

2 Exercise

This week, keep a log of all the times you feel worried. Record your trigger, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors during each worry episode in the chart below. Pay close attention to any patterns—for example, do you tend to do the same things over and over when you're worried?

Date	Trigger	Thoughts	Feelings/emotions	Behaviors
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				

6 Exercise

A lot of teens worry that their peers are irritated with them or judging them negatively. Have you had that experience? If so, think of a time in the past year when you didn't get a response from a friend to a text or social media post.

Describe the situation:

At the time, what were you worried was happening?

Later on, did you figure out the reason for your friend's lack of communication? If so, what happened?

How did your worry match up with the real reason for your friend's lack of response?

activity 3 * junk mail thoughts tracker

Date	Trigger	Thought	Worry level (0-10)	Helpfulness (0-10)	Junk mail thought? Yes/No/ Maybe
Example: 10/13	<i>Friends are talking about their weekend plans.</i>	<i>Are my friends sick of me? I hardly ever go to concerts. My friends do much more exciting things than I do.</i>	8	3	Yes

8 Exercise

Pick a situation with an uncertain outcome that’s likely to come up in the next few weeks. Imagine being in this situation, including what you would think and feel. Allow yourself to feel anxious about the situation without doing anything to gain control over it. For example, if you’re worried that your English teacher won’t like the essay topic you’ve chosen, imagine sitting with not knowing what she thinks and deciding not to ask the teacher, your parents, or your friends if they approve of the topic. Imagine saying to yourself, “I can’t predict the future, and that’s okay—I can handle whatever happens.”

Complete this exercise in your imagination several times before the actual situation arises. Then, practice it in real life. In other words, don’t do anything to try to become more certain, and remind yourself it’s okay to not know what will happen.

What situation did you practice?

Record your observations about what happened and how you handled it.

How did the actual situation compare with the way you imagined it?

activity 13 * staying in the moment

Day	Practiced mindfulness— Yes/No? How long?	What did you notice while doing the exercise?
Example: <i>Monday</i>	<i>Yes, six minutes</i>	<i>It was challenging to stay focused at first, but got a little easier by the end.</i>

activity 13 * staying in the moment

Day	Practiced mindfulness— Yes/No? How long?	What did you notice while doing the exercise?
Example: <i>Monday</i>	<i>Yes, six minutes</i>	<i>It was challenging to stay focused at first, but got a little easier by the end.</i>

activity 14 * facing feared situations

Situation	Fear rating (0-10)

14 Exercise

Sometimes, even the lowest item on your exposure hierarchy feels too scary to try. One step in the direction of giving it a shot is to do something called “imaginal exposure.” *Imaginal exposure* is just what it sounds like: facing the feared situation in your imagination. It involves writing out a detailed script of what the situation would be like and reading it out loud or to yourself many times as you fully imagine it. It helps if you do these things as you imagine your feared situation:

- Include a lot of vivid information (what you’re seeing and hearing, the emotions you’re experiencing, and so on).
- Write from your perspective, using first person.
- Write the script as if it is happening right now.

You can make the script more challenging by including some of the things you’re especially concerned will happen—but within reason. In other words, don’t spin an unrealistic, catastrophic tale of all the worst things you can think of. A counselor or parent can look it over with you to make sure the script looks realistic.

As an example, here’s a script Joe wrote with his therapist:

I walk into the front door of my house after school. The house is empty, since my mom and brother are both at work. I notice that the rooms are dark and quiet. I turn the light on, sit down at the table, and open up my backpack to get started on my homework. I hear a noise outside the house and think, Is that someone trying to get in? My heart beats faster. I want to check the lock or call my mom to see if she thinks everything is okay, but I decide to wait a few minutes. Nothing happens, so I open my math book and work for a little while. All of a sudden, there’s a bang at the side door, and it swings open. At first, I don’t see anyone come in, and I feel really scared. Then my brother walks in, slams his backpack down, and asks, “What’s up?”.

Sample Exposure Hierarchies

Jared worries about giving oral presentations at school and tends to avoid them. If he has to give a presentation, he prepares overly detailed notes in hopes he won't make a mistake. His goal is to be able to give a five-minute presentation on his own before the end of the school year. He gradually faces his fear by starting with the bottom situation on this list and working his way up to the top:

Situation	Fear rating (0–10)
Give solo presentation without notes while making eye contact with at least two classmates	10
Give solo presentation without notes, looking at the wall	9
Give solo presentation with notes	8
Give presentation with one or more classmates, talking at least some of the time	8.5
Stand in front of the class while a group member gives a presentation	7
Give presentation to the teacher alone after school	5
Practice presentation in front of two friends	5
Practice presentation in front of a parent	4
Practice presentation alone in front of the mirror	2.5

Kara really hopes to go to a precollege computer science program next summer. During the three-week program, she would live in a dorm room with two roommates. However, Kara is very anxious about sleeping away from home or from her parents (she's usually okay during family trips when her parents are in the same room). She worries she won't be able to sleep in an unfamiliar environment, and that she'll feel panicky at the first sign she's having trouble sleeping. She decides to try gradual exposure to sleeping away from home, using this hierarchy:

Situation	Fear rating (0–10)
Go to a three-week precollege program	9
Go on a weeklong school-sponsored trip to another state	8
Go on an overnight trip with a friend and her mother for two nights	7
Go on an overnight trip with a friend and her mother for one night	6.5
Sleep over at a friend's house (more than twenty minutes away from home) with two or more other girls for one night	5.5
Sleep over at a friend's house (more than twenty minutes away from home) for two nights	5
Sleep over at a friend's house (more than twenty minutes away from home) for one night	4
Sleep over at best friend's house for two nights	4
Sleep over at best friend's house for one night	3.5
Sleep over at grandparent's house for two nights	3
Sleep over at grandparent's house for one night	2

predictions log

This exercise will look at evidence for and against your hypotheses (or predictions) over time. Over the next week or two, write down all the upcoming situations you're worried about. Then, write down your predictions for each situation. Do your best not to avoid any aspect of the situation (see Activity 16 for further information on unhelpful behaviors). Next, write down what actually happened!

Date	Situation	Prediction	What actually happened
Example: August 9	<i>Emma's birthday party at the beach</i>	<i>No one will talk to me at the party. I'll stand in a corner by myself the whole time.</i>	<i>I tried not to stay in the corner. A few people from school started talking to me, and we ended up playing volleyball together.</i>

monitoring safety behaviors

Monitoring your behavior is often the first step toward changing your behavior. Of the safety behaviors you checked off above, pick one category that most interferes with your life (that is, takes up your time and energy at school, with friends, and at home). Over the next week, pay close attention to when you use this safety behavior, recording specific examples in the chart below (see Alicia’s example at the top), or noting them in your phone or computer!

Day	Situation	Safety behavior
Example: <i>Sunday</i>	<i>I have a test tomorrow</i>	<i>I keep going over my notes long after I’ve really understood the material.</i>

activity 17 * reducing reassurance-seeking and checking

Day	Behavior	How many times did you engage in the behavior today?

Bonus exercise: Write down what you're worried will happen if you don't check or ask for reassurance. Consider using the strategies (ignoring, defusing, or challenging your worry thoughts) in Activities 9 to 11 to address these thoughts.

activity 17 * reducing reassurance-seeking and checking

Target behavior (What type of reassurance-seeking or checking are you trying to stop?):			
Day	Goal (# of times you plan to check)	Actual frequency (# of times you checked)	Any challenges?

If it's too big of a step for you to reduce your reassurance-seeking or checking, try to delay the behavior. In other words, when you have the urge to check, see if you can wait ten minutes before doing it. Gradually increase the delay over time. You may find that if you ride out the urge to check, you don't have to do it after all.

activity 19 * limiting overpreparation

Date	Subject/type of assignment	Time spent on assignment	Predicted grade	Actual grade
Example: <i>May 10</i>	<i>History test</i>	<i>2.25 hours (normally would spend 3–4 hours)</i>	C+	A–

activity 21 * solving tough problems

Look at your solutions g1 bhecebUX . What are the pros/cons of each?

Solution	Pros	Cons
a.		
b.		
c.		
d.		
e.		

Based on the pros/cons, what's the best solution or combination of solutions?

exercise and mood log

Having thought about the type of exercise that would work best for you and when to do it, let's look at the connection between exercise and your worry and mood. Keep an exercise and mood log for the next three to four weeks, using the chart below. Rate your worry level on a scale from 0 (not at all worried) to 10 (extremely worried); similarly, rate how sad or down you felt that day on a scale from 0 (not at all sad/down) to 10 (extremely sad/down). After a few weeks, what do you notice about your worry and mood levels on the days you exercise versus the days you don't?

Date	Did you exercise today? If so, what did you do?	How long?	How worried were you today? (0-10)	How sad or down were you today? (0-10)

sleep log

This exercise will help you develop a more consistent sleep schedule. To start, keep a “sleep log” every day for a week.

Day	When did you wake up this morning?	Did you take any naps today? If so, how long?	When did you get into bed with the intention of sleeping?	How long did it take you to fall asleep?

27 What Exactly Am I Worried About?

for you to know

When you're worried, your thoughts may seem like they're racing, which makes it hard to figure out exactly what's bothering you. This can feel overwhelming, especially since it's difficult to challenge your worries if you can't say what you're worried about!

Consider Max, a thirteen-year-old eighth grader, who worried a lot about his performance in school and in basketball. Max described high levels of anxiety whenever he took a test or played in a basketball game, but he wasn't sure why. He said, "It's almost automatic. I just feel frozen when people watch me or grade me." Max's therapist helped him learn how to slow down and identify his specific fears in situations like these. For example, she asked him, "What bothers you the most about someone evaluating you?" After considering this, he said that people might think he isn't good enough, and then maybe he wouldn't succeed in school. Max felt less overwhelmed after he narrowed down what he was worried about. Now he has *specific* thoughts that he can directly challenge when he takes a test or plays basketball.

for you to do

To help you be as specific as possible when describing your worry thoughts, consider these hypothetical triggers. Below each trigger are three associated worry thoughts. Circle the thought that is most descriptive and specific.

Trigger #1: You have three tests and a quiz this week.

- I'm so freaked out.
- I'm going to do badly, and then my teachers and parents will be disappointed in me.
- I might fail, and I'd hate that.

Trigger #2: A lot of people at school are getting the flu.

- I'm going to get sick and throw up, and I won't be able to handle it.
- This is the worst thing ever!
- What if I get sick?

Trigger #3: Your friend invited you to her bat mitzvah, but you can't go.

- I'll be the only one not there.
- She'll be angry and decide I'm not a good friend.
- I feel nervous.

more to do

Using Max as an example, this exercise will help you identify *your* specific worry thoughts. First, see how Max completed the exercise:

Think of a time recently when you felt very worried. What was the trigger?

I had to take a tough English test.

Write down all the thoughts you remember having in the situation. Circle the thought that was most bothersome.

- I'm going to fail this.*
- I'm not prepared.*
- What if my mind goes blank when I take the test?*

What is the worst thing about this thought if it's true?

If I fail this test, my teacher will think I'm stupid—he won't recommend me for honors English next year.

What bothers you most about this "worst thing?"

It means I'm no good at English or taking tests—I'm not smart enough to succeed in school.

Based on your answers, rewrite your worry thought(s) to be as specific as possible:

I'm worried I will fail the test, and that will prove to everyone that I'm not smart enough to be a good student.

Now you try it:

Think of a time recently when you felt very worried. What was the trigger?

Write down all the thoughts you remember having in the situation. Circle the thought that was most bothersome.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

What is the worst thing about this thought if it is true?

What bothers you most about this “worst thing?”

Based on your answers to the questions, rewrite your worry thought(s) to be as specific as possible:

28 Stop Giving Worry So Much Credit

for you to know

This activity will help you identify and then ignore or challenge a very common belief: that worry is somehow protective and leads to good things happening, even if it causes anxiety and distress in the process. Many worriers believe that if they stop worrying, they'll no longer be careful and conscientious people, and chaos will ensue. For example, someone who worries constantly about her parents' health and safety might believe that if she worried less, then she would not be doing everything she could to protect her parents and thus would be a bad daughter. In other words, she has the illusion that her thoughts can control what happens to her parents, and if she lets her guard down, something bad will happen to them.

But worry does not equal conscientiousness. You can be a careful, loving, and studious person without worrying for hours on end or engaging in unhelpful behaviors (like calling your parents repeatedly to make sure they're safe). Challenging your belief that worry is protective may actually lead to *better* outcomes as well as more time and energy. Consider, for example, Franklin, a fifteen-year-old tenth grader who worries a great deal about his school performance despite top-notch grades. Though it bothers him that he feels so anxious about his schoolwork, he believes that his worry is what drives him to study a lot and get good grades; essentially, he's not sure that he'll study enough to be successful if he stops worrying so much. It's also really hard for Franklin to enjoy any downtime. He sometimes gets a surge of panic when he realizes he hasn't been worrying "enough" about his schoolwork, believing that his lapse will suddenly lead to poor work habits and bad grades. His therapist has encouraged him to consider the possibility that worrying about his work isn't what makes him a good student, and that maybe his grades would be the same (or even better) if he allowed himself to worry less about them. Franklin has practiced challenging his belief that worry protects his grades, and he's found that his grades stay within the same good range regardless of how many hours he spends thinking about his academic performance. When he isn't studying as much as his anxiety tells him to, he reminds himself of his rational response: *Worry isn't what makes me a good student.*

for you to do

This exercise will help you apply the thought-challenging skills you learned in Activity 11 to stop giving your worry so much credit. First, is there any part of your life that you think would turn out badly if you stopped worrying—for example, your grades, your safety, your loved ones' safety, your friendships, and so on? If so, what is it?

Now, answer these challenge questions.

How can I still be caring, conscientious, or safe about this part of my life without spending a lot of time worrying about everything that could go wrong?

Do I definitely know that something bad will happen if I worry less about this part of my life? Why or why not?

Is there another (positive) way things could turn out, even if I didn't worry as much? If so, what would this outcome look like?

What can I tell myself that challenges my belief that worry protects me? (Remember Franklin's rational response: "Worry isn't what makes me a good student.")

more to do

Many worried teens say they have trouble enjoying themselves during downtime, like hanging out with friends and family or watching a movie, because they're "worried about not worrying." This week, during downtime activities, apply skills learned in Activities 9 through 11 to manage your tendency to overvalue your worries.

Describe the thought as unhelpful and practice ignoring it (or mentally throwing it away).

Acknowledge and label your worry thought (for example, *My mind is telling me I have to keep worrying in order to be a good student* or *I'm having the thought that I need to worry about being a good friend to keep my friendships strong*).

If the thought persists, repeat your rational response from the first exercise to yourself.

29 Prioritizing and Scheduling Tasks

for you to know

Many teens (whether worriers or not) have trouble organizing and planning their schoolwork, extracurricular activities, time with friends, and other tasks or events. Difficulty planning your activities contributes to anxiety—for example, if you forget an assignment until the last minute, the amount of work to do in a short period of time is overwhelming. It may also feel like every task or event is equally important, making it hard to know what to do or schedule first.

Ian is an active high school senior. In November, everything seemed to hit him all in one week—two essays due the same day for his most challenging classes, mandatory basketball tryouts, band practice for an upcoming concert, and more to do for his college applications. That Monday morning, he woke up feeling panicked: how could he possibly do everything? He asked his mom if he could stay home from school, but she insisted he go and work it out with the guidance counselor. He learned some strategies to plan his activities effectively, which helped decrease his anxiety.

The first strategy Ian learned was to write down all of his tasks in *one place*. Previously, he wrote his assignments for each class in separate notebooks and kept track of his other activities in his head. He had to rifle through all of his notebooks a lot, and he often felt he was forgetting something. Ian's counselor gave him a single notebook, and asked him to put all of his upcoming tasks (and their due dates) on one page:

- Write three-page essay for European history (due Thursday).
- Write four-page essay for AP English comp (due Thursday).
- Finish essay for college applications (due in two weeks).
- Practice trombone twice before rehearsal on Wednesday.
- Do calculus homework (due next Tuesday).
- Get new shoes for basketball tryouts (by Tuesday).

Ian's counselor asked him if any of the tasks needed to be broken down into smaller steps. He said he probably needed to outline his English essay first, then write it.

Next, Ian learned to consider the *importance* of each task: high (H) = must be done as soon as possible because it's due today or tomorrow; medium (M) = needs to be done within the next week, but it's not due right away; and low (L) = needs to be done eventually, but it's not pressing. His counselor instructed him to look at his overall to-do list each morning (or the night before) and determine the level of importance of each item on his list for that day. On Monday morning, Ian's list looked like this:

M	Write three-page essay for European history (due Thursday).
H	Outline four-page essay for AP English comp (by Tuesday).
M	Write four-page essay for AP English comp (due Thursday).
L	Finish essay for college applications (due in two weeks).
M	Practice trombone twice before rehearsal on Wednesday.
L	Do calculus homework (due next Tuesday).
H	Get new shoes for basketball tryouts (by Tuesday).

By Wednesday morning, he had already completed the high-level items and one medium-level item from his Monday list. He also added another task to the list. He then rerated his priorities; his Wednesday morning list looked like this:

M H	Write three-page essay for European history (due Thursday).
H	Outline four-page essay for AP English comp (by Tuesday).
M H	Write four-page essay for AP English comp (due Thursday).
L	Finish essay for college applications (due in two weeks).
M	Practice trombone twice before rehearsal on Wednesday.
L	Do calculus homework (due next Tuesday).
H	Get new shoes for basketball tryouts (by Tuesday).
M	Finish lab report started in physics class (by Friday)

Ian could see that his top priorities for Wednesday were to finish his two essays for the next day.

Every morning, he continued to add to the list, and rerate the priority levels of each task, which helped him decide what to do that day. He also rewrote the list periodically to keep it readable.

for you to do

Get one notebook in which you will write a single list of tasks for every aspect of your life (school, extracurriculars, personal, and so on). Break more complex tasks into smaller pieces (see Activity 20 for more help with this). Then, rate the level of importance of each task for that day—remember that high (H) = must be done as soon as possible because it’s due today or tomorrow; medium (M) = needs to be done within the next week but is not due right away; and low (L) = needs to be done eventually, but it’s not pressing. To practice, write your first task list here and rate the priority level as of today:

Task	Priority (H, M, L)

more to do

Now that you've figured out how important each of your tasks is, you need to schedule time to complete the tasks. For this exercise, it's important to use either a paper schedule book that divides each day into different time blocks or an online calendar system.

First, block off all of your scheduled activities (that is, school, extracurriculars, social events) in the calendar. Anything not blocked off is your "free time." Next, estimate how long each task on your list will take to complete—then add thirty minutes to your estimate as a buffer. Finally, schedule your H tasks into the free time available for today; if you have time left over, schedule M tasks next, followed by L tasks.

Make sure you don't overschedule yourself on any one day, since you need time to rest and relax, too! To help with this, look ahead to the rest of the week. Schedule more tasks on days when you have more free time, and fewer tasks on days when you have a lot of classes/activities. Do your best to stick to the schedule, but remember that it doesn't have to be perfect. If something doesn't get done when you planned, you can find a new time to get it done, or you might find that some tasks don't really need to be done after all.

Ian, looking at his H-level tasks for Monday, estimated that his English essay outline would take sixty minutes—adding the thirty-minute buffer, he needed to find ninety minutes that day to work on it. He also thought it would take him twenty minutes to go to the store to get the shoes (plus thirty-minute buffer = fifty minutes). Finally, though it was an M-level task, Ian knew he had to practice trombone both Monday and Tuesday to complete two practices by Wednesday. He allowed an hour for practice, and he didn't add a buffer because he could just stop after the hour was up. He was aware that he had more free time later in the week, so he decided to just relax after practicing trombone. Thus, his Monday schedule then looked like this:

8–9 a.m.	Class
9–10 a.m.	Class
10–11 a.m.	Start English essay outline (free block at school)
11 a.m.–12 noon	Class
12 noon–1 p.m.	Lunch/Start of Class
1–2 p.m.	Class
2–3 p.m.	Get shoes at nearby store after school
3–4 p.m.	Basketball
4–5 p.m.	Basketball
5–6 p.m.	Finish up English essay outline (thirty minutes)
6–7 p.m.	Dinner at home
7–8 p.m.	Practice trombone
8–9 p.m.	Relax
9–10 p.m.	Relax

Now it's your turn:

8–9 a.m.	
9–10 a.m.	
10–11 a.m.	
11 a.m.–12 noon	
12 noon–1 p.m.	
1–2 p.m.	
2–3 p.m.	
3–4 p.m.	
4–5 p.m.	
5–6 p.m.	
6–7 p.m.	
7–8 p.m.	
8–9 p.m.	
9–10 p.m.	

30 Tackling Test Anxiety

for you to know

It would be hard to find a teen who hasn't felt worried about taking a test or exam at least *once*—it's a very common source of anxiety! Some teens, however, get so anxious about being evaluated that they panic, freeze up, "go blank," or otherwise struggle with concentrating on their work. This interferes with working efficiently and effectively, which then reinforces thoughts like *I'm terrible at taking tests!* If you believe that's true, then it only increases your anxiety the next time around.

Connor is a conscientious seventh grader who gets fantastic grades on his homework and class participation. His test grades, however, tend to be a letter grade or two below what he gets on everything else. A few days before a big test, he starts to feel anxious. He tells himself, *What if I can't remember everything I studied? My teacher is going to think I'm stupid. I'm never going to be able to finish.* His anxiety makes it hard for him to focus as he prepares for tests so that by the time he has to take the test, he feels panicked. His heart races, and he feels lightheaded and nauseous. When the test is handed to him, he scrolls through all the questions, selectively paying attention to the most challenging ones. Eventually, he feels calm enough to attempt some of the questions, but it's hard for him not to notice how quickly everyone else seems to be working or the clock ticking away. He works more slowly than his potential, and often leaves his exams unfinished.

Some teens, like Connor, get slowed down because their worry interferes with their concentration. However, there are some smart, capable adolescents who have found that regardless of their anxiety, they just can't finish tests quickly enough. If this sounds like you, consider talking to your parents and your guidance counselor or school psychologist. They may suggest that you be evaluated to see if you qualify for extended time on school exams and standardized tests, which can relieve some of the pressure. Either way, this activity will provide you with strategies to tackle worries in anticipation of taking tests as well as to manage your anxiety during tests.

for you to do

This set of strategies will help in advance of a test or exam. First, get plenty of sleep the night before your test, and on the day of the test, eat breakfast (and lunch, if the test is in the afternoon). After all, tests are challenging enough without lack of sleep or food interfering with your concentration. Second, give yourself adequate time to study for the test. Waiting until the last minute to study may work for people who thrive on adrenaline, but if that doesn't sound like you, give yourself a couple of days to study a little at a time. Finally, if you feel worried a day or two in advance of the test, take some time to identify and challenge your anxious thoughts. If you need guidance, see how Connor challenged his worries.

Write down everything you're worried will happen.

What if I can't remember everything I studied?

My teacher is going to think I'm stupid, and then I won't pass the class.

I'm never going to be able to finish.

Are you engaging in all-or-nothing thinking? If so, is there a "middle ground" for how the test will turn out?

Yes, I'm thinking that if I can't remember everything I studied, it's like I remember nothing. The "middle ground" is that I'll remember at least some of what I've learned even if I forget some material.

Are you catastrophizing? If so, what's truly the worst thing that could happen, and what could you do to deal with this?

Yes, thinking I won't pass the class if I don't do well on this test is probably catastrophizing. The worst that could happen is I get a bad grade on it and then can either ask to retake it or do something for extra credit.

Now it's your turn:

Write down everything you're worried will happen.

Are you engaging in all-or-nothing thinking? Remember that this involves thinking in extreme categories (for example, *I'll either ace the test or I'll fail it*). If so, is there a "middle ground" for how the test will turn out?

Are you catastrophizing (you predict the absolute worst outcome and imagine its disastrous consequences)? If so, what's truly the worst thing that could happen, and what could you do to deal with this?

more to do

You may find that despite your advance preparations, you still feel panicky at the start of the test. If that happens, try these strategies.

- Turn the test over for a few minutes (or cover the screen if it's on a computer).
- Take a moment and remember the effort you put into preparing for the test.
- Remind yourself of how you previously challenged your worry thoughts. In particular, remember that if "the worst" happens and you do poorly, you can work with the teacher to improve your grade (for example, take a retest, do an extra-credit project, or get extra help for future exams).
- Turn the test back over or uncover your screen. Find a problem or question that you know the answer to and work on this item. Continue with one or two other problems or questions you can answer.
- After gaining some momentum, continue with the harder items to the best of your ability.

In the future, it might help to mentally rehearse this set of strategies in advance of taking your next test. In particular, picture yourself gaining momentum, getting answers correct, and finishing on time.