

OBU

COUNSELING SERVICES



Combating worry and anxiety -

If this is one of your struggles, you're **DEFINITELY** not alone -

My former pastor used to joke that worry was one of his spiritual gifts.

Almost 40% of the students I've seen in my office have identified anxiety as something troubling them. If this is your battle, or if you're experiencing anxiety attacks, please come see me. I'm eager to help you.

Here are a few helpful ideas for reducing the power of your worries or anxieties. Most of these suggestions have been adapted from the book, *Worry: hope and help for a common condition*, by Edward M. Hollowell, M.D.¹

1. **Separate out and identify the toxic and destructive worry from the good worry.** "Good worry amounts to planning." It produces action, that will then eliminate or diminish most of our worry. Toxic worry is the enemy. It is repetitive, paralyzing, frightening, and unproductive.
2. **Return your focus to the present.** Realize that much of what usually occurs when anxiety has "run amok" is that our mind has been taken as a captive prisoner into the future where we're been tormented by an outcome, tragedy, embarrassing or humiliating possibility, or fantasy that our mind has created. Yet, our physical body (heart rate, breathing, muscle tension, and racing thoughts) are reacting to as if it is actually happening or about to occur. A VERY HELPFUL approach can be to begin telling ourselves the fact that it is NOT yet actually happening! To do this it can be helpful to engage our senses and drag our mind back into the present by touching something nearby, drinking a glass of cool water, feeling the

floor with our bare feet, and **then** begin to help your body relax. You may want to come by for a visit to **learn how to relax your body when in this situation**, and then practice the technique daily to hone your skills and increase your confidence.

3. **Get the facts.** What concrete evidence do you have to support your fear? Is there something you can do or someone you can talk with to investigate the situation further? Is your worry or anxiety *based on what is actually happening or is clearly probable*, or is it based on a terrifying fantasy your imagination has concocted?
4. **Exercise regularly.** It is one of the best treatments for worry we have.
5. **Develop connectedness in as many different ways as you can.** Strong connections with family members, friends, workmates, schoolmates, co-workers, and with God are all essential to us as human beings. Don't let them suffer or be neglected. If these are healthy and in place we are less vulnerable to worry. And **remember**, don't simply expect others to come and lift you up in your time of need - **You** have to take the initiative and reach out to others and let them know you're struggling.
6. **Identify those from whom you can get reassurance when you need it.** "Don't show your poetry to someone who hates poetry." Don't spin your wheels seeking support from those not inclined to give it.

7. **Analyze the problem and take the corrective action needed.** This is what non-worriers do all the time. Do what you can, turn the rest over to God, or hand it off to someone else – if appropriate. **IN SHORT: Evaluate your situation, make a plan, then ACT on it.** Schedule what you need to do, and when it's time - stick to it. You'll feel better simply by devising a plan and implementing it.

8. **Attack the worry; don't let it attack you.** Consider this explanation by Dr. Hollowell:

"There is a maxim from baseball which says, 'Play the ground ball; don't let it play you.' This piece of advice may be lost on people who are not athletically inclined or who have never played baseball or softball, but the proper fielding of a ground ball is a wonderfully instructive skill all people can learn from. A ground ball is a baseball hit by the batter that bounces very fast along the ground. The fielder's job is to stop the ball so that he can throw it to first base before the batter can reach there. In order to make the throw in time, the fielder needs to field the ball 'cleanly,' that is without bobbling it or letting it bounce off his chest. The novice fielder's first instinct in fielding a ground ball is to back up on the ball and try to predict the bounces as the ball skips toward him. This is called letting the ball play you. You are at the mercy of the unpredictable hops the ball can take. You naturally tense up and worry, *Can I field this ball or is it going to get past me?* This is a **disastrous attitude** to have in fielding a ground ball. You will likely kick the ball or miss it altogether. Instead, what you should do is play the ball, rather than letting it play you. You should charge the ball as it speeds towards you. Then you will not overthink the problem of how to field it; you will simply act. You will grab the ball before you give your worry-center a chance to think too much and inhibit you from successfully fielding it. This principle is, in my opinion, a great key to the successful management of worry and of decision-making in general. You do better to attack the problem, rather than letting it attack you."



9. **Do what's right.** It's pretty simple; if you violate your conscience, or act irresponsibly you're likely to feel guilt. And, you'll increase your anxiety over the possible consequences or the fact that maybe you're deceiving others or even yourself.

10. **Ask for advice when you need it.** This is a way to attack the problem responsibly. But, don't allow yourself to go overboard with getting others' opinions on what you should do. This can simply increase your paralysis! Seek out just a few trusted sources of

sound advice, and keep track of what they all may have offered in common, ask God for wisdom, then make your decision.

11. **Pray. Take your concern to God** directly and ask Him for wisdom, or what you need. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, **with thanksgiving [it is critical at this point to remind yourself of what He's done in the past, and how God has been faithful to meet your needs in other times in your life],** present your requests to God [He wants us to come to Him so that when He responds and meets our need, we will recognize His activity in our lives and trust Him more], and the peace of God, which transcends all human understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Phil. 4:6-7

12. **Eat and sleep properly.** These are quite important to good mental and emotional health. Don't make a habit of staying up too late, creating fatigue, then trying to get more energy by consuming high sugar snack foods. This is a **crash** just waiting to happen.

13. **Keep a note pad near the edge of your bed** so that you can write things down that may come to mind in the middle of the night – allowing you to go right back to sleep – knowing that you won't forget the item, and don't have to remain fixed on it through the night. Most worries appear magnified in the middle of the night.

Or, use a note pad to write down something that has come to mind if you're in the middle of another task. That way you can return to your current activity free of the fear that you'll forget it.

14. **Never worry alone.** Once you share a problem with someone else, it can almost immediately feel less threatening. You also find more solutions by sharing your challenges with others. Again, avoid going overboard with this and fueling your obsession with a worry by continually finding new people with whom you can vent.

15. **Use Humor.** Make friends with amusing people. Spend time with friends who help you to laugh. It's OK to laugh and joke during rough times! It'd not only OK, it's a helpful idea.

16. **Be sure to remind yourself of the possible positive outcomes in a given situation.** Worriers can generate many a negative "possible" catastrophe, but don't give much thought to the often equally possible, or even more probable positive things others might be thinking or feeling about them, the positive results that might follow their efforts, or other positive outcomes on the horizon.

¹ **Worry, by Edward Hollowell, MD, Balantine Books, New York, 1997**



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