

Respond to Worry With Compassion

During this health pandemic, incessant thoughts about the safety, health, and wellbeing of ourselves and others leads to worry. It's natural to worry, it occurs because we care so deeply. But worry itself is not always helpful. In fact, when it feeds into a cycle of negativity, pessimism, and fear, it becomes counterproductive. Break the cycle by responding with self-compassion.

Teach Your Brain to Respond to Worry with Compassion

We can only change the things we're aware of, so the first step is to *notice* when you're in a worry loop. When you feel stressed, take a moment to pause, notice your feelings, thoughts, and physical sensations. As you periodically pause, notice and reflect, you'll begin to identify the patterns that trigger your worry. Whenever you notice yourself in a cycle of worry, be self-compassionate. With consistent practice, you'll break the cycle and create an island of sanity: a time to rest and recover.

Notice Your Situation

When you sense yourself worrying, get curious and ask yourself questions to identify your stress triggers.

- Who was I with?
- What was I doing?
- Where was I?
- When did it happen?

Notice Physical Sensations

A physical sensation might be the first cue you're caught up in worry - muscle tension, aches, pains, restlessness, or difficulty concentrating are all symptoms of anxiety. Pause to ask yourself:

- What did I feel?
- Where did I feel it?
- Rate intensity (1-10)

Notice Your Emotions

Take a moment to take a breath, become still, and name the emotions contributing to the cycle of worry – is it fear, anger, frustration, sadness, disappointment, boredom, nervousness, or depression?

Notice Your Thoughts

As you pause, attempt to capture the thought(s) running through your mind.

- What went through your mind – a thought, image, or memory?
- If you had an image or memory, what did it mean to you?

Compassionate Response

Stop, reflect, and craft a self-compassionate response to your worry. Speak to yourself with wisdom, strength, warmth, kindness, and non-judgment. Below are a few questions to get you started.

- What would my best friend say to me?
- What would a truly compassionate person say to me?
- What tone of voice would I need to hear to feel reassured?

EXAMPLE

Situation	Body Sensations	Emotions	Thoughts	Compassionate Response
Mindlessly streaming through Social Media.	My breathing was shallow and I had a tension headache. 7	I started feeling anxious with an increasing sense of panic.	This is so scary, so many people are dying. What's going to happen to me and my family?	It's perfectly understandable to worry, it would be unusual not to. What's the best thing you can do for yourself to feel better right now? Maybe you can watch a comedy or get up and go for a walk.