



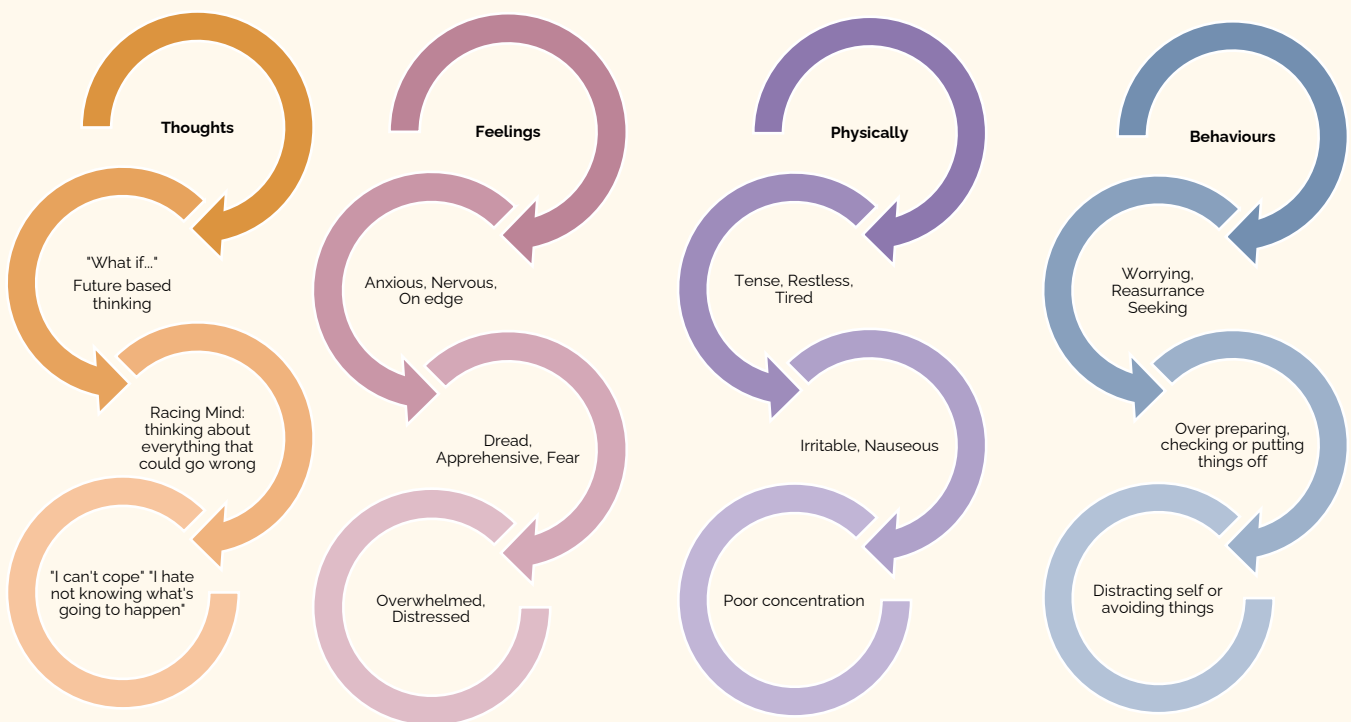
A Booklet for Worry

Created by Olivia Muir
HumanOS Psychological Therapist



Feeling Worried

Worrying is something we all do but it can become all-consuming and difficult to manage. Worries can occupy your mind and interfere with daily life which can result in feeling overwhelmed and anxious. This information will help you identify worries and ways to manage them. When people are worrying a lot they notice various things changing. We can group these into categories. Do you recognise any of the following?



How would you describe how you're feeling at the moment?

Goals

When we're feeling worried something that can be difficult but helpful to start off with is thinking about what you would like to be doing if you didn't feel this way. Having goals in mind can help give you a direction to look towards. Try to think about where you want to be in the future.

Breaking goal setting down is proven to help create goals that people are more likely to stick to. It can also make thinking about goals feel less overwhelming. We call this method of goal setting SMART goals.

Tip: small goals are more achievable to start with

Specific: Try to be as specific as possible including dates, times and what exactly you want to achieve

e.g. 'I want to stop my anxiety' -> 'I want to develop strategies to manage my worries'

Measurable: Making a goal measurable means you can track your progress

e.g. 'reduce my worry to 20 minutes a day' or 'have strategies I can use when I find my worries escalating' is a way to measure progress

Achievable: Is this a realistic goal in the short term? Is it possible to achieve in the next month? If not, think about breaking it down

e.g. 'I want to stop worrying' -> 'I want to reduce my time spent worrying'

Relevant: Make sure the goal you have chosen is in line with what you want to address. Will achieving the goal make a difference to you now?

e.g. is reducing worry what you want to focus on?

Time Specific: Try to set a time frame of when you want to achieve this goal by

e.g. 'in a month's time I want to be regularly using the strategies I have learnt'

Write down your goals here using the above tips:

1.

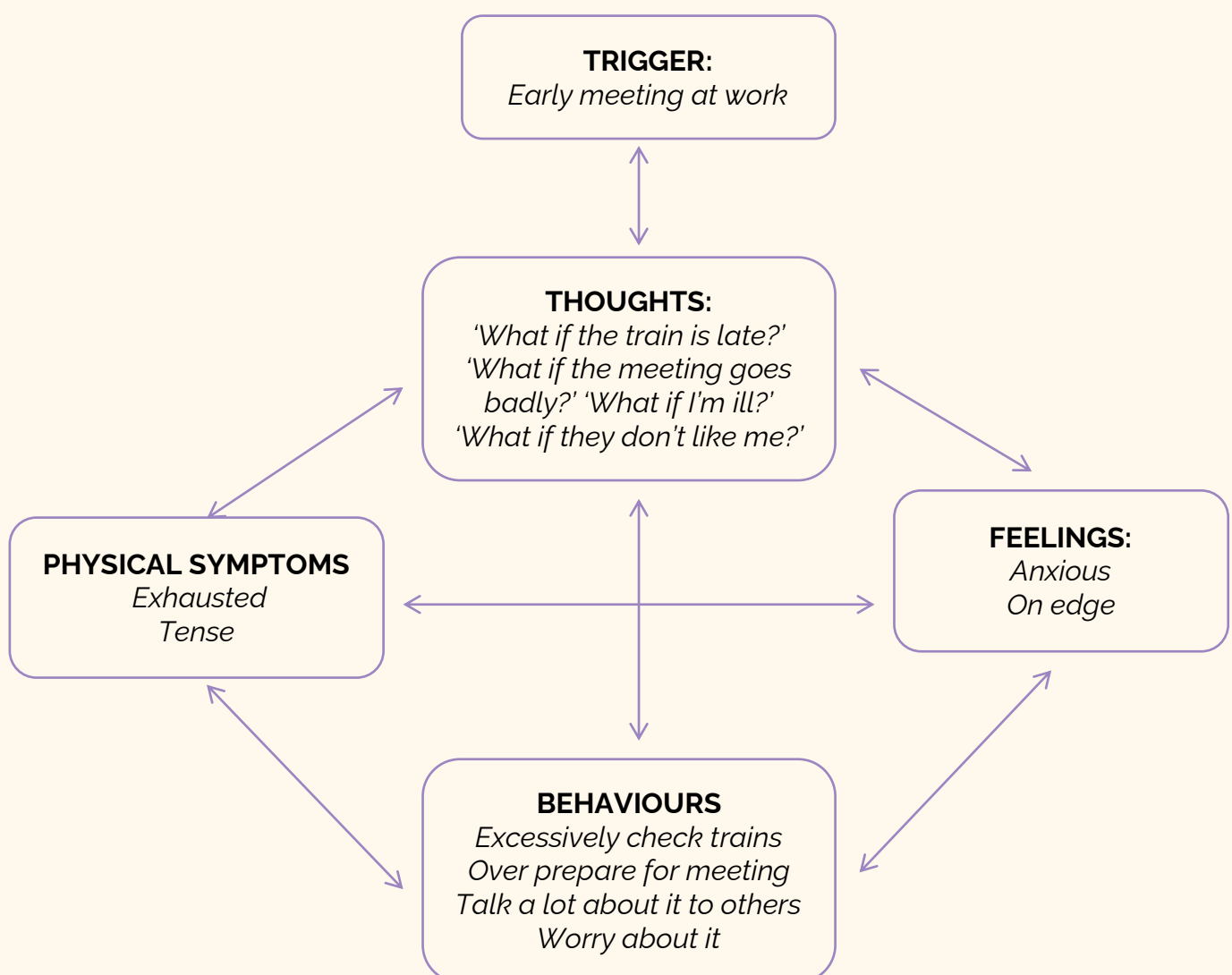
2.

3.

The Cycle

Changes in our mood can fall into 4 main categories: thoughts, feelings, physical symptoms and behaviours. These changes can all feed in to one another to make the problem feel worse.

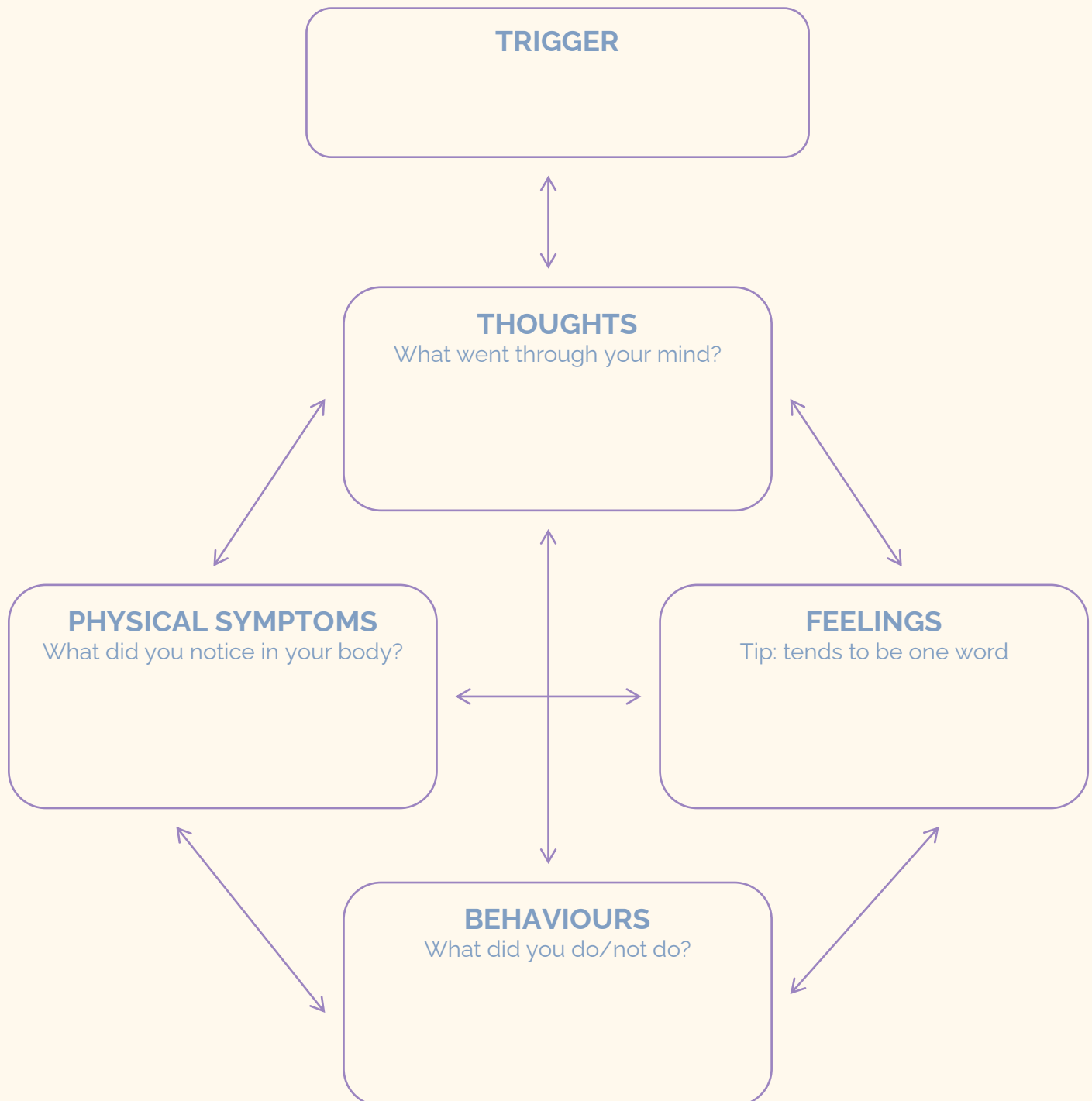
For example, if we start to worry we might start feeling more anxious, which can make us want to reassurance seek or can make us want to withdraw. Reassurance seeking can make us feel reliant on others and less able to cope by ourselves. Withdrawing can make us feel more isolated and worry more. These things can make us feel more anxious. This is known as a 'vicious cycle'



Note: Worrying is a behaviour. This will be explained more below.

Your turn

Try to think of a time you felt anxious and worried recently and map it out below. Starting with the trigger: what was the situation? Then go from there with the first thing you noticed: a shift in your feelings or a specific worry?



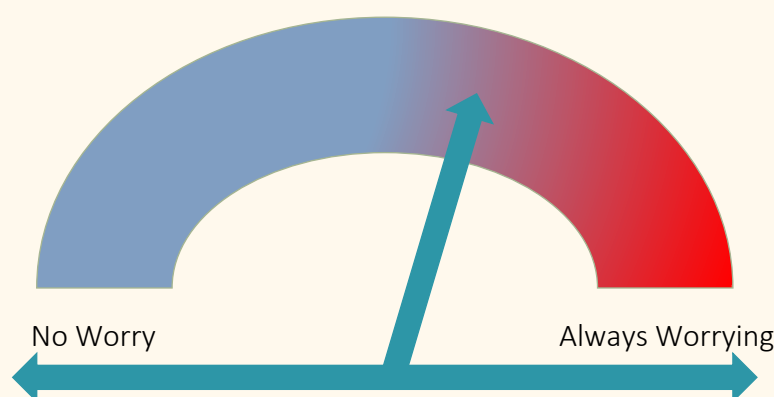
What is Worry?

Worrying is something we all do to an extent. It is a behaviour, it is the process of going over the same thoughts again and again to try and make yourself feel less anxious. What we know is worry actually increase anxiety.

Worries often start with "what if...."

What triggers worry? What often happens is a thought comes into our mind that makes us feel uncertain, anxious or fearful. These emotions and this uncertainty can be difficult to sit with. To try and calm this emotion and find an answer we might start to worry. Worry can be triggered by external events (e.g. missing a train) or internal feelings (e.g. nausea). It is usually caused when we feel uncertain about something in the future. Uncertainty makes us feel uncomfortable so we try to think of all the possible outcomes to work out what could happen. Worry is our mind trying to protect ourselves from future fears and uncertainties. Feeling anxious about something like an interview can help us prepare for it, but when we just start worrying about it it's actually very hard to take action. Instead we become stuck in a worry cycle.

Why is worrying unhelpful? We might think the worry is helping us plan or stay in control, but usually thinking about all the things that could go wrong makes us feel anxious and overwhelmed. We tend not to worry about things going well but instead focus on everything that could go wrong and underestimate our ability to cope. Worry may start to interfere with our lives, it can make us doubt ourselves, feel really anxious, distract us, impact our sleep and make us feel irritable.



Where are you on this scale? Where is reasonable to get to?

Worry Diary

The first step to managing worry is to realise when you're starting to worry and noting it down. Creating a record of worries can help you identify patterns in your thinking as well as create some distance between you and the worries. Some people find it helpful to record this on their phone notes or in the table below, whatever is easiest.

Tip: Many people find that they tend to worry at night- make sure you keep a pen and paper next to your bed.

Date & Time	Situation Where? With who? What are you doing?	Worries What are you thinking? What do you fear may happen?	Emotions What emotions are you feeling? Any physical symptoms?

Reflections and Learning

How did you find keeping the worry diary?

Did you notice any patterns in your worries?

Do the worries feel as anxiety provoking now as they were at the time?

Have any of the worries come true? If so, how did you cope?

Classifying Worries

Worries can fall into two type of categories:

Practical Worries

Practical worries are current problems that we can take action to solve. We can identify the problem and then make a plan to action them: like items on a to do list.

Examples: My car has broken down -> a worry may come to mind such as 'what if I can't get to work tomorrow?' -> instead of just worrying about this you can take action and practically address the issues by finding a car repair service and coming up with another option of how to get to work the next day if necessary.

Hypothetical Worries

Hypothetical worries are about things that haven't happened yet, and things that do not have a practical solution. We cannot control the outcome. They are triggered because we feel uncertain about something.

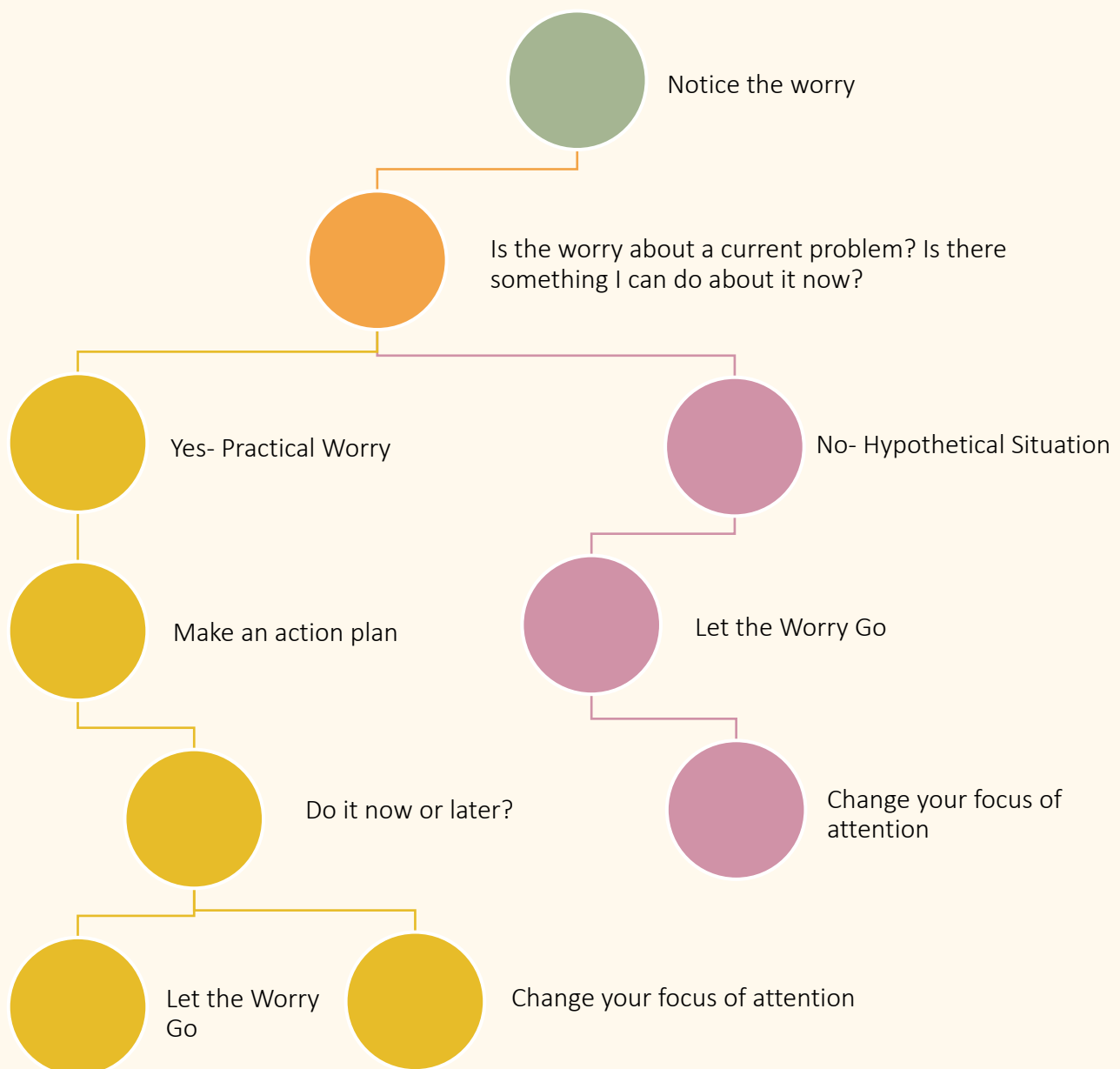
Examples: 'What if my train is delayed, what if I lose my job, what if my partner leaves me, what if I become unwell?' -> these are all things largely outside of our control, there is no action we can take and worrying about them does not help us but just distresses us. There may be some practical elements to some of these e.g. if you are underperforming at work there may be specific things to address with your manager, however, if there is nothing practical to address then this is a hypothetical worry.

Sometimes worries may start as a practical worry such as worrying about getting to work because your car has broken down. Once you have solved this problem by booking into a garage and finding a way to work hypothetical worries may then occur such as "what if they can't fix it then I don't have a car for a whole week, what if I need to buy a new car, I don't have enough money, what if I can't afford the holiday next month because of this" -> these are future based possibilities that haven't happened yet, we can't problem solve them at the moment as we need to wait and see if the car can be fixed first. Instead it is important to sit with the uncertainty and trust ourselves that if something does go wrong we will be able to cope with that as and when. So, worries may be practical initially, but you may go into a chain of hypothetical worries.

Worry Map

This is map to try and categories your worry and identify how to manage them. The difficult part is learning how to find the practical solution or managing to 'let go' of our hypothetical worries and instead sit with the uncertainty.

Remember: Sometimes hypothetical worries may have practical elements- for example, we may take some practical steps towards sorting our financial situation, but it may come to a point where there is nothing further we can action and we find ourselves worrying about things for no reason.



Worry Diary 2

Try keeping another worry diary, this time when you write the worry down identify whether it is hypothetical or practical. We will go on to learning how to address these but the first step is categorising the worry. This in itself can allow you to take a step back in realising there may be nothing you can do currently to help which will start allowing you to see that the process of worry is unhelpful. With hypothetical worries try to really focus on the fact the worry isn't helping it's only more anxious thoughts. Think about what else you can focus on in that moment instead of the worries.

Date & Time	Situation Where? With who? What are you doing?	Worries What are you thinking? What do you fear may happen?	Emotions What emotions are you feeling? Any physical symptoms?	Type Hypothetical or Practical?

Worry Time

What happens when we try to suppress our thoughts?

Imagine a luminous pink rabbit bouncing up and down on the floor in front of you. Once you've visualised that in front of you, try not to think about it at all for 30 seconds. You can think about anything but the luminous pink rabbit bouncing up and down. Observe where your thoughts take you? How easy was this? Did the pink rabbit come back into your mind? Did you feel like you were fighting with your thoughts?

This is what happens when we try to suppress thoughts, they pop back into our minds just like if we tried to push a beach ball under water.

Instead we need to make space for them so you can come back to the worries and analyse how you are feeling.

Worry Time

Worry time is an evidence-based technique to manage hypothetical worries. It helps teach you to postpone a worry. Worry time is 10-20 minutes set aside each day to address the worries you have noted down in your worry diary. The idea is that when a worry comes up you note it down and tell yourself that you need to refocus back on the task in hand and postpone thinking about that worry until worry time. This allows you to feel more in control of your worries throughout the day as you are giving yourself a time and place to worry and therefore containing the amount of time you spend worrying about future concerns. By doing this you break the habit of worry. It is important to acknowledge that worry has become a habit, and habits are difficult to break. Using this strategy can help.

Step 1: Plan your Worry Time

- Choose a time each day
- Choose how long for (ideally no longer than 20 minutes)
- Assure you'll have no distractions in this time
- Avoid scheduling your Worry Time too close to bedtime as it is helpful to have an activity planned in after to help you refocus

Step 2: Keep you Worry Diary

- Outside of your Worry Time continue to write down your worries using the worry diary
- Categorise them into practical and hypothetical
- It is the hypothetical ones you will come back to in worry time (you will learn a technique to manage practical worries later on)

Step 3: Present moment refocusing

- Once you have written down the worry refocus on the present moment. What are you doing? What could you be doing?
- Remind yourself that you will have time to worry about this later, but for now you are going to re-focus your attention back to the present
- If you are finding this hard try the present focus moment technique on the next page

Step 4: Worrying in your scheduled worry time

- When it's your worry time find a quite place with a notepad and pen and go through each worry reflecting on the following questions:
 - o How did you feel when you first wrote this worry down compared to how you feel about it now?
 - o Has the thing you were worrying about happened? If yes, how did you cope? Did you cope better or worse than you thought?
 - o Are any of the worries on your list no longer a problem? Was worrying about it worth it?
 - o What happened to your anxiety when you come back to the worries? How does it feel to spend this time worrying?
- When you finish this exercise rip up the paper and throw it away. Then move on to your next activity.

Once this is completed start a new worry diary for the next 24 hours. You can repeat bringin worries to worry time as much as you need.

Present Moment Focus

Once you have written down your worry, you will then need to refocus on the present moment. This can be as simple as getting back on with the task you were doing before the worry distracted you or starting a new task- try to really focus on what is going on around you and tune your attention onto this. It is harder to worry when you are really focused on the present moment.

Tip: Day to day tasks can be great ways to achieve a present moment focus- for example, doing the washing up, really focus on the activity, the sound of the tap running, the smell of the washing up liquid, the feeling of the bubbles.

Sometimes if you are feeling very anxious this can be really hard. The following grounding technique can be helpful to support our present moment focus. It works by taking your attention out of your head, and switching the focus to your senses and surroundings.

Go down this list noticing and naming outloud or writing down:

5	• 5 things I can see
4	• 4 things I can hear
3	• 3 things I can touch
2	• 2 things I can smell or taste
1	• 1 deep breath

Tip: It can be helpful to step outside to complete this.

Deep Breathing: Breathing deeply can really help manage our physical anxiety. When feeling anxious you may be taking shallow 'chest breaths'. Try to focus on breathing slowly, in through your nose. Imagine a balloon blowing up in your stomach as your breath in. Count to 4, pause for a moment then breath out. Try to keep these slow and steady.

Reflect

How did you find worry time?

What did you notice about your anxiety and worry throughout the day?

How did you find refocusing?

Problem Solving

When we feel anxious, sometimes our practical problems can also feel overwhelming, and we can struggle to find solutions. Problem solving is an evidence-based intervention designed to separate the worry and the problem and help us think through the solution logically to resolve the worry.

The 8 steps of Problem Solving:

1. Identify the worry you want to work on

Choose one of the practical worries you would like to work on. Remember to make sure it is a practical worry not a hypothetical concern- use the worry tree if you can't decide.

2. Make sure this is a practical problem you can work on

Convert the practical worry you would like to sort into a problem to solve. For example, 'What if I don't meet my deadline' -> 'I need to complete my work report by Thursday'.

3. Identify all the possible solutions

Try to identify as many potential solutions as you can think of. Don't reject any solution, no matter how ridiculous it may seem. Often the more creative solutions can help us to address different aspects of our problem.

4. Analyse the strengths and weaknesses of each solution

Consider the main strengths and weaknesses of each of the solutions you identified in step 3. You might want to consider your capability, opportunity and motivation for each solution. For example is it possible, do you have the resources, how do you feel about carrying it out?

5. Select a solution

Once you've analysed the strengths and weaknesses of each option and pick the strongest solution.

6. Develop a plan

You will need to carefully plan how you will implement the solution- consider the four 'W's'- with whom, what, when, where.

7. Put your plan into action

Put the plan into action, record what you did and how it went.

8. Review/repeat?

Review how it went – did it work? What went well? What didn't go so well? What would you do differently next time? Did you cope better than you thought, even if it didn't go to plan? Anything else you need to do – back to step 5? What does this show you about how helpful, or not, worry is?

These steps may seem very simple but when you have a practical worry circling in your head writing solutions out like this can really help focus. Use the table on the next page to go through a practical worry.

Problem Solving Worksheet

Step 1- write down the Practical Worry you want to work on

Step 2- convert the worry into a problem you can solve

Step 3- what are the possible solutions- remember to be creative

Step 4- what are the strengths and weaknesses for each solution

Step 5- select your best solution

Step 6- develop a plan to apply your solution

Step 7- put your plan into action, what did you do?

Step 8- review your plan, how did it go?

Goal Review

Once you have been practising managing your worries for a few weeks check in with how you are feeling and progressing towards your goals. We recommend you do this every week or two to ensure you are moving in the right direction. Goals keep us accountable.

Is what you're doing working towards your goals?

Is there anything you need to change to achieve your goals?

Is there any further support you need right now?

Staying Well Plan

To feel better and stay well, it is important to continue looking after your mental health just as you would your physical health, using what you have learnt far. When you notice you are feeling better it is helpful to acknowledge what you have done that has led to improvements in order to help stay well in future.

Remember, everyone's mood fluctuates. Sometimes things happen that make us more anxious in life. This is normal. There is a difference between mood fluctuating and potentially relapsing into being unable to manage your worries.

A lapse is a brief return to feeling anxious which might be very understandable in a variety of different situations (e.g. something goes wrong at work, difficulty in relationships). During these times we can worry more. As we have said, everyone has these moments and they are usually temporary. It can be easy in these moments to dwell on failures or be unkind to yourself - but don't give up on the strategies you have learnt and try to be compassionate to yourself.

A relapse is when negative thinking and ways of behaving that you have previously tackled start to spiral and make you feel considerably worse. These periods tend to impact your every day life and last for longer. During these times you will likely feel unable to apply the strategies you have learnt, so the aim is to identify signs of a relapse early on.

On the final page are some questions to help guide you in summarising your learning from this booklet. We recommend you keep this booklet somewhere safe to refer to in the future if you need to.

What were you struggling with at the beginning?

What strategies have you learnt that have helped?

How will you continue to make progress and continue to build on what you've achieved so far?

What will you first notice if you start to feel anxious again? Your 'warning signs' (think about the thoughts, feelings, physical symptoms and behaviours at the beginning)

What will you do if you notice a relapse?