



AnxietyLab.org

3-4-5 Program Course

Method #2

The once-over: Reality testing and certainty

Give it the once-over to get to the Final Answer - then *STOP*

The “once-over” means you can use the designated worry schedule to go over the specific issue thoroughly from beginning to end – but only once and within a set time period (not on-going). As you gain more skill in handling your own thinking habits, you'll get to know the difference between realistic issues that must be included in the once-over and other details that may seem important but are actually inconsequential. This may take time to master but it is vitally important.

Method 2: Accepting Uncertainty

“What stands fast does so, not because it is intrinsically obvious or convincing; it is rather held fast by what lies around it.” — Ludwig Wittgenstein, On Certainty

Strengthening your ability to handle uncertainty

People tend to need certainty. Especially those prone to worrying: we crave certainty at all times. But that is not how life works so the ability to handle uncertainty is a vital life skill. This is where your work on unrealistic expectations, both positive and negative, can greatly help in reducing anxiety tendencies. You may not be able to control something but perhaps being able to control the things around it (yourself) will be comforting enough. Becoming more comfortable with your emotions will

help ease this strain.

There are several methods used to address the overwhelming need for certainty and the cognitive distortions it can create. Using the method of “reality testing” may be the most intense. Otherwise simply questioning your expectations and beliefs and comparing them to an outside measure may help calm unrealistic fears and constant disappointments.

It will also help in coming to terms with the reality that it is impossible to have certainty at all times.

Ask yourself probing and challenging questions like the following in order to strengthen your ability to be less distracted and distressed by the unknown:

Is this problem real and happening now or is it a hypothetical “*what-if?*” scenario?

Answer:

If the problem is a hypothetical “*what if?*”, how likely is it to actually occur?

Answer:

Has that thing occurred before? Is it a strong enough possibility that it's worth my time and energy?

Answer:

Are there more realistic possibilities for this?

Answer:

Is it possible to be certain about everything in life?

Answer:

What are the advantages of requiring certainty?

Answer:

How is needing certainty in life helpful and unhelpful?

Answer:

Is it likely that many situations have a neutral outcome? Could this be one of them?

Answer:

Is it reasonable to expect to know everything? Do others have total certainty?

Answer:

Is it likely that being able to live with a small amount of uncertainty on big things is a trait that increases your own well-being?

Answer:

Once you have strengthened your ability to handle more uncertainty, your anxiety should ease and open the way for more growth and further development. One thing to focus on would be the vital skill of knowing how to accept things that cannot be changed.