

Facing Worry and Anxiety

In this chapter you will learn to:

- * Use relaxation skills to reduce tension and arousal in general as well as in stressful situations
- * Observe objectively the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors associated with anxiety
- * Engage in realistic risk assessment
- * Face your images of catastrophic events and their accompanying emotions so that they lose their power to frighten you
- * Identify and change worry behaviors such as excessive checking and avoiding
- * Solve problems effectively

BACKGROUND

A little anxiety and worry can be very useful. Thinking that something bad might happen in the future if you don't take appropriate action motivates you to study for a test, learn your lines for a play, work on solutions to problems, and do your best when you perform. Anxiety's most important function is to prepare you for the possibility of danger in the future. When you are in an anxious state, you're already a little tense and alert, so it's easy to shift into the fight-or-flight response that is your body's natural fear reaction to imminent danger or threat.

For example, when you're driving on a stormy day, you are likely to feel a little anxious and tense. Rather than daydreaming or listening to the radio, you're likely to hold the steering wheel with both hands, sit up straight, and scan the road for possible threat. When you see a large tree falling just ahead of you, your emotion moves from anxious to fearful as your fight-or-flight response is triggered and you respond instantly by braking and steering your car away from the danger.

Anxiety becomes a problem when it is triggered too frequently, is too intense, or you can't turn it off (Craske and Barlow 2006). If you are always anxious and worried, your body is always prepared for the possibility of danger in the future. While you won't go crazy from it, long-term

anxiety and worry are likely to cause sleep problems, fatigue, irritability, and poor concentration that can negatively impact your performance and productivity.

Anxiety can be triggered by anything that is perceived as potentially dangerous or threatening, such as the possibility of making a mistake, being rejected, missing a deadline, or not doing well on a test. The danger doesn't even have to be real, because simply thinking it might occur sometime in the future produces anxiety. People create unnecessary anxiety for themselves when they overestimate the danger of a possible future event, as well as overstate the likelihood that it will actually occur. They wonder, "What if this terrible thing happens and I can't cope with it?" Then they think, "It would be a disaster!" Thoughts like these trigger anxiety.

It's Monday morning, and Ana is worried her children will be late for school and get into "big trouble." She's also worried that she isn't prepared to give a five-minute speech at work today, and will therefore blow it, even though she has been working on it for two weeks, and she's worried that her sick brother, at home with a cold, could get pneumonia.

Ana, like most chronically anxious people, does what she can to prevent bad things from happening: she overprepares for work because she is worried she will be criticized and perhaps even lose her job if she makes a mistake. She gets herself and her children to appointments early so as not to impolitely barge in late or miss something important. She's worried that if she doesn't check things repeatedly, disaster might result. Ironically, these "worry behaviors" perpetuate her anxiety because they prevent her from learning that it is highly unlikely that anything catastrophic would happen if she doesn't do these things, and if there were a mishap, that she probably could handle it.

So what if her kids are a few minutes late to school occasionally? She might get a call from the school, but they won't fail or be kicked out. Checking on her sick brother many times a day may provide her with momentary reassurance, but it won't prevent pneumonia.

When they are worrying and engaging in worry behavior, everyone becomes stressed. Ana goes to bed Sunday night worrying about her problems and this makes her feel keyed up rather than sleepy. When she can't sleep, she gets up after tossing and turning for an hour to make her children's lunches, rather than leaving this chore to them as she normally would. She does this because she thinks it might prevent her children from being late to school. She recalls the disapproving look on the school principal's face last week when she arrived late with the kids, and she feels a wave of fear as well as more tension in her shoulders.

She says to herself, *She must think I'm an incompetent mother. Maybe I'm not cut out to work and raise kids on my own.* Her stomach feels queasy. *What if they're not getting enough of my time? What if they start thinking it's okay to be late? What if they start turning their homework in late ... maybe not do it at all? I can't handle all this and my job too!* She massages the pain that is spreading across her shoulders and takes an antacid to quell her stomach upset. *"I'm so wired ... if I don't get some sleep, I won't be functional tomorrow."* She returns to bed, sets her alarm to go off a half hour earlier than usual, and tosses and turns for another hour before falling asleep. As you can see, worry, worry behavior, and tension interact to escalate and maintain anxiety.

This chapter is based on the work of Michelle G. Craske and David H. Barlow (2006), John White (1999), and Mary Ellen Copeland (1998). It addresses the three components of anxiety that work together to maintain your anxiety and worry over time:

1. Your thoughts that tell you there is a possibility of danger or threat in the future
2. Your body that becomes tense in response to this alert message
3. Your behaviors that are designed to check for danger and avoid it if possible

SYMPTOM-RELIEF EFFECTIVENESS

The skills taught in this chapter will help you reduce your anxiety and worry and lessen the physical symptoms of tension associated with excessive worry, such as feeling restless, keyed up, or nervous; sleep disturbances; tiredness; difficulty concentrating; muscle tension; and irritability. These skills will also lessen the occurrence of your spontaneous fear-provoking images of disaster and cut down on your worry behavior.

TIME TO MASTER

You can learn and apply these skills within a few months. Move at a pace you are comfortable with as you work your way through the exercises in this chapter. Your success will depend on how much you practice these exercises.

INSTRUCTIONS

Relaxation Skills for General and Acute Tension Relief

As you read about in Ana's example above, physical tension both contributes to and results from worry and anxiety. You can use the relaxation skills you've been learning in this book to begin to intervene in your cycle of anxiety and worry. If you haven't already mastered diaphragmatic breathing, turn to chapter 3 and begin with the exercise called *How Do You Currently Breathe?* then move on to *Diaphragmatic or Abdominal Breathing*. After you are comfortable with diaphragmatic breathing, use it to practice the exercise *Mindful Breath Counting*, which, in addition to being relaxing, will help you to become more objective and self-accepting as you observe your thoughts, sensations, and feelings.

Next, turn to chapter 7 and learn the first three stages of *Applied Relaxation*. That is, practice the exercises from the sections called *Progressive Muscle Relaxation*, *Release-Only Relaxation*,

and Cue-Controlled Relaxation. Your goal is to be able to relax in two or three minutes using cue-controlled relaxation techniques. As you practice this exercise, be sure to focus on the sensations of relaxation in your body, especially in your chest, abdomen, forehead, and shoulders.

To bring down your general level of arousal and tension associated with anxiety and worry, set aside time once or twice a day to relax for twenty minutes. Use this time to learn and practice Diaphragmatic or Abdominal Breathing, Mindful Breath Counting, and the first three exercises in chapter 7. Keep a log of your level of relaxation before and after you practice your twenty-minute relaxation exercise, using the Record of General Tension in chapter 2, Body Awareness.

Once you have successfully paired the word “relax” in the exercise Cue-Controlled Relaxation with the sensations of deep relaxation, start using cue-controlled relaxation whenever you feel your tension beginning to mount during the day. You will also be using this technique later in this chapter when you practice imagery exposure and change your worry behaviors.

Step Back and Observe Your Anxiety

It’s hard to change something until you understand it. So to become more aware of the various components of your own anxiety, you will need to keep a daily record. You will identify your anxious thoughts, sensations of tension, and worry behavior and observe how they interact to cause your anxiety to escalate. According to Craske and Barlow (2006), you will become more detached and objective about your anxiety, worry, and tension when you regularly monitor and record your anxious experiences. You will then use this information to practice the next three techniques presented in this chapter and gain greater control over your anxiety and worry. You can also monitor your improvement, and pinpoint those areas in which you still need to work further, by continuing to fill out the Anxious Episode Record forms.

Make a large number of copies of the blank Anxious Episode Record, adapted from Craske and Barlow’s (2006) Worry Record, and use one when you notice a dramatic increase in your anxiety level, when you catch yourself worrying, or when you feel symptoms of physical tension. Following is an example of Ana’s Anxious Episode Record Form.

Realistically Assess Risk

If you worry excessively, most likely you don’t have the skills to assess risk appropriately. Some people worry excessively every time they plan to fly on an airplane or each time they drive their car on a freeway. Others worry beyond reason about suddenly losing their job, even when there is no external circumstance that would warrant their becoming unemployed. The problem with overestimating risk is that it subtly increases the amount of your worry until the worry itself becomes a bigger problem than the dangers you worry about. Learning accurate risk-assessment skills can make a huge difference in your overall anxiety level.

ANA'S ANXIOUS EPISODE RECORD FORM

Date: 5/5

Length of episode: 5 hours

Anxiety Severity Scale:

Put an X at the point on this scale that best describes your maximum level of anxiety during this episode:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	X	10
None			Mild			Moderate			Strong		
Extreme											

Triggering events: *Five-minute presentation tomorrow at work, children late to school last week, brother sick.*

Worries: *I'm going to blow my presentation tomorrow and my boss will think I'm incompetent and fire me, my kids will be late to school and the principal will think that I'm an incompetent mother. What if my kids start being late about other things like homework? I couldn't handle that! What if my brother's cold turns into pneumonia? He could die! I wouldn't know what to do with such a terrible loss.*

Underline and/or fill in physical symptoms: *muscle tension, sleep difficulties, difficulty concentrating, mind going blank, irritability, fatigue, restlessness, feeling keyed up or on edge. Other: upset stomach, pain in shoulders.*

Worry behaviors: *Make children's lunches and set alarm a half hour early to prevent their being late, over-prepare for five-minute presentation, check on sick brother many times a day.*

ANXIOUS EPISODE RECORD FORM

Date: _____ Length of episode: _____

Anxiety Severity Scale:

Put an X at the point on this scale that best describes your maximum level of anxiety during this episode:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
None			Mild			Moderate				Strong
Extreme										

Triggering events:

Worries:

Underline and/or fill in physical symptoms: muscle tension, sleep difficulties, difficulty concentrating, mind going blank, irritability, fatigue, restlessness, feeling keyed up or on edge. Other:

Worry behaviors:

PREDICTING OUTCOMES

Most chronic worriers focus their attention on catastrophic outcomes. Regardless of how likely (or unlikely) it is that the event they are worrying about will actually occur, their fear is primarily based on the worst possible consequence. For example, a woman who had worried constantly about being abandoned thought her life would be destroyed when her husband told her he was leaving their marriage. But instead of being lonely and sad and single for the rest of her life, she was very unhappy for only a few months. After some intimate conversations with her friends, she realized that many people went through divorce and ended up happier than they had been before. She soon became very social, physically active, and even fell in love with a more suitable partner—all before her divorce was final. So, although she was very unhappy for a relatively short period of time, the catastrophic outcome she'd expected never came to pass.

When you worry, you tend to forget that your capacity to cope with even the most serious disaster is quite remarkable. People survive—and sometimes even benefit from—situations they originally perceived as catastrophic. In most instances, you, your friends, and your family will find a way to cope with whatever happens.

You will find a Risk Assessment Form below that you can use to lower your anxiety by estimating accurate probabilities and making coping plans for catastrophe. Make a number of copies and fill out one each time you find yourself worrying excessively.

On the first line, record one of your worries in the form of a feared event. Write down the worst possible version of your worry. For example, if you worry about your spouse, who is a traveling salesperson, imagine the very worst: a disastrous plane crash over the Pacific Ocean, months of investigation that lead to no evidence, and none of the bodies ever being recovered. You'll never see your spouse again, and you'll end up financially ruined. On the second line, write the worry thoughts that typically come up for you: "He'll die ... the family will never be able to make it ... I'll never sleep again ... horrible ... a nightmare beyond nightmares. ..." Jot down whatever comes to mind, even if it is just an image or a fleeting word. On the third line, rate your anxiety when considering this worst-case scenario. Use 0 for no anxiety and 100 for the worst fear you have ever experienced. On the fourth line rate the probability of this worst-case scenario coming to pass—from 0 percent for no likelihood at all to 100 percent for absolute inevitability.

The next five items in the Risk Assessment Form address catastrophic thinking. Assuming your biggest fear actually did occur, predict all the worst possible consequences. Then try to think of specific coping thoughts and actions that might help you manage in the face of the catastrophe. As you do this, consider how long it is likely to last; what resources you can use to help yourself; and how you and/or other people have coped with similar experiences. Once you have some ideas about how you could deal with the worst catastrophe, go ahead and create a revised prediction of the consequences. Some things may now look a little less daunting because you have a coping plan. Rerate your anxiety after this process to see if there's been any change.

The next three items in the Risk Assessment Form address the issue of overestimation. List the evidence against the worst outcome happening. Then list all the alternative outcomes you can think of. Figure the odds of the worst outcome happening as realistically as you can. When you begin to do this, consider how many times you have had this worry versus how many times it has actually happened. If it has happened before, be sure that you are not basing your guess on a limited number of cases. You may want to survey your friends or look up the actual odds. Finally, rerate the probability of the event occurring and your anxiety about the event. You should find that both your probability and anxiety ratings have declined as a result of your making a full and objective risk assessment.

Following is an example of a filled-out Risk Assessment Form from Paul, a student who is afraid of failure in general, and is specifically worried about his entrance examination for law school.

Fill out a Risk Assessment Form each time you are confronted by a significant worry, or whenever you return to a worry more than once. It's important to do this exercise consistently. Each risk assessment helps you change your old habits of catastrophic thinking. When you've completed a risk assessment, keep the form. You may wish to refer to it again when confronting a similar worry. Remember that you've had lots of practice with your old ways of thinking. You are going to have to practice this new fact-based, realistic thinking for some time before it becomes automatic.

SAMPLE RISK ASSESSMENT FORM

1. Feared event: *Performing poorly on my law school entrance exams (LSAT).*
2. Automatic thoughts: *I'll score extremely low. My mind will freeze and I won't know any of the answers.*
3. Rate anxiety from 0 to 100: 95
4. Rate probability of event from 0 to 100 percent: 90
5. Assuming the worst happens, predict the worst possible consequences: *I'll score so low that I won't get into any law school. All my undergraduate work will be useless. I'll end up working at a job I detest.*
6. Possible coping thoughts: *If I don't do well the first time, I can take it again and learn from the experience. There are other appealing careers besides law; for example, I'm still very interested in publishing.*
7. Possible coping actions: *Study regularly. Take a class that will help me prepare for the exam. If I need to take the LSAT again, maybe I can find a study partner who is planning to take it at the same time I am.*
8. Revised predictions of consequences: *I won't completely fail. If I do poorly the first time, I'll use that information to help me better prepare for the next opportunity to take the exam. Also, I really can consider an alternative career.*
9. Rerate anxiety from 0 to 100: 70
10. Evidence against the worst possible outcome: *I am studying diligently and I typically receive higher-than-average scores on my exams. I scored in the eighty-fifth percentile on my SATs.*
11. Alternative outcomes: *I may do just fine. I may do better than I expect. I may not do as well as I need to get into my first-choice law school, but my second choice is also a reputable institution. I may need to take the LSAT again and make a bigger commitment to preparation. In each case, I'd end up being a lawyer.*
12. Rerate probability of event from 0 to 100 percent: 35
13. Rerate anxiety from 0 to 100: 45

RISK ASSESSMENT FORM

1. Feared event:

2. Automatic thoughts:

3. Rate anxiety from 0 to 100: _____

4. Rate probability of event from 0 to 100 percent: _____

5. Assuming the worst happens, predict the worst possible consequences:

6. Possible coping thoughts:

7. Possible coping actions:

8. Revised predictions of consequences:

9. Rerate anxiety from 0 to 100: _____

10. Evidence against the worst possible outcome:

11. Alternative outcomes:

12. Rerate probability of event from 0 to 100 percent: _____

13. Rerate anxiety from 0 to 100: _____

Face Your Worst Fears

Have you ever had an image of a terrible event—real or imagined—just pop into your head? Did it trigger a fear response? For instance, if you worry about driving, you might have had the image of a truck plowing into the back of your car when you are stopped at an intersection, which filled you with terror. According to Craske and Barlow (2006), worries are often associated with vivid mental images. Each time you replay such a picture, it's as though the feared incident is really happening, and you experience a fearful fight-or-flight response. Worrying is less distressing than this fear response, and so you are likely to divert your thinking to worrying about "all those bad drivers out there," and take preventive measures such as frequently checking your side and rearview mirrors. Your fearful catastrophic image gives fuel to your worry. Unfortunately, if you try to avoid this fearful image, it is a little like telling yourself not to think of a white polar bear—the image just pops up again.

Craske and Barlow (2006) have observed that if you repeatedly face your feared image on purpose, after a while you'll find that your fear of it has declined. With your fear lessened or even gone, you will be less likely to worry about not being safe and in control. They developed "imagery exposure" as a safe and convenient method to imagine your feared image repeatedly, causing your fear of it to diminish. It incorporates the relaxation, monitoring, and risk-assessment skills that you have been practicing.

GETTING READY FOR IMAGERY EXPOSURE

Before purposefully exposing yourself to your feared images, copy a number of the blank Preparing for Imagery Exposure Form for each of the main topics you worry about most.

Sandy, who had learned from her Navy parents that she must "shape up, keep her home shipshape, or ship out," spent a great deal of her time cleaning and straightening up her house. But no matter how much time she spent cleaning, it was never enough. She rarely had anyone over because she was afraid that others would think she was such a slob they wouldn't want to have anything to do with her.

Sandy's Preparing for Imagery Exposure Form follows:

SAMPLE PREPARING FOR IMAGERY EXPOSURE FORM

1. Write down one of the main topics you worry about most.

People disapproving of me because of my messy, dirty house and then rejecting me.

2. For this worry, write down the image that pops into your mind that represents the worst thing that could happen. You may have already identified this image on a Risk Assessment Form. This time, instead of concentrating on your anxiety-provoking thoughts, you will focus on the image of the worst thing that could happen. Describe this worst-case image as though it is happening to you right now. Be specific. Include your physical and emotional reactions.

The neighbors, whom my husband invited over for dinner, arrive early for my husband's birthday dinner. I haven't had time to pick up the house, let alone finish making dinner. My husband lets them in and they look around and shake their heads. My husband says, in a sarcastic tone, that the place looks like a tornado just blew through and he begins picking up clothes, dishes, and newspapers from the living room floor and the dining room table and his wife comes out to the kitchen and starts doing the dishes in the sink, and asks me when did I last wash dishes. I feel a rush of tingling energy through my body, my face is hot, my chest and shoulders are tense, and my stomach churns. I feel embarrassed, ashamed, mad, and nervous. I have a strong urge to flee, but I'm trapped; I'm the hostess and it is my husband's birthday. The next day when I take a walk in the neighborhood, all the people turn away from me and refuse to speak to me. I realize they have been told what a dirty slob I am. My stomach sinks, my chest and arms are tight, and my heart is pounding. I feel ashamed and lonely.

3. What does this image mean to you?

That if people visit when my house is messy, they will think I'm a dirty slob and they won't want to have anything to do with me and I'll be ashamed and lonely forever.

4. Using the Anxiety Severity Scale on your Anxious Episode Record Form, rate the level of anxiety you experienced as you imagined this image (0 being none and 10 being extreme).

PREPARING FOR IMAGERY EXPOSURE FORM

1. Write down one of the main topics you worry about most.

2. For this worry, write down the image that pops into your mind that represents the worst thing that could happen. You may have already identified this image on a Risk Assessment Form. This time, instead of concentrating on your anxiety-provoking thoughts, you will focus on the image of the worst thing that could happen. Describe this worst-case image as though it is happening to you right now. Be specific. Include your physical and emotional reactions.

3. What does this image mean to you?

4. Using the Anxiety Severity Scale on your Anxious Episode Record Form, rate the level of anxiety you experienced as you imagined this image (0 being none and 10 being extreme).

When you have completed a Preparing for Imagery Exposure Form for each of the topics you worry about most, order them from the least anxiety-provoking image to the most distressing image on a scale of 0 (no distress) to 10 (extreme distress).

INSTRUCTIONS FOR IMAGERY EXPOSURE

1. **Beginning with your least distressing image, read your description, and then close your eyes and imagine the scene as clearly as possible, using all of your five senses.** Imagine you are in the situation; you are really experiencing it. Try not only to see the image, imagine its sounds and smells. Imagine what it would feel like to touch something from the image. Imagine your fearful emotions and physical sensations, as well as the meaning you give to the situation in your imagery.
2. **After one minute, use a 0 to 10 point scale to rate the vividness of your imagery, with 0 meaning no image and 10 meaning extremely vivid.** Rate your anxiety on the Anxiety Severity Scale. If your imagery wasn't clear or you rated it as less than 5 and you didn't experience at least a little fear, repeat instruction step 1. Remember that you are a participant and not an observer. Imagine the situation, the meaning you give it, and the fear sensations and emotions that you imagine experiencing. If you still have difficulty imagining the scene, read the first Special Considerations section below before moving to the next item on this list.
3. **When you have a clear image associated with some anxiety, stay focused on it for five minutes.** To do this, you may need to repeatedly reread your description of the image and imagine the event as though it is actually occurring. Let yourself experience any emotions and sensations that are produced by the image. Allow the image, your sensations, and emotions be whatever they will be without trying to change them. The distress and meaning associated with the image will change as you repeatedly expose yourself to the image. Keep bringing your focus back to your image and the accompanying meaning, emotions, and physical sensations.
4. **Relax, using cue-controlled relaxation. If needed, use progressive relaxation. Once you are relaxed, answer these questions:**
 - Do you think that just because you imaged this event, it might happen?
 - If this event were to happen, what would you do to handle it?
 - How are you blowing out of proportion the meaning of this imagined event?
 - Based on facts and logic, how likely is this imagined event to happen?

Use the strategies that you've been learning, along with your already existing personal resources, to work toward a more realistic interpretation and way of coping with your imagined event.

5. **Read your description again, close your eyes, and imagine the event once more, as if it were really happening, for half a minute.** Rate how vivid the image is on the 0 to 10 scale. Rate your level of anxiety on the Anxiety Severity Scale. Once you have a vivid image associated with some anxiety, then try to imagine it for five minutes. In addition to imagining the event, imagine what happens in the days, weeks, and months ahead. In short, see yourself handling the imagined event. For example, if your imagined event is your house burning down, imagine witnessing that happening. Then imagine the next day when your friends and family come over to commiserate with you and help you salvage what you can. And imagine the next week when you complete the insurance paperwork regarding your losses, and the next month when you meet with an architect to discuss the plans for building your new house.
6. **Repeat instruction step 4, first relaxing and then answering the four bulleted questions again.** Repeat steps 5 and 4 until your anxiety level is 2 or less on the Anxiety Severity Scale, at which point you can move on to exposing yourself to your next image. You may find that as your distress response to the image diminishes, you are less able to imagine the image. This is to be expected and is a natural occurrence.
7. **You can work at your own pace.** As a rule of thumb, you might try three five-minute rounds of imagery exposure a day. Keep a record of your practice with the upcoming Imagery Exposure Log. Apply imagery exposure to all of the catastrophic images you have, one at a time.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are several reasons why you might have difficulty imagining your catastrophic scene:

1. **The first item on your list simply may not be very anxiety-provoking for you.** Typically, emotions cause an image to become more vivid; if the image is neutral for you, it might not be very clear. You may have already realized that your images are of events that are unlikely to happen; or if they did, you could cope with them. You may think, "This is just an image, it's not real." If so, you are ready to move on to the next item.
2. **You may be a novice at using imagery.** If so, practice visualizing more neutral and/or positive scenes before attempting to visualize your catastrophic images. Here is one exercise to get you started:

Without looking up from this page, close your eyes, and imagine your surroundings in as much detail as you can. Use all of your senses. Imagine yourself moving around in this space. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you touch? What do you feel? What do you smell and taste? When you are done, open your eyes and compare your recollection with the real thing.

Then close your eyes again, and imagine yourself in the same place, but this time you see an unfamiliar door. You open this door and imagine walking into a pleasant and safe place. Explore this place, not as an observer, but as a participant. Be sure to use all your senses. Practice this exercise in different settings to improve your observational abilities and imagination. Once you can imagine neutral and/or positive scenes, start doing imagery exposure with your personal catastrophic images again.

3. **The image you are imagining may be too general.** If so, make your image more specific. For instance, instead of imagining your six-year-old disappearing, imagine a specific event such as your child disappearing in your favorite department store filled with a crowd at Christmastime.
4. **Your image may be too anxiety-provoking, and you are trying to avoid anxiety.** If you suspect that this is the case, remember these three facts:
 - a. It's just a picture, not reality.
 - b. Imagining an image won't make it come true.
 - c. The more you expose yourself to the distressing images, the less distressing they will become.

If necessary, you can make the image feel less threatening by imagining it first as a black-and-white snapshot or a black-and-white moving picture that you are watching from across the room. Work toward imagining yourself in the catastrophic picture. You need to be willing to experience the distress of facing what you are avoiding in order to reduce your fear and anxiety. If you continue to have problems, a cognitive behavioral therapist experienced in using imagery can help you with this.

5. **If you find that your emotional distress does not decrease or actually increases with repeated exposures to the image, observe whether the image is continually changing.** This often happens in everyday worrying. It can actually cause you more distress, because an image can trigger the fearful fight-or-flight response. When you worry, rather than staying with the same image until you get used to it and your distress diminishes, you flit from one distressing picture to the next and your anxiety escalates. When you are practicing this procedure, remember to stick with the same image while you are

repeating the imagery exposure until your distress decreases, and only then go on to the next item on your list.

6. Keep a record of your imagery exposure practice that includes the date, a name for the image you are working on, how vivid the image is, and your maximum anxiety level based on the Anxiety Severity Scale. Use the blank Imagery Exposure Log we've provided to keep your record.

HOW IMAGERY EXPOSURE WORKS

To continue with the last example, Sandy read the description of her image that she had written out on the Preparing for Imagery Exposure Form in which she imagined a neighbor couple disapproving of her messy house, their telling her other neighbors about her slovenly ways, and then all of her neighbors ostracizing her. She was surprised by how easily she could imagine the details of the scene as though she were really in it, and also surprised by how anxious she became. She rated both the vividness of the image and her anxiety as an 8. When she focused on the image for five minutes, she began to sob as she imagined the shame and embarrassment associated with being disapproved of, as well as the painful shame and loneliness of being ostracized by all of her neighbors. When she caught herself blanking out, worrying about something else, or her mind drifting from her original image, she reread her description of the scene a few times. At the end of five minutes, she used cue-controlled relaxation to bring her tension level down. She gave careful thought to the following four questions before she answered them:

- Do you think that just because you imaged this event, it might happen? *No.*
- If this event were to happen, what would you do to handle it? *I would do cue-controlled relaxation as soon as I realized the neighbors were early. I would clarify that I wasn't expecting them for another hour and still have some things to do before I am ready. Since I feel calmer and more in charge giving orders, I would tell my husband to clean up the living and dining rooms and invite the neighbor woman to help me in the kitchen. If they said something that I thought was a sign of disapproval, I would be honest or use humor.*
- How are you blowing out of proportion the meaning of this imagined event? *I have some friends in this neighborhood who have seen my home when it was untidy, and they like me just fine. I see them often and I rarely feel lonely. This couple, based on one visit, may think I'm a lousy housekeeper, but they aren't going to turn the whole neighborhood against me because of one visit.*
- Based on facts and logic, how likely is this imagined event to happen? *Unlikely. Most people are not as particular as my parents are about how a house looks, and they are not likely to condemn anyone based on how her home looks on a single occasion. Certainly the whole neighborhood isn't going to turn against me because of this. I have friends who accept me as I am.*

When Sandy closed her eyes again to imagine her image for a minute, along with the associated emotions, sensations, and meaning, she noticed that the image was still vivid (8), and that her anxiety had come down by two points (6). When she imagined the image for five minutes—including what she would do the following day, week, and month—she could see herself coping, using cue-controlled relaxation, rational thinking, honesty, humor, and her support system of husband and friends. At the end of five minutes, she rated the vividness of her image as an 8 and her anxiety as a 4. When answering the four questions again, she added that she couldn't please everybody and if some people thought she kept a messy house, this didn't make her a bad person.

EXAMPLE OF SANDY'S IMAGERY EXPOSURE LOG

<i>Today's Date</i>	<i>Image (Identifying Phrase)</i>	<i>Vividness</i> 0–10	<i>Maximum Anxiety</i> 0–10
6/1	Messy house	8	8
6/2	Messy house	8	4
6/3	Messy house	6	2
6/4	Job interview	9	8
6/5	Job interview	8	5
6/6	Job interview	7	3
6/7	Job interview	7	2

IMAGERY EXPOSURE LOG

<i>Today's Date</i>	<i>Image (Identifying Phrase)</i>	<i>Vividness</i>	<i>Maximum Anxiety</i>
		0–10	0–10

Change Your Worry Behavior

Worry behavior is designed to prevent bad things from happening. It reassures you that you are doing everything you can to keep your world from unraveling. Recall Ana's worry behavior: overpreparing for a five-minute speech, repeatedly checking on her brother, getting up in the middle of the night to make her children's lunches, and setting the alarm clock a half hour earlier in order to get her kids to school on time. Some people even worry about being worried, so they try to avoid activities that might cause them to worry.

As you've learned, worry behavior actually perpetuates your worry and anxiety because it prevents you from finding out that the negative event you are trying to prevent is unlikely to happen; and if something bad did happen, that most likely you could cope with it. For example, you think that you've dodged the bullet of your boss yelling at you for making a mistake by checking and rechecking your work. Unfortunately, checking and rechecking your work keeps you from discovering how likely it is that you will make a mistake significant enough for your boss to soundly criticize you. It also prevents you from learning that, if by chance you did make a big mistake and your boss yelled at you for it, you could handle it. The result: endless worrying, needless tension, and wasted time and effort checking and rechecking.

Worry behavior that reinforces your worry and anxiety needlessly is not the same as actions you take to guard your and your family's safety when the probability of something dangerous happening is relatively high. When you have to leave work alone after dark in a dangerous part of town, it is prudent to have parked your car under a streetlight earlier in the day. When your teenager is out hours past her curfew, it's a good idea to check on his or her whereabouts.

In the next exercise you will be asked to identify your worry behaviors. For each of your worry behaviors, you are to plan an alternative behavior that will allow you to test your negative prediction of what will happen if you don't perform your worry behavior. For example, if you worry that you will miss something crucial if you are late to meetings so you always arrive early for them, your alternative behavior could be to arrive on time or even be a few minutes late.

Here is an example of Owen's Alternatives to Worry Behavior Form:

ALTERNATIVES TO WORRY BEHAVIOR FORM

<i>Worry Behavior</i>	<i>Alternative Behavior</i>	<i>Prediction</i>	<i>Maximum Anxiety</i>
Check 6 times daily on wife	Check once daily on wife	She'll die	10
Stay at work until all work done	Leave work on time with one item incomplete	I'll be seen as unproductive, I'll be fired	8
Wks. of research to buy new appliances	3 hrs. research to buy new appliances	Make a mistake	9
Avoid guests due to messy house	Dinner party with one soiled item left out	Be viewed as slob, Rejection	8
Perfectly groomed for work	Wear soiled, wrinkled, or uncoordinated clothes	They'll think I'm an unprofessional slob	8
Count to 10 before leaving a room	Leave room without counting	I or a family member will get hurt or die	10

You are likely to experience significant anxiety the first time you don't engage in the worry behavior that was designed specifically to protect you from something terrible happening. But you will find that it is actually quite a relief to discover that usually nothing terrible happens, and if something bad does happen, you can handle it. Typically, your anxiety will rapidly diminish with repeated practice of your alternative behavior. Now you are ready to fill out your Alternatives to Worry Behavior Form. Your Alternatives to Worry Behavior Form will serve as a guide when you practice your alternative behaviors in real life. Follow the instructions below.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Identify your worry behaviors.** In the first column of the Alternatives to Worry Behavior Form below, write down all your worry behaviors that you know are excessive and based on worry. Review your Anxious Episode Records to help you recall your key worry behaviors.
2. **Plan alternatives to your worry behaviors.** In the second column of the Alternatives to Worry Behavior Form, write down a nonanxiety-based alternative behavior for each of your worry behaviors. You might want to think about what a person would do in the same situation if they didn't have your worry. For example, because Owen worries about being seen as unproductive and losing his job, he stays late to finish his work every night; his coworkers routinely leave work on time with their work incomplete.
3. **Predict what will happen if you don't perform your worry behavior.** In the third column of the Alternatives to Worry Behavior Form, write down your worst-case scenario prediction of what will happen when you practice your alternative behavior in place of your worry behavior.
4. **Estimate the maximum anxiety you will feel when you first do your alternative behavior.** In the fourth column of the Alternatives to Worry Behavior Form, rate on the Anxiety Severity Scale (0 = no anxiety; 10 = extreme anxiety) what you anticipate your maximum anxiety will be the first time you actually do each of the alternative behaviors.

ALTERNATIVES TO WORRY BEHAVIOR FORM

<i>Worry Behavior</i>	<i>Alternative Behavior</i>	<i>Prediction</i>	<i>Maximum Anxiety</i>
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

PRACTICE YOUR ALTERNATIVE TO WORRY BEHAVIOR

Beginning with the least anxiety-provoking alternative to a worry behavior, practice it daily until your maximum anxiety level when you do it is no more than 2 on the Anxiety Severity Scale. In preparing to do your alternative behavior, you can use the skills you learned earlier in this chapter to realistically judge the odds of something bad happening, evaluate your catastrophic prediction, and plan what you would do if something negative were to happen. You can also use cue-controlled relaxation if you feel tense.

Ideally, you should practice your alternative behavior every day. However, if an alternative behavior can be practiced only once a week (*example*: sitting in the middle of a pew near the front of the church during a service rather than on an aisle seat in the back for easy exit in case of an emergency), it makes sense to work on more than one alternative behavior at a time. This is also true if the alternative behavior depends on circumstances beyond your control (*example*: attending parties to which you have been invited, rather than not going),

Use the Alternative Behavior Practice Log below to record the date on which you practice, what alternative behavior you are practicing, the consequence of doing that behavior, and your maximum anxiety level that day. Compare the consequence of doing your alternative behavior with your prediction of what would happen when you practiced that behavior. Did the consequence of your alternative behavior disconfirm your prediction? Even if something negative did

happen when you practiced your alternative behavior, were you able to cope with the consequence? If not, what could you do next time to cope more effectively?

Be on the lookout for subtle worry behaviors you might engage in to avoid the possible consequences of your alternative behavior (for example, attending a party but not talking to anyone or talking only to people you know well to avoid possible rejection). Of course, you have to be the judge of what level of challenge you are ready to take on. As you move through your list practicing your alternatives to worry behaviors, you will discover that you can tolerate more anxiety than you thought you could. This will allow you to take on greater challenges faster.

Owen, a supervisor in a bank, always stayed late to finish all his work every day. He planned as his alternative behavior to leave at least one item incomplete and to leave work on time each day. His prediction was that, if he did this, he would be overwhelmed by the work that would pile up, and that, ultimately, he would be fired for being underproductive.

When evaluating the odds of his negative prediction coming true, he had to admit to himself that his fear was unlikely because he was the only person at the bank besides the bank president who stayed late to finish up his work and the only one who finished all his work every day, yet none of his colleagues had been fired for being underproductive. In the improbable event that he would be fired, he knew that with all of his contacts at other banks he would not be unemployed for very long. In spite of this awareness, he predicted that his anxiety level would score an 8 when he practiced his alternative behavior.

The first day of practice, Owen's maximum level of anxiety was actually a 6 when he left work on time with one small item incomplete. He knew that he had worked hard to get things done during the day so as to not leave anything significant undone. Rather than sabotage his progress, the next day he purposely didn't work very hard and he didn't complete an important item before he left work on time; his maximum level of anxiety for the day was an 8. He resisted the temptation to stay late, and instead he practiced cue-controlled relaxation at his desk before he went home. He did the same over the next three days. By the middle of the second workweek, Owen's maximum anxiety level was a 2; he had learned he could leave work on time, confident that if something important had to wait until the next day he could manage it.

Here's an example of Owen's Alternative Behavior Practice Log:

ALTERNATIVE BEHAVIOR PRACTICE LOG			
<i>Date</i>	<i>Alternative Behavior</i>	<i>Consequence</i>	<i>Maximum Anxiety</i>
7/10	Leave work on time with one item not done	Nobody noticed; able to complete item	6
7/11	"	Nobody noticed; able to complete 7/10 item	8
7/12	"	Client wanted 7/11 item not done; able to deliver by end of day, acceptable to customer	7
7/13	"	Nobody noticed; able to complete 7/12 item	4
7/14	"	Boss wanted 7/13 item but agreed to wait until item complete	5
7/17	"	Nobody noticed; unable to complete 7/14 item	3
7/18	"	Nobody noticed; able to complete 7/14 and 7/17 undone items today	3
7/19	"	Nobody noticed; chose not to complete 7/18 item today	2
7/20	Wore wrinkled shirt to work	Nobody noticed	7
7/21	"	Coworker joked about it	6

Other Factors to Consider

If you experience little or no anxiety when you practice behavioral alternatives, you may have learned to think more realistically. If this is the case, completing the behavior alternatives exercise will confirm your new way of thinking. Be careful not to engage in subtle forms of checking, preventing, and avoiding to keep your anxiety low. For instance, if as an alternative to micromanaging you choose to delegate responsibilities to others, don't go around checking on them and making improvements on what they have done.

If you think that it would be too anxiety-provoking to practice this exercise, remember that your anxiety will be short-lived compared to the ongoing anxiety you will experience if you don't change your behavior. Remember that it's not unusual to experience the greatest anxiety the first time you practice an alternative behavior; stick with it because with repeated exposures to the new behavior your anxiety will quickly diminish.

If your anxiety level doesn't come down with repeated practice of your alternative behavior, examine your thoughts and use the realistic thinking skills you learned at the beginning of this chapter. You may be interpreting the consequences of practicing your alternative behavior in a way that supports your old negative prediction. For example, Caleb, a realtor, who was always at least ten minutes early to his appointments no matter how rushed he was, practiced being at least two minutes late to his appointments.

After a week of no one commenting on his tardiness, Caleb still felt anxious. He realized that he was telling himself that people were just being polite and that they were going to stop doing business with him if he kept it up. He reminded himself that he wasn't a mind reader or a fortune-teller, and that he needed to focus on his clients' behavior in response to his tardiness. He decided to persevere in practicing his alternative behavior, and at the end of two weeks, he had lost only one client who found a house through another realtor. He was able to handle this and his anxiety level regarding being tardy with his clients was a 1.

TURN WORRY INTO PROBLEM SOLVING

In this chapter, so far you've learned how to deal more realistically with exaggerated worries, not to get rid of appropriate concerns about real threats. But what can you do to keep your worry from getting out of hand when you have a life crisis or genuine problem? There are three practical steps you can take to minimize your worry and anxiety. They are: (1) clearly define the problem; (2) use brainstorming to find solutions; and (3) make a contract with yourself to follow through on your solutions.

This step-by-step model for turning worry into problem solving was adapted from the *Worry Control Workbook*, by Mary Ellen Copeland (1998). Each step, written in bold, is followed by an

example of how a young entrepreneur used the problem-solving process to deal with worries about starting her business.

1. **Write down one situation that is really worrying you. Be specific about what the problem is.** *I really want to start a business of my own, but my financial resources are very limited. I'm worried that I don't know enough to avoid the pitfalls and I'll end up losing everything.*
2. **Brainstorm for solutions.** Make a list of possible things you can do to improve or correct the situation.
 - *Talk to other entrepreneurs about their experiences in starting their businesses.*
 - *Research organizations that support entrepreneurial efforts and people.*
 - *Research the possibility of acquiring a small-business loan or other capital available for small start-up businesses.*
 - *Join a couple of small-business and entrepreneurial organizations.*
 - *Find investors among friends and family.*
 - *Start the business out of my home to save overhead and protect me financially.*
 - *Work an extra job for a couple of years to earn more money.*
 - *Stay at current job while starting my own company part-time.*

3. **Evaluate each idea.** Which ideas are not possible? Put an X next to those. Which ones would be difficult to implement? Put a question mark next to those. Which ideas could you implement right now? Put a Y next to those.

<i>Talk to other entrepreneurs about their experiences in starting their businesses.</i>	Y
<i>Research organizations that support entrepreneurial efforts and people.</i>	Y
<i>Research the possibility of acquiring a small-business loan or other capital available for small start-up businesses.</i>	Y
<i>Join a couple of small-business and entrepreneurial organizations.</i>	?
<i>Find investors among family and friends.</i>	Y
<i>Start the business out of my own home to save overhead.</i>	?
<i>Work an extra job for a couple of years to earn more money.</i>	X
<i>Stay at current job while starting the company part-time.</i>	X

4. **Set specific dates.** Make a contract with yourself to do all the things that you've marked with a Y.

By April 1, I will talk to other entrepreneurs about their experiences in starting their businesses.

By April 15, I will research organizations that support entrepreneurial efforts and people.

By May 1, I'll have canvassed family and friends for possible investors.

By May 15, I will research the possibility of acquiring a small-business loan or other capital available for small start-up businesses.

5. **When you have completed all of the items marked with a Y, go on to the more difficult things marked with a question mark. Make a contract with yourself to do those.**

By June 15, I will join a couple of small-business and entrepreneurial organizations.

By July 1, I'll decide whether I should clear out a back bedroom to create a home-based business office.

By July 15, I will apply for all available capital that I find during my initial research.

6. **Now maybe some of the items marked with an X don't look so hard. If there are any you think you could manage, make a contract with yourself to take that action.**

By August 15, if other options have not worked out, I will start my company part-time while continuing to work full-time at my job.

PROBLEM-SOLVING WORKSHEET

Use this space to apply the problem-solving technique to one of your worries.

1. Write down one situation that is really worrying you.

2. Brainstorm for solutions. Make a list of possible things you can do to improve or correct the situation.

3. Evaluate each idea. Which ones are not possible? Put an X next to those. Which ones would be difficult to implement? Put a question mark next to those. Which ones could you do right now? Put a Y next to those.

4. Set specific dates. Make a contract with yourself to do all the Y items.

By _____ (date), I will _____

5. When you have completed the Y items, go on to the more difficult ? items. Make a contract with yourself to do those.

By _____ (date), I will _____

6. Now, maybe some of the X items don't look so hard. If there are any you think you could manage, make a contract with yourself to take that action.

By _____ (date), I will _____

Note that three other chapters in this workbook can help you deal with life problems. They are Goal Setting and Time Management, Work-Stress Management, and Assertiveness Training.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Facing your worry and anxiety will become progressively easier as you regularly practice the skills presented in this chapter. Consider these goals for yourself: Each time you choose to use your relaxation skills, you will feel less tense. Each time you successfully challenge your worry, you will experience more peace of mind. Each time that you systematically confront your catastrophic images, you become a little less fearful. Each time you tackle situations you worry about in real life and don't experience negative consequences that you can't cope with, you will become a little more self-confident and resilient. Each time you focus on problem solving, you will become more

aware of the many resources you have to accomplish your goals. Just be patient with yourself as you work through this chapter, because it takes a while to overcome old habits of thinking and behaving and to develop new ones.

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