

Leahy's 7 Steps "To Stop Worry from Stopping You"

1. Identify Productive and Unproductive worry
2. Accept Reality and Commit to Change
3. Challenge Your Worried Thinking
4. Focus on the Deeper Threat
5. Turn "Failure" into Opportunity
6. Use Your Emotions Rather than Worrying About Them
7. Take Control of Time

Source: Leahy, 2005

1. Identify Productive and Unproductive worry

It can be tough to tell if you are worrying in unhelpful ways or problem solving. This difference is also called productive worry (problem solving) versus unproductive worry. If you are stuck worrying about something you can't control, this is not problem solving. Most importantly, although worry and problem solving seem similar, problem solving moves us closer to resolution, and worry keeps you spinning over and over in a cycle.

2. Accept Reality and Commit to Change

This is about using mindfulness, willingness, and radical acceptance with painful realities and uncertainties of life. Radical acceptance allows you to better see changes you can make that emotional pain may block from your awareness. At very least, with acceptance you can change our relationship with worry.

3. Challenge Your Worried Thinking

This starts with mindful awareness of your worry thoughts and patterns, and challenging worry thoughts that are not facts. It may include: identifying cognitive distortions in your worry, asking what is "likely" rather than "possible," testing your predictions, not underestimating your ability to cope, and imagining advice you'd give a good friend that shared your worry.

4. Focus on the Deeper Threat

This involves uncovering core beliefs that fuel your worry. Have you noticed some people worry constantly about certain issues while others don't? A person's worries may be fueled by beliefs and fears, like they will always be abandoned, are helpless to care for themselves, or defective deep down. A couple of helpful ways to uncover and modify these core beliefs include working with an individual therapist and/or reading the book "Re-inventing Your Life" by Drs. Young & Klosko.

5. **Turn “Failure” into Opportunity**

In the big picture, did you truly “fail?” What if you gained wisdom or growth from the process? It is vital to see that even if the outcome is “failure”(e.g., F in Chemistry), this does not equal being a failure as a person. It is inaccurate and harmful to convince yourself that you embody the stable, unchangeable, internal character trait of being a failure. Sometimes we all have our behaviors “fail” to bring us the outcome we want. When you use this as an opportunity to learn and enhance effective behaviors, it is a natural part of growth.

6. **Use Your Emotions Rather than Worrying About Them**

Worry can actually be avoidance! Research has repeatedly shown that people that struggle with anxiety tend to avoid unpleasant emotions by engaging in worry. This is an attempt to solve problems and prevent something bad from happening. When a person is actively engaging in worry, they are actually experiencing less intense emotions. Many people with anxiety fear that if they confront unpleasant emotions, they will become overwhelmed and unable to cope. However, trying to avoid emotions tends to keep people stuck. In research with college students, those who worried a lot often said they worry about certain things to avoid worrying about other things that are more frightening.

Borkovec, 1994; Leahy, 2005

7. **Take Control of Time**

Finally, worry is “always an escape from the moment,” and most worriers have a sense of time urgency. Ask yourself, “Do I feel pressured for time a lot?” Also ask “Do I feel overscheduled?” “Am I often rushing to meet deadlines?” or “If something bad could happen, do I need the answer right now?” Using time management skills, practicing assertiveness, being mindful, and “turning the urgency off” can be life changing.

Consider this: Whenever you say “no” to taking on another demand, you are at the same time saying “yes” to something else. For example, if you say “no” to picking up an extra work shift this weekend, you may be saying “yes” to... being more prepared for your midterm, time with friends, exercise, feeling more prepared for the week, self-care, etc. Please consider what you will be saying “no” to before you say “yes.”

Worry Time Practice

The Time of Day I Scheduled for Worrying:

My Scheduled Worry Place:

My Main Concerns Today:

My Experience Worrying:

My Physical and Emotional Reactions:

The aspects of this worry that I have control over include:

The aspects of this worry I cannot control include:

Based on Rygh & Sanders, 2004

