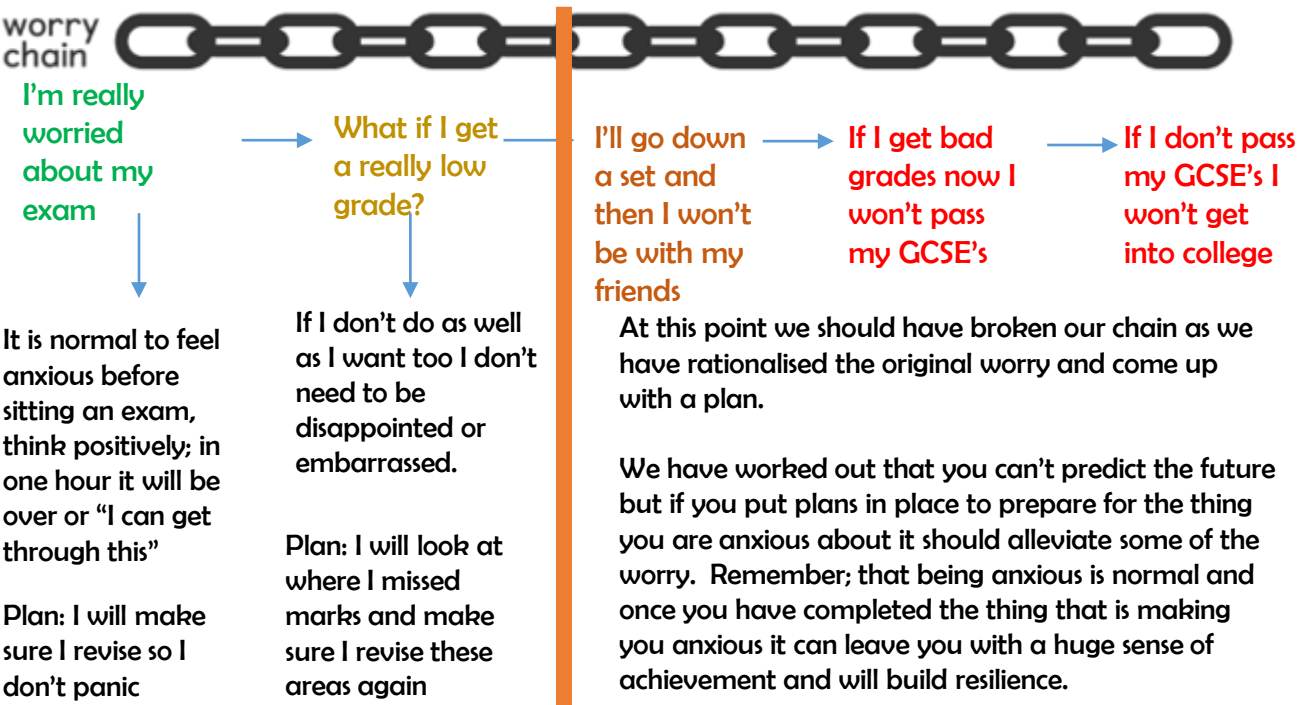
At the moment, we all have real concerns about COVID19, mainly because it is difficult for anyone to predict the future and also because it has changed our lives in so many ways. Here’s an example of something that we may be worried about and how this worry can become even bigger in our heads.

Lets think of our ‘worry story’ as a chain:



Now lets look at this chain, you can see by the colour coding that this worry has got bigger and bigger. The original worry is a normal worry and something that we have probably all experienced but then it becomes something that probably isn't going to happen.

What we need to do is to break this chain by rationalising these worries.





Another thing that can make us worry or feel anxious are unhelpful thoughts. We can sometimes find ourselves falling in to a thinking trap which can be difficult to get out of. Thinking traps are caused when our unhelpful thoughts become bigger than our helpful thoughts, it would be great if we had helpful thoughts all the time but sometimes we just need to make sure that we have a healthy balance of both.



The way that we do this is through some detective work as, just like a detective you need to challenge your unhelpful thoughts and find the evidence behind them. If there's no solid evidence then the unhelpful thought probably isn't true.

An easier way to challenge your thoughts is to write it down:

Thought: All my friends hate me

Evidence for: I said something that upset them, my other friend told me that they hate me

Evidence against: They haven't actually said that they hate me, they are still including me in their conversations, they have still asked me to hang out with them after school, my other friend couldn't tell me exactly what they had said so it probably means that it isn't true.

Case Closed: There is more evidence against my thought

What I will do next: I will talk to my friends and explain that I didn't mean to upset them and apologise.

Top Tips for worry

- **Start a worry book** - If we have lots of worries in our head we can find it difficult to concentrate, it can make you grumpy or you may find it difficult to get to sleep as you have too much going on in your mind. Try writing down all of your worries in a book especially before you go to sleep, as this can 'empty' your brain.
- **Talk to a trusted adult** – talking is the best way to stop your worries as someone might be able to offer a different point of view on the things you are worried about.
- **Use the Worry Chain** - If managed properly worries can help us make plans and problem solve difficulties that we face in the future or in every day life. Use the Worry Chain to help rationalise your worries.
- **Get a good nights sleep** – sleep is so important as lack of sleep can make our worries seem bigger. Our brains need time to rest and often begin to rationalise our thoughts whilst we sleep (even though we're not aware of it happening). You might find that after a good nights sleep the worry has floated away.
- **Positive self talk** – When dealing with a worry try to be positive and say to yourself that there is a solution to every problem.
- **If you find yourself coming up with a problem with your solution then stop**, as you are beginning to create a worry chain. Ask someone to help you come up with a solution for your worry.
- **If you begin to constantly worry try and use a distraction to take you away from your thoughts**. Listen to some soothing music, go and make yourself a drink or watch your favourite TV show.
- **May sure that you surround yourself with positive people.**
- **Use your detective thinking to challenge unhelpful thoughts.**

- Go on a media diet – social media and watching/listening to the news can make us worry in lots of different ways. Social media may make us worry that we don't look at certain way, that our lives aren't as good as other people's or that we are not liked as much as others. The news might leave us feeling worried about things happening in the world. If this happens it is good to take a break from media. Put your phone down, turn the TV off or watch something that will make you laugh.
- Do some exercise – the chemicals that are produced in your body when you exercise can stop your worries becoming worse and it will make you feel better about yourself.
- If you are worried about worrying too much talk to someone.
- Try and think "Is this something I really need to worry about?". Worrying doesn't achieve anything unless you take action and try and come up with a solution for your worry.
- When we are constantly worrying we forget about all the nice things in our life or the nice things around us. Stand outside and listen to the sounds or look at nature. Reconnect with people, text a friend or do something nice with your family.

