**Flourish SFU – Natalie Cowell**

**Worrying and What is Worry?**

* Subjective negative thoughts about the present and future. It’s based on our experiences, concepts and beliefs of our environment (the world around us) and who we think we are.
* A pattern of repeated cognitive behaviours that we use as habitual automatic responses to incoming data (stimuli) from our environment.
* Worry is a low level state of fear. The more we worry, the more intense the fear can become.

**How is Worry triggered?**

* Worry is triggered by our self talk that is based on our personal beliefs. The language we use to ourselves and to others to define what is happening in our lives will create and foster worry if our words are negative and based on our fears and doubts.
* The physiological act of worrying is triggered by cues from our senses and our nervous system, to the incoming information we are receiving from external data. This incoming data will be assessed against our memories and the physical body will react accordingly. If a threat is perceived, then the ‘fight or flight’ response is activated.
* Worry becomes a habit that we unconsciously trigger as a response to what is happening in our lives. We evaluate all people and events as safe, not safe or neutral.

**What Worry *is not***

* Dedicated time to allow for a process of objective and rational thinking to problem solve.
* Thinking with clarity. Worry (fear) activates the non-logic centre of our brains.
* A reliable decision making process that is based on facts. Worry does not allow us to work with the full capacity of our logic brain.
* Being in control of our thoughts, emotions and physiological reactions.
* A good use of our time and energy.

**Why do we need to worry? The reasons why we think worry might help us**

There is a reason that we worry beyond it just being a habit that we have created. We have used worry as a tool to cast out our doubts and fears and, we believe, it is a tool to keep us safe and prevent and protect from the uncertainty of life and the bad things that may happen. Other reasons why we believe we need to worry. We believe: We are being useful. We are being responsible and careful. We can avoid failures and dangers and that it will reduce all uncertainty.

**Worry and our physical body**

Worry creates imbalance in our body: cognitive, emotional, hormonal, chemical and physical imbalances. When we are in a state of worry, a state of fear, we are activating the fight or flight mechanism. So the physical sensations we feel in our body are the same feelings that we have when we are frightened. It may be on a slighter lower gradient, but if you are a worrier then you are running this into your body’s system on a daily basis. And of course, this just heightens your primal brains hyper vigilance to all stimuli coming in and the result is that we are priming the body to aware for more incoming threats.

We release more adrenaline, cortisol and vasopressin into our body and become more physically, emotionally and mentally anxious. We are running the message ‘the world is not safe. Be on alert at all times!’

**What are the characteristics of a worrier?**

The following questions (except the sleep worry questions, are based on Robert L Leahy’s work) Here are some of the conscious and unconscious characteristics of a worrier:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Statement** | **Yes - No - Maybe** |
| Worrying helps me problem solve. |  |
| I believe that if I worry, it will prepare, protect and prevent bad things from happening. |  |
| I believe I cannot make a mistake, others will see my mistakes as failure and that is not acceptable. |  |
| I believe I cannot make a mistake, I have high expectations for myself and failure is unacceptable. I am a perfectionist. |  |
| I need to know everything now, I cannot have uncertainty. |  |
| Uncertainty means risk of failure and bad things happening. |  |
| Other people will be judging my work. It must be perfect. |  |
| I like to be in control. I feel less anxious when I am in control. |  |
| I want to know the answer to all the ‘what ifs?’ If I generate all the bad possible outcomes, I can find all the solutions to fix them. Then I will recheck my findings just to be sure! |  |
| I must gather all the information to assess the possible threats. I must over prepare and cannot have any doubts or fears. Failure is unacceptable. |  |
| I will wait to take action until I am 100% certain of success. |  |
| I cannot trust my memory. |  |
| I am being useful when I worry. It stops me feeling so anxious when I worry. |  |

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| --- | --- |
| **Statement** | **Yes - No - Maybe** |
| I worry to solve problems more than to solve my emotions. |  |
| If I worry then I can avoid feeling the powerful emotions that my worry masks |  |
| Anything bad that could happen is a reflection of who I am as a person. |  |
| Any personal failing is a direct reflection of who I am as a person. |  |
| I treat all negative thoughts as if they are true. |  |
| I believe the world isn’t safe, so I should remain vigilant. |  |
| I am not good enough. |  |
| I assume that the world is full of rejection and possible failure. |  |
| It is my duty and responsibility to worry. I am a responsible person. |  |
| Worry helps me avoid thinking about the worst possible outcome. |  |
| It is my role to fulfil the expectations of others about who I am. |  |
| I cannot be disliked and not rewarded by others for who I am. |  |
| I need the affirmation and reassurance of others that everything is okay. I cannot trust my own thoughts and feelings, they are not important enough.  It is not enough for me to be happy with whom I am. I need others to affirm my worth. |  |

**Social**

It matters to social worriers what others think of them. It matter a lot! It matters more then what they think of themselves. Here are some thoughts of a social worrier:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Statement** | **Yes - No - Maybe** |
| I do not want to be rejected by others, they must accept and like me. |  |
| People will abandon me. I need and depend on other people. |  |
| I need to be viewed as special or unique. |  |
| There is something wrong with *me* if others don’t like me. |  |
| Others will judge me harshly if I am not nice all the time. |  |
| It is not good to tell people what I really think. They may not like me or punish me in some way. |  |
| I must make a great impression on others. |  |
| I shall ruminate on past experiences to evaluate how well I performed. |  |
| I seek the approval of others and I want to rewarded by others for my good behaviour. |  |
| I want to avoid things that others may dislike or punish me in some form |  |
| I deny my own needs so that I can serve others. |  |
| I can’t take care of myself. I can’t make anything happen on my own. I need others. |  |

**Work**

Work consumes a vast amount of a person’s time. What we do as work, or what we would like to do, is tied in with who we think we are.

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| **Statement** | **Yes - No - Maybe** |
| My work reflects who I am. It must not fail. Others will be judging me harshly. |  |
| I must get on with everyone I work with. |  |
| It is my role to fulfil the expectations of others about who I am. |  |
| I want to be liked and rewarded by others for who I am. |  |
| I will wait to take action until I am 100% certain of success. |  |
| I need the affirmation of others that what I am doing is correct. |  |
| I need to know everything now, I can’t have uncertainty. |  |
| Uncertainty means risk of failure and bad things happening. |  |

**JUDGEMENT**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Statement** | **Yes - No - Maybe** |
| I feel that others judge me negatively. |  |
| I judge myself negatively. |  |
| I judge and measure others behaviour. |  |
| I feel that I am not good enough. |  |
| I want others to like me. |  |
| It is my role to fulfil the expectations of others about who I am. |  |

**Sleep Worry**

*All people who have sleep issues worry about their lack of sleep as a logic mechanism to try and control it from continuing. They use worry to stop this bad thing from happening and to protect themselves from it. They use ‘what ifs?’ ’whys?’ and make plans based around this worry to try and stop the sleeplessness. They use worry as a tool to be useful about this awful situation they are experiencing. They do it because they want the best for themselves and they want this suffering to end.*

Start these statements with “I worry that ...”

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Statement** | **Yes - No - Maybe** |
| If I don’t get sleep tonight I won’t be able to cope tomorrow. |  |
| If I wake up in the night, I just won’t sleep again! |  |
| If I don’t go to bed early I won’t be able to get enough chance to sleep. I have to catch up on sleep! |  |
| That I won’t be able to sleep properly ever again. |  |
| That I will always be like this. |  |
| That I will get ill. |  |
| That I will lose my mind! |  |
| That I will lose my relationships. |  |
| That I will lose my job. |  |
| That I won’t ever have a life again. |  |
| That I won’t be able to sleep when I go to bed. |  |

**Why doesn’t Worry work in our best interest**

Because worry is a form of fear. From the basis of fear, we cannot make good decisions. We are not properly exercising our logic mind. We are working from a platform of fight or flight. We have made the decision that the world is not safe and we react accordingly.

Recognise that:

Worry gives the *illusion* of control, but the reality is that from a platform of worry, we are not in full control of our thoughts, emotions or actions.

When we worry, we *think* more then we ***feel***.

Worry is a problem in itself and worry begets more of the same. If you have a sleep issue, then you are consciously or unconsciously running worry in your system 24 hours a day.

**What would it be like to not worry about your sleep. What If?**

Ask yourself:

What would it be like to not be a worrier about your sleep? How would you feel mentally, physically and emotionally? Who would worry about your sleep if you didn’t? What would you do with the time instead? What other emotions would you experience if you weren’t worrying about your sleep?

It is the continual worry based on **the thought** that you have a sleep issue that is the ***cause of insomnia***. Insomnia itself is only the symptom of the negative thought that you have a sleep issue. **Worry fuels the negative sleep thoughts.**

**The Benefits of giving up Worrying**

* When we give up the habit of worrying, we can:
* Connect with our emotional responses to what is happening in our lives and *recognise that this is at the heart of our worry.*
* We live by our values and our principles.
* We are empowered and have more trust in ourselves and the choices we make.
* We gain self worth and do not need the acceptance of others to be at peace in the world.
* We truly accept that our best efforts are good enough.
* We can use our values and principle as our standards for how we wish to be in the world. These values are our rudder to guide us through our days and life.
* It is not our role to fulfil the expectations of others about who we are. How others choose to judge us is their choice. If I choose to accept or reject these judgments is mine.
* It is not our duty to make others happy. Our responsibility is to meet our own needs without that impacting negatively on others.
* It is okay not to be liked and rewarded by others for who we are. Being nice at the expense of our own needs is not emotionally mature. Our growing sense of our self worth chokes off this need.
* It’s okay to take action even though we cannot be 100% certain of success. We can learn to trust in ourselves and the unfolding process more.
* We do not need the affirmation and reassurance of others that everything is okay. We learn to trust ourselves and our own decision making.
* It is enough for me to be happy with whom we are. We do not need others to affirm our worth. Our sense of who we are is judged by our internal barometer, and not from the judgements of others.
* Making mistakes and failure are part of the human journey. Most lessons have been learnt this way. Humility is a value that sees us through this journey.
* We cannot know everything. Faith, hope and trust are values that we can apply to ease the not knowing. Each day is an opportunity to grown in knowledge and awareness.
* Obtain emotional freedom from low serving emotions such as fear, guilt and shame.
* We live a life based on ‘choose to’ rather than ‘have to’.
* Make informed clear objective decisions.
* We are more rational and less emotional when decision making.
* We connect with our needs and look to find ways to serve them.
* We can better connect to others to meet and serve their needs also.
* We are free from guilt and shame.