



## Worrying Functionally <sup>[1]</sup>

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Let's make one thing very clear right from the start: anxiety and worrying are not the same thing. Anxiety represents the general problem, while our daily worries are just a piece of the puzzle. Not everyone who experiences worry can be called anxious.

Sadly, anyone who deals with social anxiety (or any other form of anxiety) is also tormented by worries. Every mental condition characterized by intense worry has its own 'flavor'. Socially anxious individuals tend to worry that: 1) Others will evaluate their performance; 2) People will make fun of them; 3) They will not do as well as others. In this article, we're going to focus on how your daily worries can be turned into something useful, or at least what to do so that they don't smother you.

### **Everyone Worries!**

Our natural tendency to worry doesn't depend on our social and financial status. Even the richest and most powerful people on this planet worry on a daily basis. It's a matter of education, habit or even genetic makeup. Some people are more prone to worrying than others. To be concerned about the future, from time to time, is absolutely normal, but it shouldn't become a constant state of mind.

### **Will Worrying Help You Deal?**

Subconsciously, most people think that if they worry enough, they'll prevent certain unpleasant events. Sadly, it doesn't work that way. It's a huge difference between worrying about a problem and finding solutions.

### **How Can Worrying Be Good for You?**

Believe it or not, worrying can sometimes be good for you. From a physical and mental point of view, worrying makes you alert. Basically, when you spot a potentially dangerous situation, your body and mind will immediately prepare for a 'confrontation'. The problem with social anxiety (and any other form of anxiety) is that the person remains 'on guard' for long periods of time, without ever making a move. This strategy is a huge waste of time and energy.

## Is Not Caring Better?

On the other hand, there are those of us who simply don't care. This is also a bad strategy because being completely worry-free prevents you from spotting potential dangers. For example, a carefree person won't take the time to prepare for a speech. This increases his/her chances of failing miserably.

When it comes to being worried in a 'healthy' manner, you should consider asking yourself 2 questions: 1) When? 2) How much?

### When

It's crucial that you differentiate between real and 'imaginary' danger. People who experience anxiety tend to worry about everything. First of all, worry about those events that are directly linked to you. Don't waste your time worrying about 'existential problems', we'll deal with that later. Be as pragmatic as you can. If you have an upcoming social event, worry about that. Second of all, try not to focus on several events at the same time. Worry about one thing at a time. When you're done with that, move to the next one.

### How Much?

Just enough to put you on alert mode. Once you identify potential threats, don't waste time worrying and imagining 'catastrophic scenarios'. Instead, focus on finding solutions. You can also challenge the negative thoughts associated with that specific threat. For example, if you're worried about attending an event, try to identify and challenge ANTs and dysfunctional schemas associated with that specific situation. To achieve this, use the thoughts journal.

## Your Daily 'Worry Time'

As we said earlier, people with social anxiety are tormented by all kinds of 'existential problems'. What if a meteorite hits the Earth? What if I lose my house in a fire? We call them 'existential problems' because chances are that we'll never see these scenarios ever come to life. Unfortunately, for some of us it's almost impossible to stop worrying about them. In this case, the best thing to do is to set aside a daily 'worry time'.

## Why is "Worry Time" Useful

When you return from work, spend 5-10 minutes alone, worrying about what concerns you the most. Forget about finding solutions (for now), just focus on worrying. The whole purpose of this exercise is to 'restore the balance of power'. It will be YOU who controls this behavior, not the other way around. You know that you can worry anytime you want, but you also have the power to choose when to worry.

A fair warning though, never use this exercise right before you go to bed. Worrying puts you on 'alert mode' which might affect sleep.

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