

# NATIONAL CRISIS INTERVENTION TRAINING INSTITUTE

## “Picking Up Straws”



Ever hear about “the straw that broke the camel’s back?” The common explanation for that phrase is that, after being piled on in a one-by-one manner, a pile of straws can get so heavy that...all it takes is.....ONE MORE STRAW...to break the back of a camel. Thus, that one, tiny little straw becomes “the straw that broke the camel’s back. However, there is another way it can happen. Most people, when asked to describe what appears to be on the back of the camel in the picture above, would say “straw,” rather than “a big pile of little tiny individual straws.” Why? Because most people probably use the term “straw” interchangeably to describe an individual strand of straw, as well as a big pile of individual strands.

Our problems are like that. We can have our proverbial backs broken by allowing our tiny problems to pile up, worrying about them as though they were one gigantic monster lurking in the corner...so that if just one more tiny problem is added to the massive burden, we become overwhelmed by the one terrible, insurmountable pile that NO mere mortal could overcome by himself. Key culprits in this tragic phenomenon are two first cousins: Worry and Regret.

We believe that chronic worry is a “disease.” “Worry” is a malignant, vampiristic, wasteful, life-sucking force that robs us of peace, serenity, accomplishment, and success. It is our belief that human beings are psychologically, emotionally, cognitively, physiologically, and spiritually incapable of fervently worrying about something, while simultaneously doing something about what they’re worrying about. The key to overcoming the disease of worry is to learn to transform it into what we refer to as “dynamic concern.” Likewise, the key to overcoming a mountain of straws is to change how we look at it: not as a big pile, but as individual, manageable, lift-able straws. Therefore, this exercise in dealing with problems and resolving worry is called “Picking Up Straws.”

*...Joel Johnson, Director  
National Crisis Intervention Training Institute*

## **“Picking Up Straws”**

### **Step One**

Make a list of every worrisome thing that has “rented free space in your head” within the last month...even for a few seconds. Do not share this list with anyone, since the person sitting by you may be on the list. If you need extra paper, write on the backs of the pages.

- |     |     |
|-----|-----|
| 1)  | 24) |
| 2)  | 25) |
| 3)  | 26) |
| 4)  | 27) |
| 5)  | 28) |
| 6)  | 29) |
| 7)  | 30) |
| 8)  | 31) |
| 9)  | 32) |
| 10) | 33) |
| 11) | 34) |
| 12) | 35) |
| 13) | 36) |
| 14) | 37) |
| 15) | 38) |
| 16) | 39) |
| 17) | 40) |
| 18) | 41) |
| 19) | 42) |
| 20) | 43) |
| 21) | 44) |
| 22) | 45) |
| 23) | 46) |

## Step Two

Sometimes problems, issues, and worries are what we refer to as “lesser included” items that actually are a part of another problem or issue. If any item would simply “go away” if another problem on the list was solved, ***put a line through it.***

## Step Three

Sometimes we worry about things that have already happened, whose results are totally out of our control. Since you’re not a time traveler, the past is the past. If you can’t do anything about what has already happened, and that item is on the list.....***put a line through it.***

## Step Four

Sometimes we worry about things that have not happened yet, that may never happen, and that are not preventable. Once again, since you’re not a time traveler, the future is the future. If you can’t do anything to prevent it, and it is not inevitable, and hasn’t happened yet...***put a line through it.***

## Step Five

Sometimes we worry about things that are inevitable, but haven’t happened yet, and that we can do nothing about, preventively. Keep in mind that VERY FEW things are on that list. This unique category is reserved for things like....dying. If any item on the list fall into that finite category...***put a line through it.***

## Step Six

Sometimes we worry about things that are currently going on, that we can do nothing about. If any of the item on your list falls into that category...***put a line through it.***

## Step Seven

While it’s noble to be concerned for other people, we can sometimes be overwhelmed by focusing on other people’s problems, allowing our own problems to “eat our lunch.” Chronic worriers are often also chronic caretakers and enablers. If any item on the list is not or will not directly affect you (or your children...or does not affect someone whose life is literally in your hands...***put a line through it.*** Once you get your worry problem under control, you can go back to helping others. If you don’t get control of it, you just might not be there for those people, at all.

## Step Eight

Now, what you have left is a short list of things that are currently going on, that you can do something about, and that directly affect you or your children. Take another look at your MUCH SHORTER list, see if any item is something that can wait until later, but would be nice to take care of when you get around to it....***put a line through it.....***then implement the ***“NCITI Systematic Problem-solving Process!”***



**Wow! What a relief!**