ACCEPTANCE BASED TREATMENT OF GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER

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FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

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Panic Attacks
WORKBOOK
A Guided Program for Beating the Panic Trick
Generalized Anxiety Disorder is a common, solvable problem.

Chronic Worry is the main symptom of GAD.

People often fail to solve this problem because they struggle against worry, rather than learn to work with it.

Working with, rather than against, is the path out of this problem.
WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER?

- Excessive, chronic worry about various topics
- The equation of doubt with danger
- Physical sensations and somatic complaints
- Efforts to stop the worrying
- The efforts to stop worrying usually fail, and make it worse.
ORDINARY VS. GAD WORRY

Ordinary Worry
- Leads you to planning and problem solving
- Attention is focused on important issues
- Little interference with ordinary activities
- Ends with choices made & action taken
- Worry is incidental to your life

Chronic Worry
- Interferes with problem solving and planning
- Attention is focused on unlikely disasters
- Worry crowds out ordinary activities
- Worries don’t get solved, just repeated, then replaced by other worries
- Worry is the focus of your life
Is it GAD Worry? A quick check

- Does the problem exist now?
- Can I do something to change it now?

The client’s aversion to uncertainty will become apparent here
How Chronic Worry Works: Diagram the Worry Sentence

What if...? ___________________

The Catastrophe Clause
The Worry Trick

- I experience Doubt...
- And treat it like Danger
- Two kinds of attempted solutions
  - Disarm the worry by disproving it
  - “Stop worrying”
- Both result in more, not less, worry
- The goal: accept uncertainty
The Two sided Relationship with Chronic Worry

ON THE ONE HAND...
- You regard worry thoughts as if they were accurate predictions of the future
- You try to prove the feared event won’t happen.
- You fail to prove it because you can’t prove a negative
- You treat the failure to disprove the thought as evidence that it will happen
- Result: more worry

ON THE OTHER HAND...
- You fear that worry will kill you, drive you insane, or otherwise ruin your life
- You treat worry as a dangerous object: you try to get rid of it
- You get rid of objects by throwing them away; when you try that with worries, it energizes them
- Result: more worry
How people try to “reason” with GAD worry,

- Internet “research”
- “think positive”
- Cognitive Restructuring run amok
- Repetitive requests for specific reassurance
- Search for evidence to disprove fears
- Consult experts but can’t accept response
How people try to stop worrying

- Distraction
- Drugs and Alcohol
- Rituals and Superstitions
- Avoidance of cues and reminders
- Seek a lot of general reassurance (tell me I’ll be OK)
- Thought Stopping
Uncle Argument and Your Relationship with Worry

- You don’t have problems you worry about
- You have the problem of worrying
- Treatments and self help methods that aim principally at the content of your worries often miss the point, and make things worse
- You’ll make better progress when you target the relationship you have with your worry
Acceptance based approach to worry

- You can start by recognizing that we don’t control our thoughts, and it’s usually unhelpful and counterproductive to try.
- Your brain is like a TV set, with no off switch, channel selector, or volume control. If you rage against the sound, things just seem worse.
- We don’t have to correct irrational thoughts, nor do we need to achieve certainty.
- We just have to live with irrationality and uncertainty. All of us.
Become more aware of the voice of worry

- It gets its power from its subliminal nature, from operating behind the scenes
- Catching it in the act — tic tacs
- Enlist your family in helping detect this in conversation
- More formal observation — use the worry journal to record your observations in the moment of worry
The Recovery path:  
A new relationship with worry

- Chronic Worry is a Heckler
- It's not an accurate warning you need to heed
- Nor is it a threat to your well being that you desperately need to silence
- You can change the way you relate to Chronic worry by treating it like a heckler
  - Not a threat
  - Not a valid warning of trouble either
New responses to the “What if…” Invitation

- For some people, it’s enough to notice the “what if…”, and move on.
- Others need a more active response.
- Guideline for active responses: work with the worry, rather than against it.
Active Responses to GAD Worry

- Keep a list of the thoughts
- Double Down/Humor the thought
- Haiku
- Sing a dreadful song
- Write a news story about the awful event
- Worry in a different language
- Take your worries for a walk
Your daily workout: Worry Appointments

- Schedule your worry, 2x/day for 10 minutes
- Give worry your exclusive focus
- This time is for pure worry. Don’t brainstorm, problem solve, or soothe yourself – just worry
- Do this out loud, standing, in front of mirror
- Coupled with postponing, or forced choice
Are you motivated to worry? The “Advantages” of Worry

- It helps if I expect the worst
- If I worry about something, I might prevent it from happening
- If something bad happens and I hadn’t worried about it, I’ll feel guilty
- Worry shows that I care

These beliefs can make you more prone to worry
General Maintenance

• Regular cardiovascular exercise
• Regular practice of a simple relaxation or meditation
• Regular use of Worry Appointments
• Sleep hygiene (permissive, not prescriptive, approach)
• Possible reduction in intake of sugars and/or caffeine
• Journal
• Weekly conversation with support person, not for reassurance, but to review your current relationship with worry
In Summary...

• GAD is common, and treatable
• People often fail to solve the problem of GAD, not because they’re defective, but because they instinctively use methods that make things worse rather than better
• Methods based on acceptance, rather than resistance, are the key.
THAT’S ALL, FOLKS!

Thanks for coming!
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