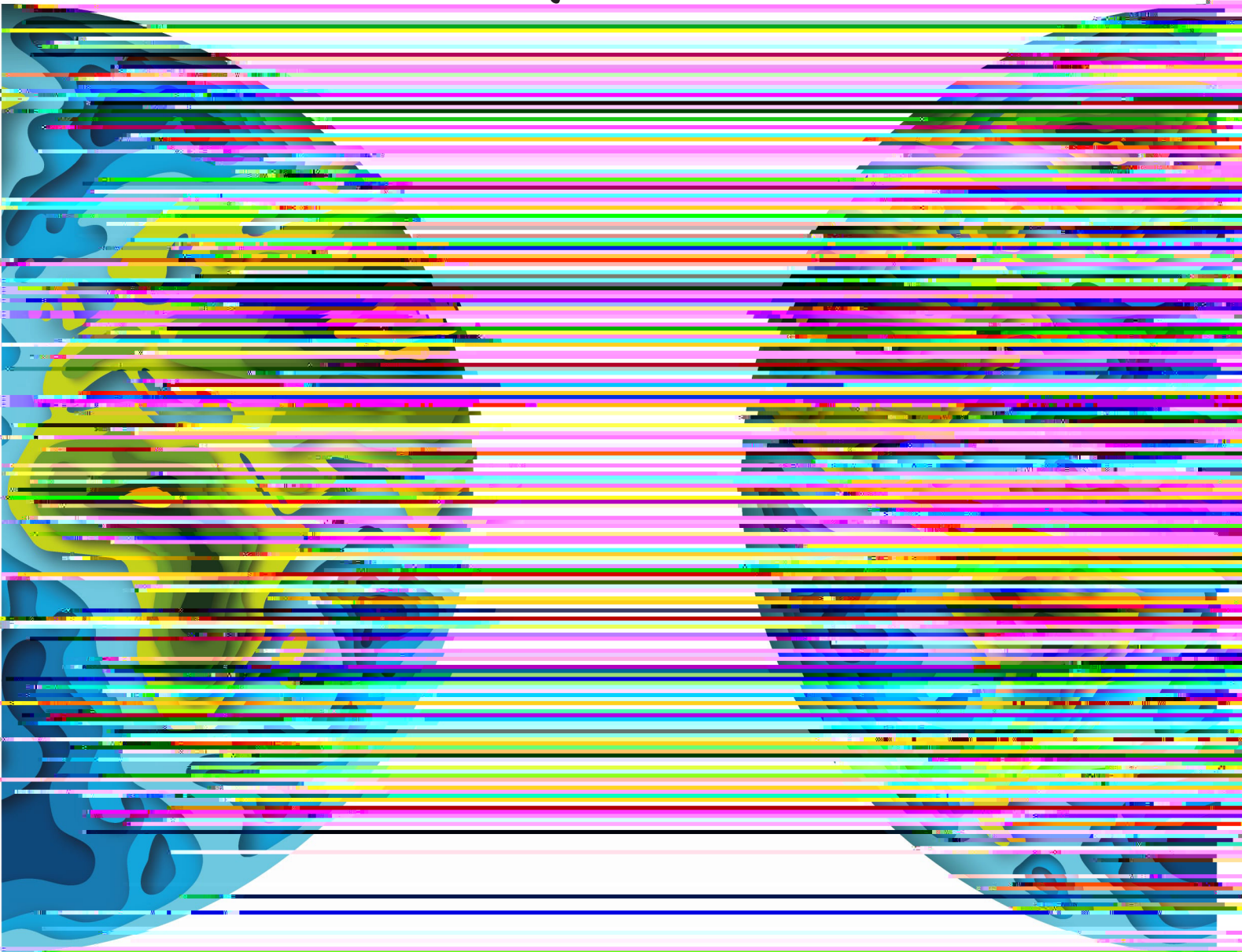


Guide

US English

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About this guide

Our world is changing rapidly at the moment. Given some of the news coverage, it would be hard not to worry about what it all means for yourself, and for those you love.

Worry and anxiety are common problems at the best of times, and when it takes over it

What is worry?

Human beings have the amazing ability to think about future events. 'Thinking ahead' means that we can anticipate obstacles or problems, and gives us the opportunity to plan solutions. When it helps us to achieve our goals, 'thinking ahead' can be helpful. For example, hand washing and social distancing are helpful things that we can decide to do in order to prevent the spread of the virus. However, worrying is a way of 'thinking ahead' that often leaves us feeling anxious or apprehensive. When we worry excessively, we often think about worst case scenarios and feel that we won't be able to cope.

What does worry feel like?

When we worry it can feel like a chain of thoughts and images, which can progress in increasingly catastrophic and unlikely directions. Some people experience worry as uncontrollable – it seems to take on a life of its own. It is natural that many of us may have recently noticed ourselves thinking about worst-case scenarios. The example below illustrates how worries can escalate quickly, even from something relatively minor. Have you noticed any thoughts like this? (confession: we both have!)

Worry isn't just in our heads. When it becomes excessive we feel it as anxiety in our bodies

What triggers worry and anxiety?

Anything can be a trigger for worry. Even when things go right, you might manage to think to yourself *"but what if it all falls apart?"* There are particular situations where worry becomes even more common, though. Strong triggers for worry are situations that are:

- **Ambiguous** – open to different interpretations.
- **Unfamiliar** – so we don't have any experience to fall back on.
- **Uncertain** – unclear how things will turn out.

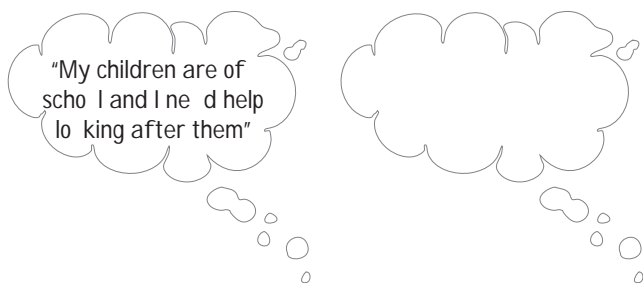
Does any of this sound familiar at the moment? The current worldwide health situation ticks all of these boxes, and so it makes sense that people are experiencing a lot of worry. It is an unusual situation with much uncertainty, which can naturally lead us to worry and feel anxious.

Are there different types of worry?


Worry can be helpful or unhelpful, and psychologists often distinguish between worries concerning 'real problems' vs. 'hypothetical problems'.


Real problems are about actual problems that need solutions right now. For example, given the very real concern about the virus at the moment, there are helpful solutions which include regular handwashing, social distancing, and physical isolation if you have symptoms.


Hypothetical problems about the current health crisis might include thinking about worst-case scenarios (what we might call catastrophizing). For example, imagining worst case scenarios such as *most* people dying.



nd ways to let the worry go and focus on something else. You might also use this tool with children if they are struggling to cope.

 . Worry is insistent – it can make you feel as though you have to engage with it . But you can experiment with postponing hypothetical worry, and many people find that this allows them to have a different relationship with their worries. In practice, this means deliberately setting aside time each day to let yourself worry (e.g. 30 minutes at the end of each day). It can feel like an odd thing to do at first! It also means that for the other 23.5 hours in the day you try to let go of the worry until you get to your 'worry time'. Our *Worry Postponement* exercise will guide you through the steps you need to give it a try.

 . Worry can come from a place of concern - we worry about others when we care for them. A traditional cognitive behavioral therapy technique for working with negative, anxious, or upsetting thoughts is to write them down and find a different way of responding to them. Using the *Challenging Your Thoughts With Compassion* worksheet, you can practice responding to your anxious or worrying thoughts with kindness and compassion. We have provided a worked example to get you started.

 . Learning and practicing mindfulness can help us to let go of worries and bring ourselves back to the present moment. For example focusing on the gentle movement of your breath or the sounds you hear around you, can serve as helpful 'anchors' to come back to the present moment and let go of worries.

Worry Postponement For Uncertain Times

1. Read the scenario and identify the worry.

2. Highlight the worry and write down the worry in your own words.

3. Write down the worry in your own words. E.g. "I am worried that I will not be able to find a job." or "I am worried that I will not be able to pay my bills." or "I am worried that I will not be able to afford a house."

Step 1: Preparation

1. Write down the worry in your own words. E.g. "I am worried that I will not be able to find a job." or "I am worried that I will not be able to pay my bills." or "I am worried that I will not be able to afford a house."

Step 2: Worry postponement

Step 3: Worry time

1. Write down the worry in your own words. E.g. "I am worried that I will not be able to find a job." or "I am worried that I will not be able to pay my bills." or "I am worried that I will not be able to afford a house."

Compassionate Thought Challenging Record

PSYCHOLOGY  LS

Compassionate Thought Challenging Record

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