

Getting to grips with Anxiety

Managing Worry



Acknowledgements

Thanks to all those practitioners and researchers whose work has underpinned the cognitive-behavioural techniques included in these open-source guided-self-help manuals.

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Introduction

- Some young people might have times when they feel overwhelmed by worries, or it may feel like they never stop worrying or feeling tense. Worry might keep them up at night, wake them up early, and get in the way of living life to the full.

This supplement has been developed to help understand and manage worry, particularly where they are getting in the way of using a step by step plan for overcoming anxiety with your practitioner, or making it difficult to figure out what to test out. It provides you with additional ideas about how to deal with the anxious thoughts that cause worry. This is important because you can do different things with different types of thoughts....

TALKING ABOUT....

worry

worry

worry

Everybody worries. Worrying is a normal part of life, particularly during times of stress or pressure, and when you don't know how something important is going to turn out. It's common for worries to delay sleep in the days before an exam, for example. Some people worry more than others, in the same way that some people might be more argumentative than others, or some people more generous than others.

Just because everybody worries doesn't mean that you shouldn't do something about it when it takes over. Signs worry is taking over are when you're worrying more days of the week than you're not, if you think you worry about things more than others do, and in particular, when you find the worries are impossible to switch off. Other signs are tense muscles, irritability, difficulties sleeping at night or concentrating at school. When worrying takes over and it stops you from doing what you want and having any fun, it's the right time to get help.

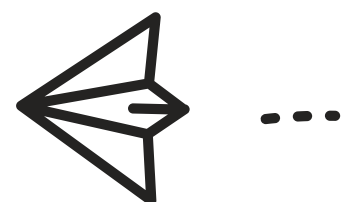
Worry can go something like this...

"What if I haven't put the right books in my bag...? I won't have my homework or I might not have the books for my maths lesson with the strict teacher... she might tell me off in front of the whole class... if she tells me off I'll probably get a detention... I'll be in trouble with all of the teachers... they'll all think I'm a bad student and I'll get a bad reputation... all of the teachers will think I'm terrible and I'll never succeed at school... I'd better just check my books again..."

...Even though you seemed to be worrying about something small there's always a bigger fear lurking behind it.

Worrying is always about something going wrong in the future. If you find yourself worrying about a past event and still feel anxious, it is probably because you are predicting that for some reason it will affect your future. For example, if you are worried about an argument you had with your mum, it might be that you are worrying she will tell you off or she'll be angry with you for a long time.

If you are thinking over and over a past event that just makes you feel sad and down – often something to do with loss or guilt – this is a different problem that probably needs a different solution. If you find that you are feeling low and sad a lot of the time, talk about it with your practitioner.



WHY DO I WORRY MORE THAN OTHER PEOPLE???

You can inherit how much you worry from your family or ancestors in the same way that you might inherit your eye colour. But there's also many things we do, without even thinking, that make worry worse. It's easy to get caught in these traps, and this manual can help you to get out of them. No matter what we inherit, we can change how much we worry. And you can choose the methods that suit you best.

It's easy to see why it was useful for people to inherit worry. Imagine a group of ancestors from thousands of years ago. They were similar to us except they were much more hairy (and not quite so good looking or clever). However, they had a lot of dangers to think about all the time. They didn't have houses to protect them, and there were sabre-toothed tigers who wanted to eat them.

Like now, humans back then were sociable – they stayed together in groups. This was safer for them and they could pick ticks out of each other's hair etc. **However** when they were relaxing in groups, one person had the job of **sounding the alarm if the group was in danger**. This person was chosen because they were quick and they cared about everyone. Their job was important. Their purpose, in a group, was to let everyone know at any sign of danger. They were **the first worriers** and it's possible that you might be very, very distantly related.

Things to think about, although we don't necessarily have the answers...

Why was this job so important to human survival?

Why might this job be less useful now?

Is it possible to be smart and caring without being a worrier?

But remember...

It is important to point out that worry is not always inherited. For some people worrying might be a natural part of going through a really hard time, or maybe having experienced some difficulties in the past. You can see that if you went through bad times, or you are still experiencing stressful events, you might be more likely than other people to expect bad things to happen.

If this is the case, you can still use the same techniques to handle worries, in particular, concentrating on making sure you are good at telling the difference between worrying about real life problems and worrying about things that are less likely to happen. But also, if past worries continue to bother you, make sure you tell your practitioner as it might be a different treatment is more helpful. Also, if you have a lot of problems in your life, especially if it's more than other young people you know, make sure your practitioner knows too.



WHAT DOES WORRY CONTROL IN MY LIFE?

It's important to remember that even if you spend most of the time worrying, there are probably parts of your life where you still feel in control and confident.

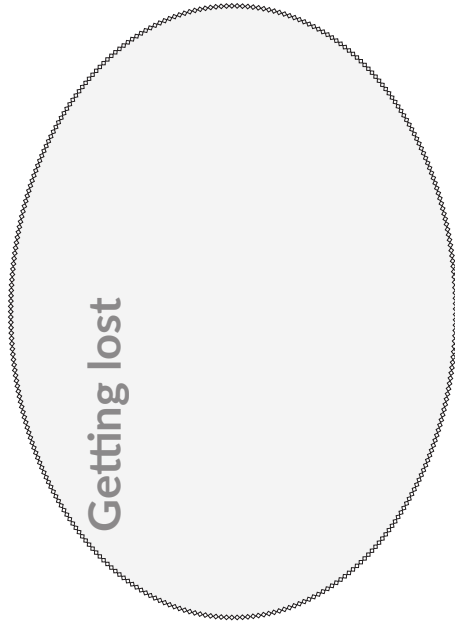
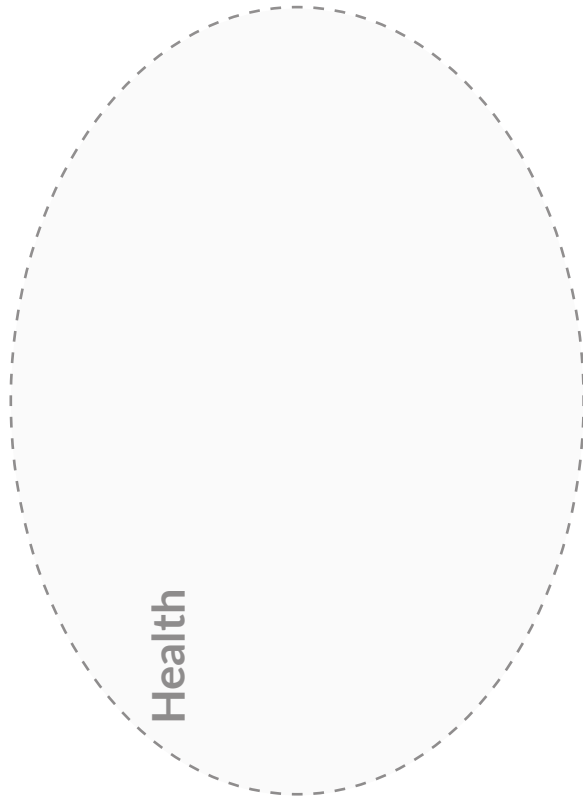
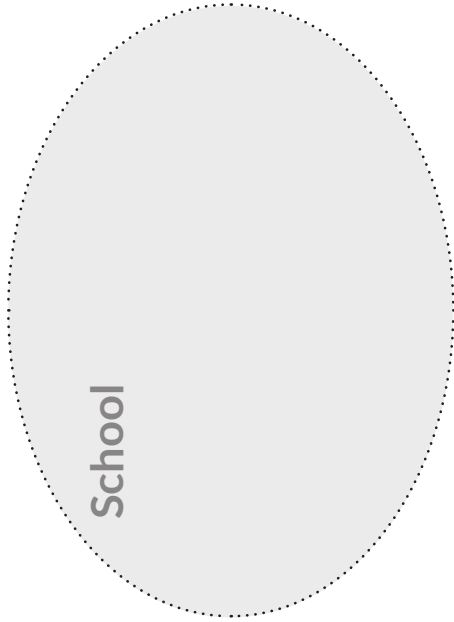
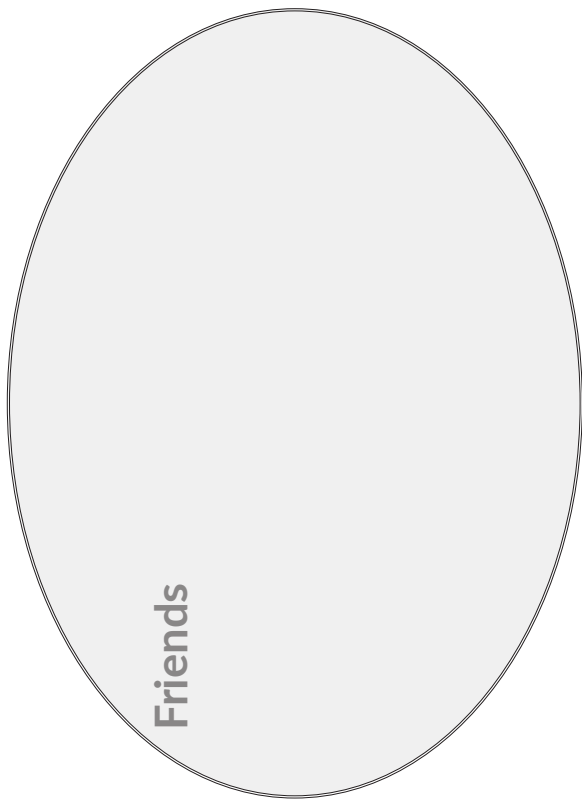
Have a think back over the past couple of weeks or so. What are your main worries? When does worry take over so that you can't relax? In the other column, note down any parts of your life that you feel in charge of. These might be things you feel confident about doing.

You can use a box to write down and put your worries into over the next week and bring back to sort through with your practitioner next week.

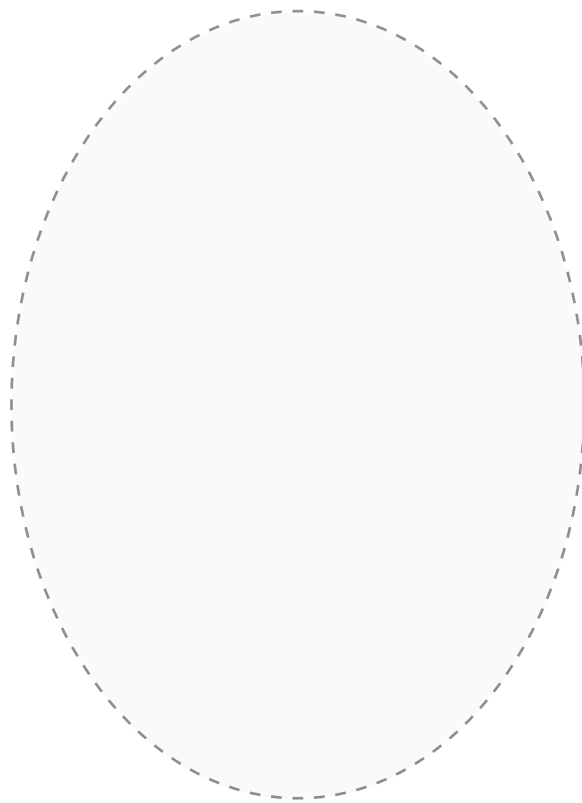
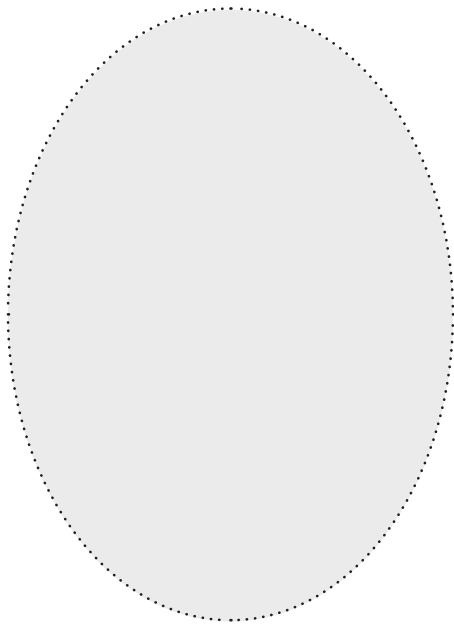
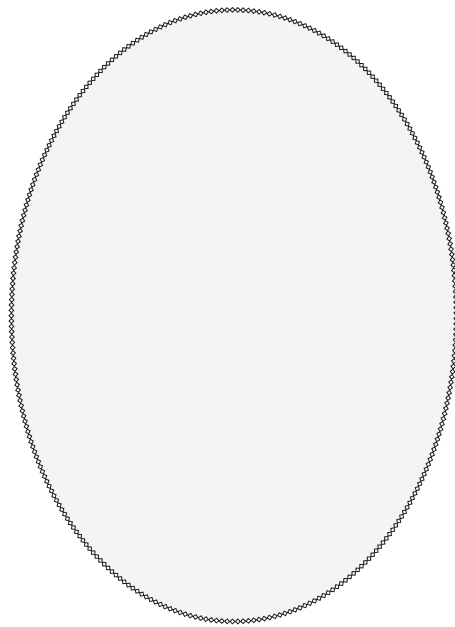
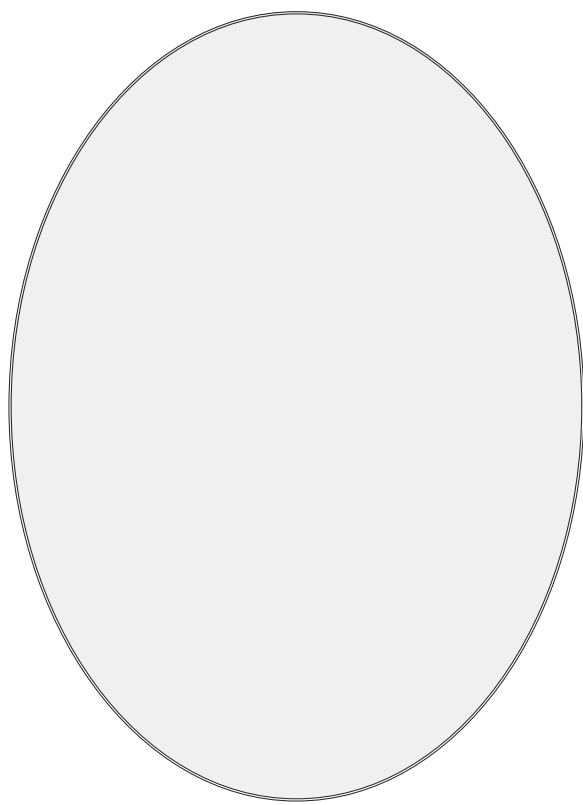
THINGS UNDER MY CONTROL	THINGS UNDER WORRY'S CONTROL

CATEGORIES

Use the list above, or your box of worries and see if you can sort the worries into different circles. Here are some examples of general themes, but on the page below you can write your own themes if they're different to some of the examples here. Some might have more than others.



CATEGORIES



STEP 1: PROBLEMS VS FEARS

You can divide your worries into two types:

1. Worries about realistic problems that are happening now, or will come up soon
2. Worries about distant or hypothetical future fears

In the below table, write all the differences you can think of between **PROBLEMS** and **FEARS**

PROBLEMS	FEARS

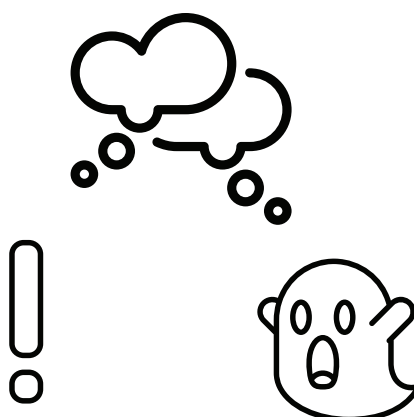
Now go back and look at the list of worries you had at the beginning. Can you begin to divide these into the two types of worry? Write P for problem or F for fear next to each worry. Some might have parts of both, and you can divide these up.



Example table....

PROBLEMS	FEARS
<p><i>It is possible, or likely, to happen</i></p> <p><i>You have to find a solution to move forwards</i></p> <p><i>It would be difficult for anyone to solve</i></p> <p><i>Many people have similar issues</i></p>	<p><i>It's not likely to happen anytime soon, however frightening it is</i></p> <p><i>You can move forward with your life without dealing with it right now</i></p> <p><i>Fears are different for everybody. Yours might seem odd, but everyone has unique fears</i></p>

Being able to tell the difference between worry related to problems and worry related to fears is one of the first steps in overcoming worry. The following pages will take you through the different ways you can use to manage different types of worry.



STEP 2: UNDERSTANDING WHAT DRIVES WORRY

Before you start practising techniques to deal with problems and fears, without worry, it's important to understand what drives worry, as it is likely to bother you along the way.

Worry is caused by an allergy to *uncertainty*. Instead of sneezing when they see a cat or a dog, people who worry react very strongly when they *don't know exactly what is going to happen*.

People who worry might think that something really bad will occur if they enter a feared situation without *predicting all the things that can go wrong and preparing for them*.

You can see how you might start to worry if you think you have to think of everything that could go wrong before you do anything.

Does this sound familiar? A story might help this make more sense:

Granny's bag

Granny is taking you to the cinema. Granny really REALLY doesn't like to get caught out. She likes to make sure that she is prepared for anything that could go wrong. You're worried she might forget something so the two of you decide to pack a bag together. Here's the list. See what you can add...

- a sausage roll (you might get hungry)
- a notepad (what if you think of something important you might need at the shops)
- hair curlers (what if granny sees that handsome Harry Styles at the cinema?)
- twenty pence (sometimes they charge to go to the loo)
- some tissues (you might need to blow your nose)
- some face wipes (if you eat the sausage roll you might get crumbs on your face)
- a personal alarm (safety first!)
- a dictaphone (what if you have some ideas for your novel while you're out)
- your homework (what happens if the bus is delayed or the town centre cut off and you can't get home in time to do it)
- granny's favourite magazine (what if the film gets boring?)

Can you think of any problems with preparing for everything?

You get hungry in the middle of the film. What are the chances that granny will be able to find the sausage roll in her bag?

What if you don't like sausage rolls? Should you take all the food you might want with you?

What are the chances you'll miss the film because you've spent so much time packing?

What are the chances you'll be so exhausted after packing that you'll feel too stressed out to go?

Like granny, people who are allergic to uncertainty often try to cope with uncertain situations by planning and preparing for everything OR avoiding it altogether. This might reduce their anxiety in the short term, but it keeps worry going in the long term. No-one can control life to make things more certain, but in your step by step plan to face your fears, and using the techniques in this supplement, you will gradually get used to uncertainty, so that it doesn't feel so bad.

STEP 3: DEALING WITH PROBLEMS

These activities are for helping you deal with PROBLEMS.

Solving problems and/or getting help is a great replacement for worry.

First you might need to take a closer look at some thinking traps that you might have got into.

Anna is always coming up against problems: she often can't get her homework right the first time, she always seems to say the wrong thing to her family, and she doesn't always say the right answers in class. Is there something **wrong** with Anna?

Anna also struggles to solve problems perfectly the first time she tries them, does this mean she is not very good at solving problems?

What about you? What are you like at solving problems? Do you often run into difficulties? How confident are you that you will succeed when challenged? Do you prefer to do the same sort of problems again and again because you know how to do them, rather than try out new ones?

There are a few thinking traps that mean people worry more. Do you believe any of these things about yourself?

1. Having problems mean there is something wrong with me
2. I am bad at solving problems
3. Problems are always bad and never good
4. My problems will always turn out badly



Write down any similar thoughts you have about yourself.



With your practitioner, you might need to do a quick check to see if these are really as true as you think they are, using the form and example below.



<p>Worry trap</p> <p>“I am really bad at solving problems”</p>	<p>Alternative possibility</p> <p>“I am as good as anyone else at solving problems, it’s just that things are sometimes difficult to fix right away</p>
<p>Any evidence?</p> <p>I couldn’t do my maths homework last night</p> <p>When I tried to answer a set of maths questions last week I got half of them wrong</p>	<p>Any evidence?</p> <p>I didn’t really try to do my maths homework last night because I was so sure I’d get it wrong. But actually I think I may have got a few correct if I’d had a go.</p> <p>Most of the class got the questions ALL wrong last week so I actually coped better than I thought.</p> <p>There are lots of other times that I’ve managed to find a way around my difficulties</p> <p>Solving different problems is just a matter of practice. My friend always gets things wrong first time but she always has another go.</p>

Worry trap	Alternative possibility
Any evidence?	Any evidence?

DEALING WITH PROBLEMS

Here are some other tips that will help you to respond to problems without worrying:

1. Recognise problems before it's too late

If a problem is not recognised, or it is ignored, it can grow and grow even if it started out small. A good example is the maths homework. If you don't have a go at doing it because you are worried you will not get it 100% correct, then it can become a much bigger problem. The teacher might tell you off for not trying, which is a bigger problem. If you haven't told them that you found it difficult, they won't explain it properly and then it'll be harder to do more questions like that in the future.

Two things you can do to help you recognise problems early are:

a. use your emotions as clues (the problem detective)

When you are feeling stressed out and tense it can be helpful to ask yourself: "Is there a problem I am not seeing that is leading to this tension?"

It can be easy to think of being stressed as the problem, but it can often conceal a problem. Using your emotions to identify problems can help you view them more positively – as helpful friends.

b. make a list of the problems that tend to come up often

If you have a list of common problems for you it can be helpful to recognise them early and start sorting them out with a tried and tested method.

2. Seeing problems as a normal part of life

If you think you have problems because there is something wrong with you, you won't see problems as a normal part of life. However, they are. It would be impossible to find someone who has not experienced problems. Identifying and solving problems helps you build resilience for the future. It may seem that some people don't have problems – but this is just not the case.

3. Seeing problems as opportunities and not threats

It is easy to see a problem as EITHER a threat OR an opportunity, but it will often be BOTH of these things, depending on the way that you look at it.

Try looking at a recent problem and see if you can find any parts that present opportunities for you.

A good example is that of an exam, or a really challenging piece of work. It's easy to see these as presenting nothing but pain and misery, but look a little closer and you begin to see that learning to cope with them one step at a time, with help, can help you gain useful skills for life, whatever the outcome of each exam, test or homework.

DEALING WITH PROBLEMS: PROBLEM SOLVING

The truth is that no one is good at handling difficult problems. It's just not an easy thing to do. If you always want to do well and get frustrated when you can't do things perfectly, normal problems can leave you feeling scared, angry or sad (or all three).

People sometimes forget to sit down and solve problems step by step, and can give up at the first hurdle. Your practitioner can show you problem-solving techniques that can help you solve any very difficult problems that you have. This worksheet is just to remind you of the steps that are helpful when solving difficult problems.

STEP 1: WHAT EXACTLY IS THE PROBLEM AND WHAT ARE MY GOALS?

In many ways, this is the most important step. For example, sometimes we try to solve many problems at once rather than breaking them into pieces.

Ask yourself three questions: What is going on? What would I like to change? What is the obstacle that stops me getting what I want?

If there is something you can do about that obstacle, it's good to try problem solving. If the obstacle is something you have no control over, make sure you get help from your back-up team.

Don't set yourself impossible or unhealthy goals! If your goal is to lose one stone in weight for example, and this should only be the case if you are overweight, you need to think about how long it will take you, and possibly set smaller goals over a shorter period of time.

Check that you have a realistic and achievable goal before you move onto the next step

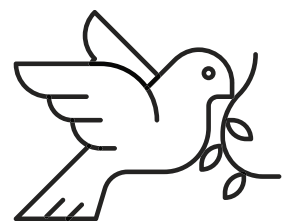
STEP 2: THINK OF AS MANY SOLUTIONS AS POSSIBLE

You have to step outside of real life for this stage and *really think of all possible answers, however ridiculous it might seem.*

It's easy to rule something out that might just work with another idea to form the perfect solution.

There are some handy tricks to coming up with lots of different solutions for your problems

- *Never rule it out before writing it down. You'll decide on the best solution later. For now, include EVERYTHING you think of*
- *The more possible solutions the better*
- *Try and think of as many completely different solutions as you can, even if they seem a bit crazy*
- *Don't let uncertainty hold you back*
- *Don't be tied down by habit – doing completely new things can be fun and effective as well as scary*



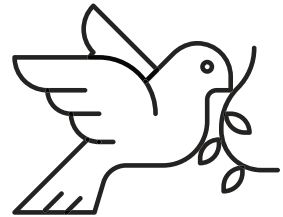
STEP 3: MAKING A DECISION

The most important thing about this stage is to forget about *perfect solutions*. They simply don't exist. Sometimes it's about coming up with the best solution you can under the circumstances. It is likely that all answers will have some up and down sides. If there was an easy answer, it wouldn't be a problem.

You might select two or three options and combine them for your final plan.

It's helpful to think of the good and bad outcomes of each solution you have come up with in STEP 2. You can ask yourself the following questions:

- *Will this solve the problem?*
- *Do I have enough time for this solution?*
- *How would I feel if I do this?*
- *What are the outcomes of this solution in the short and long term?*



STEP 4: JUST DO IT

Once you've decided on the best solution, make a concrete plan about how to do it. This may include different steps.

Remember not to get caught in the trap of trying to reduce your uncertainty by checking things over a million times, putting them off, and getting lots of extra information. This stage is about *just doing it*. You've made the plans, now see them through.

STEP 5: DID IT WORK OK?

The final stage is just to have a think back over the chosen solution. Did it help to achieve your goal and reduce the problem? What changes have you noticed? If there was anything that didn't work out, is there anything you can change? Is there anything helpful from earlier steps that you can revisit? If it was successful, can you use the solution again for similar problems in future?

It is important to remember that worry can trick you into thinking you won't be able to sort something out when you will. Sometimes you might panic at the thought of an everyday problem. This is *just a worry*. You'll be able to sort it out – just remember that sometimes you can just wait and handle things as they come up.

If you get a thought that's scary about your school day for example, just try and picture it in your mind. If you let that picture wind forward in your head naturally, lots of solutions will pop into your head. Worry can stop this process from happening. Sometimes you just have to trust yourself to respond naturally. Remember – *there is nothing about YOU that makes you worse at doing this than anybody else*.

Finally: Don't forget that you can always rely on the 'phone-a-friend' option. Adults can and will help you out when you ask them to, and sometimes two heads are better than one.

SUMMARY: RESPONDING TO FRIGHTENING THOUGHTS...

Worry is triggered by frightening thoughts. It's a response to anxiety, like other understandable, but unhelpful behaviours. It's clear that worry creates even more worry and tension, until you feel overwhelmed and exhausted. Practising catching scary thoughts that trigger worry is the first step to stopping the process. The thoughts will be problems or fears.

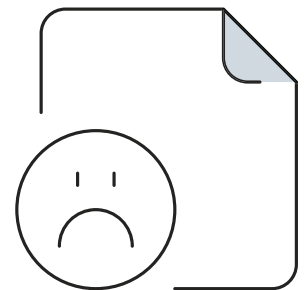
The process of worry is based on things that may not be true. It's helpful to look at the way you are viewing the world. Is there another way of looking at things?

Worry Trap

My scary thought is TRUE

If I worry, I can prevent bad things from happening

If it did happen, I wouldn't cope

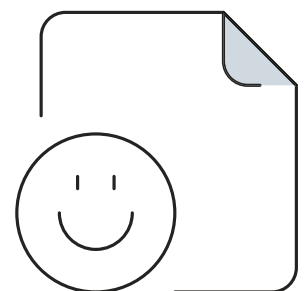


Alternative possibility

My scary thought is just a problem or a fear

If I work out which is which I can use techniques to fix it or get help

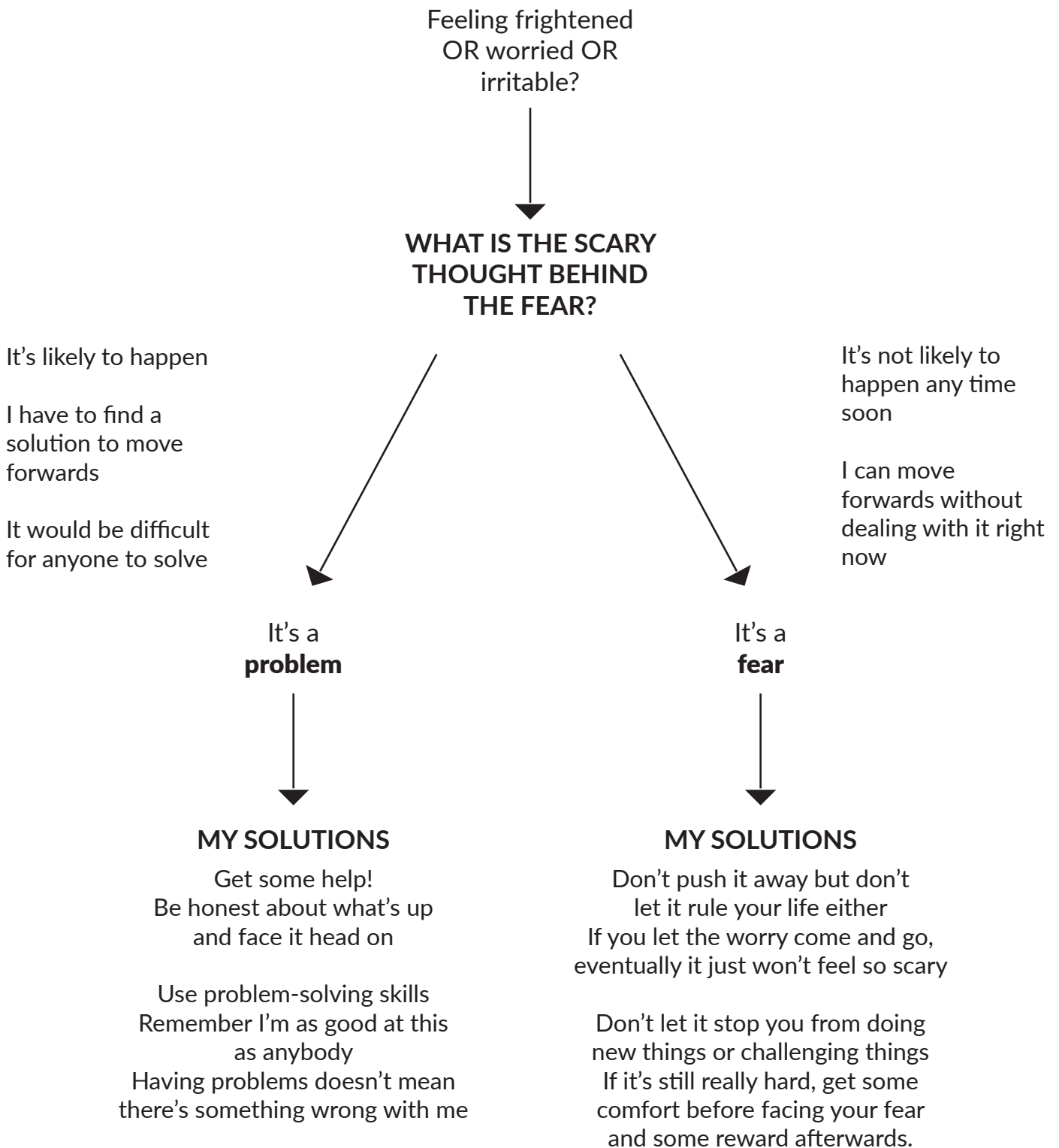
I can handle difficulties as well as anyone else



THE THOUGHT TREE...

So, what should you do when you have scary thoughts about bad things that might happen?

Here is a “thought tree” to help you decide.



If you're not sure: FEEL THE FEAR AND DO IT ANYWAY. Or plan a step on your fear ladder with your practitioner. You are never going to feel certain. Stop trying. It's liberating.

STEP 4: DEALING WITH FEARS

These are some tips about how to deal with FEARS without worrying.

First we may need to do another reality check. Is everything you believe about fear and anxiety true?

Anna cannot stand to think about scary thoughts for long. As soon as a scary picture pops into her mind, she tries to get rid of it. She tries to think of something else or do something else to make the image go away. This has become an automatic habit for her. However, the worrying images seem to keep coming back to haunt her.

What about you? Are there some thoughts or pictures that you sometimes think about that give you strong feelings of fear or sadness that you can't bear? These are often about scary or unpleasant things, such as something bad happening to someone you love, or to you. Do you think that it's bad to think about these things? Or maybe that it's more likely to happen once you've thought about it? These are common things to believe, but neither are true.

There are a few thinking traps that mean people worry more. Do you believe any of these things yourself?:

There are some things I shouldn't think about

If I think about something bad, I must replace it with something else

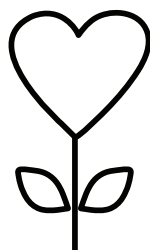
I must distract myself instead of thinking about something unpleasant

I mustn't watch or hear things, for example on the TV, that remind me of my fears

When I have images of bad things happening, I must try and think things through so I won't think about the images

Have a think with your practitioner about whether you recognise any of these beliefs.

If any of these thoughts are about bad memories from events in the past, make sure to tell your practitioner, as this could well be a different sort of problem, which might need different things to help.



You can use the space below to write down any similar thoughts you have had yourself:



With your practitioner, you might need to do a quick check to see if these are as true as you think they are, using the form and example below.



<p style="text-align: center;">Worry trap</p> <p>“thinking of bad things is bad: my anxiety will go on forever if I think about my worst fears”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Alternative possibility</p> <p>“everybody thinks of bad things, it’s normal. The anxiety and the thought will go away if I let it drift off naturally rather than trying to do something about it”</p>
<p>Any evidence?</p> <p>Fear feels really bad.</p> <p>Everyone says stress is bad for you.</p>	<p>Any evidence?</p> <p>Long term stress can be bad but feeling bursts of fear is a normal part of life and not bad for you at all. In fact, the only way to overcome fears that are not related to reality is to face up to it and get through the fear.</p>

Worry trap	Alternative possibility
Any evidence?	Any evidence?

DEALING WITH FEARS

It's the most natural thing to want to push upsetting or worrying thoughts and feelings away and not deal with them. Why feel upset when you can think about something else?

For one thing it seems that pushing scary fears (thoughts or pictures) away is not as easy as it sounds. Pushing any thought away is difficult.

Let's try it out. Try and imagine a white rabbit hopping around in your mind.

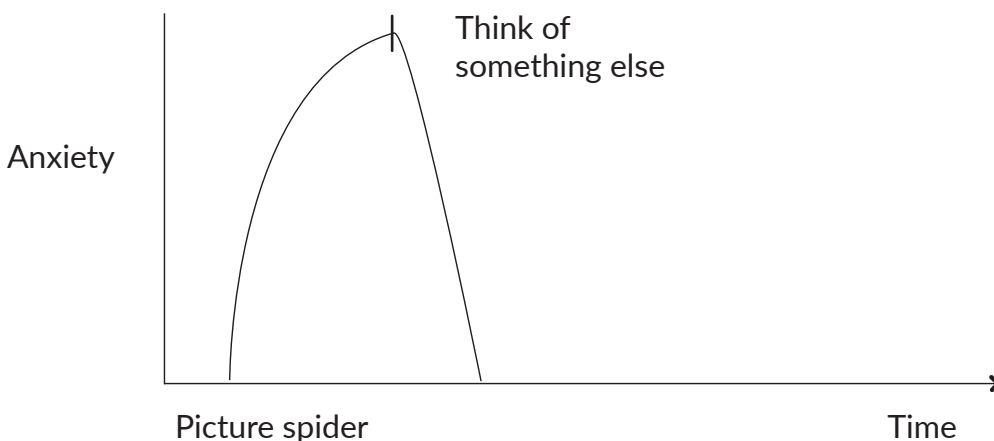
Got a good picture? Now your next task is to NOT think of that rabbit. You have no other instructions but to NOT think of a rabbit under ANY circumstances. Try and do this for 30 seconds.

Difficult? Research shows that most people find this. There are ways to try and not think of things for a while, but they can backfire, and the thought tends to pop back up again.

An alternative to avoidance

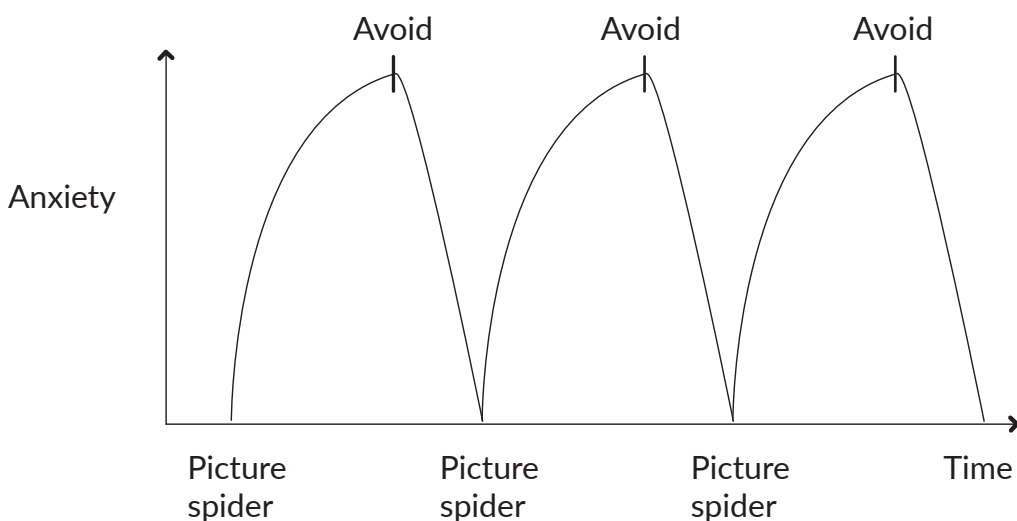
It's easy to see why people want to avoid scary things. If you are afraid of something, once you move away from it, you feel less anxious. For example, if I am afraid of spiders and I conjure up a picture of a spider in my mind, I feel very anxious. What will happen to my anxiety if I stop thinking about the spider?

My anxiety will go down:



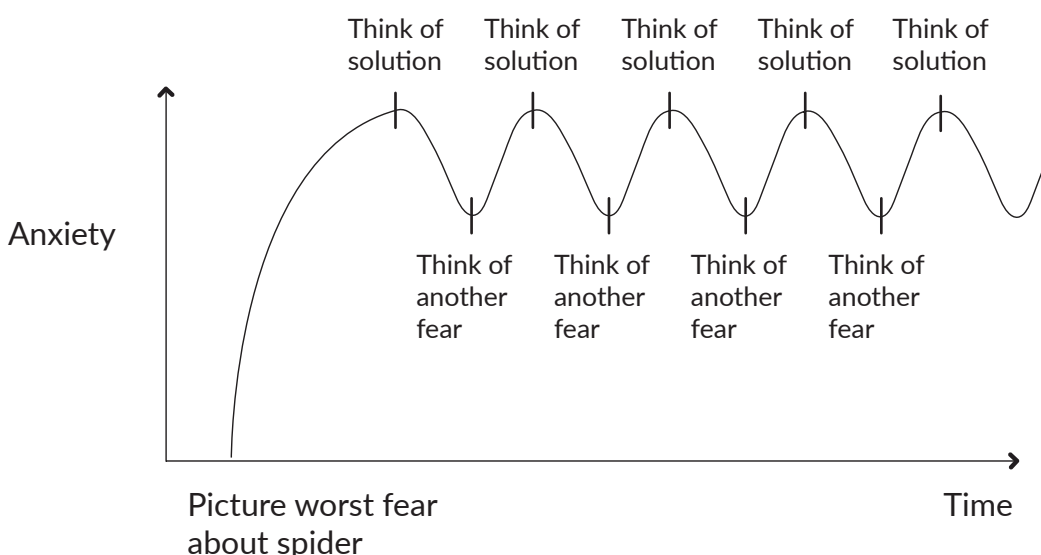
But what will happen to my fear of spiders as long as I avoid thinking about them or seeing them?

I'll continue to be scared – in fact I might get more frightened as I think “good thing I didn't think of those spiders, who knows what would have happened?”:



It's harder to push away scary fears about bad things that will happen. If you manage for a while, they tend to pop back even more. It is thought this is because you haven't had a chance to let the first flash of fear fade away naturally, because there is nothing that immediately can hurt you.

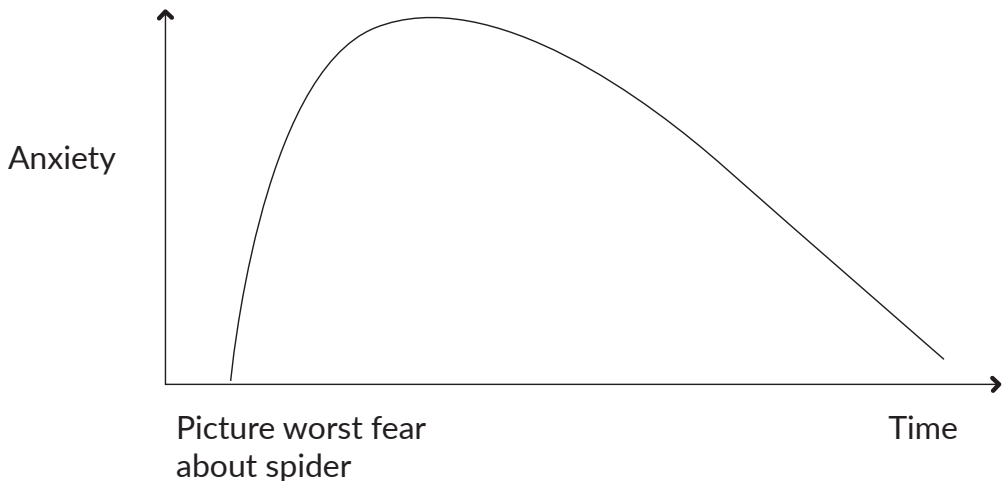
It can feel like worrying about it will help – but we know now that this is not the case. Worrying is never productive. In worrying about a fear, you might try and think of solutions. This might reduce your anxiety for a moment, but then you think of another fear and so on and so on:



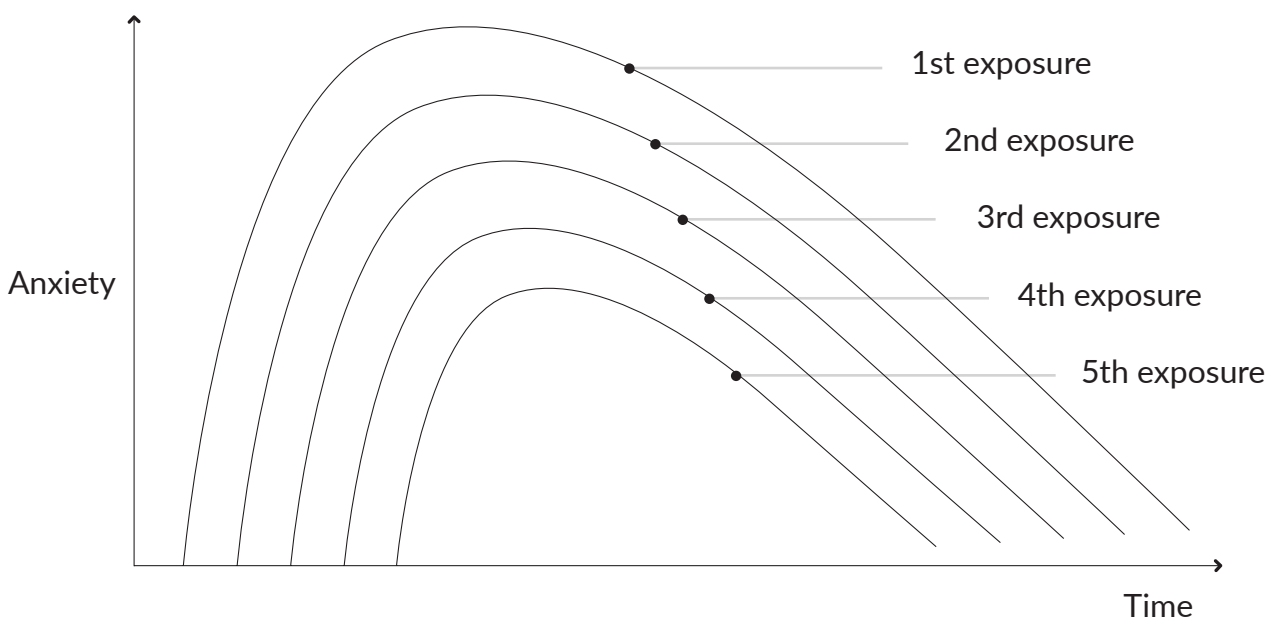
You can think about a problem to try and work out how to solve it. We know that's useful. Trying to solve fears is much harder because they can't be fixed if they're too far in the future, or they're very unlikely. You can't solve them, and you can't test them out.

So how do we deal with fears?

Scary pictures that drive worry will become less scary the more we don't try and do anything with them, but instead allow them to stay in our mind without trying to control them. If you stay in a feared situation long enough when there's no immediate danger to your life, without doing anything at all, your anxiety will come down naturally. That's how anxiety works.



If a fear comes into your mind and you do not respond to it any more than thinking "it's just a fear, it's not really true", eventually your anxiety will come down. Also you will have shown yourself that it is just a fear and not reality. However, this can take time and effort to sink in. So you need to practice this over and over again. Each time you do, the feeling of anxiety will not go up as high, and it takes less and less time to go back down:



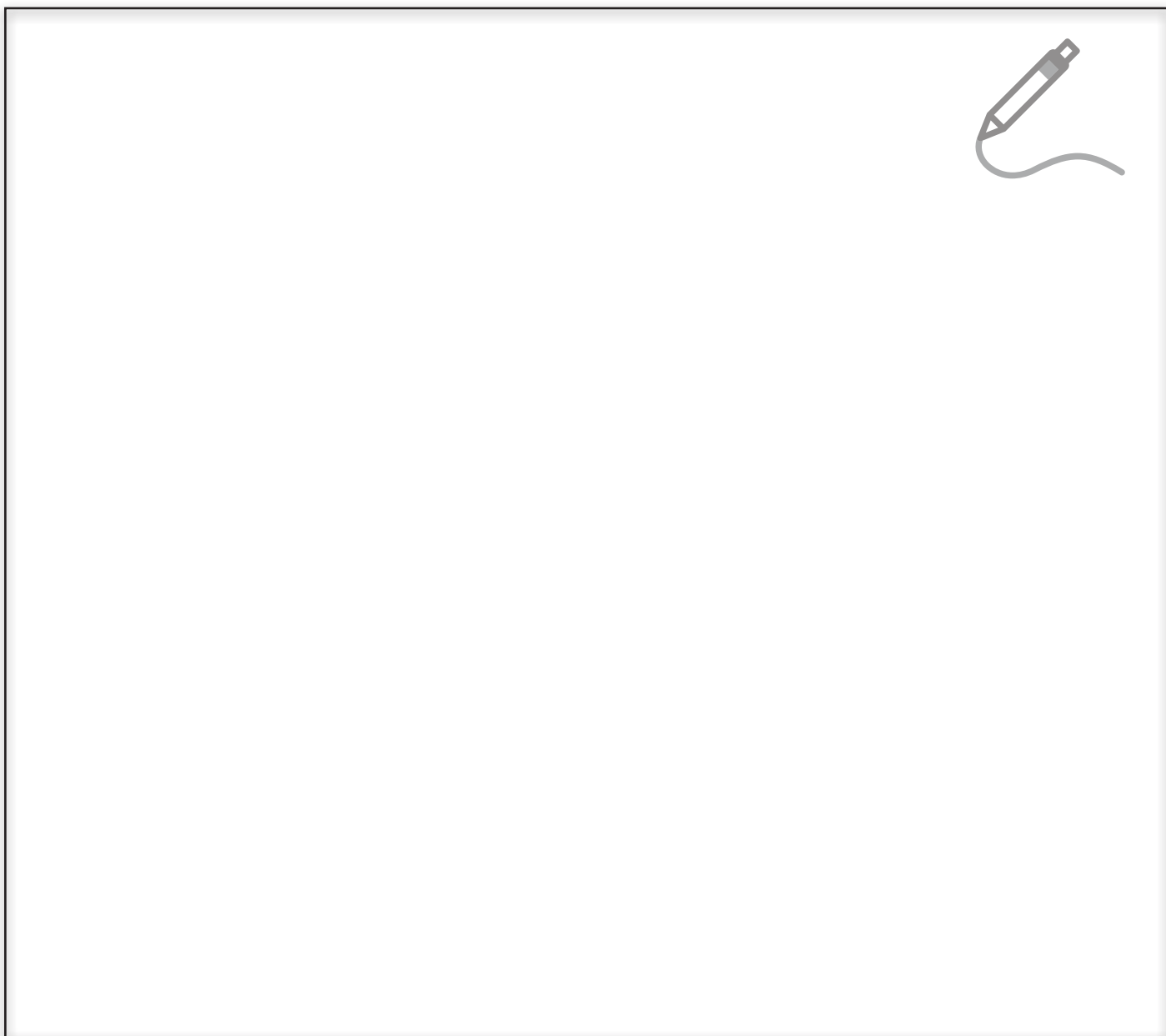
Next time you notice you're worrying, try and spot what's behind it. If there is a FEAR driving it (i.e. a very distant and not very likely terrible consequence), instead of pushing it away, label it as a fear and let it drift off naturally so you can get on with something else.

This is an approach to try in general. Whenever you find yourself worrying something that seems trivial, try and figure out if there's a big fear behind it, and just let the thought come and go. It should naturally drift off on its own if you don't try to control it.

This is the hardest part of dealing with worries, and it's OK to come at it gently. Try it out when you feel ready. Always give yourself rewards for doing difficult things and always remember you can ask for help from your back up team. These experiences are felt by everyone in the world, to some degree. And remember, if things ever feel overwhelming, they will pass, and you can always use distraction or comfort to help you.

If it feels overwhelming, you can use your grounding techniques (reminder below) or your favourite calming breathing or muscle relaxation, or get on with something else more pleasant.

Make a list of your favourite coping behaviours below:

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for writing a list of coping behaviours. In the top right corner of the box, there is a simple line-art icon of a pencil pointing downwards and to the left, with a curved line representing the pencil's path.

5 4 3 2 1 Grounding Exercise _____



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