

## Effectively Managing Worry & Anxiety

**Source:** Beyond blue & Psychology Tools UK

Health care workers may feel extra stress during the COVID-19 outbreak. This is a normal response in these unprecedented circumstances. Such feelings are not a sign of weakness and it's important to acknowledge this. There are practical ways to manage your mental health during this time, including:

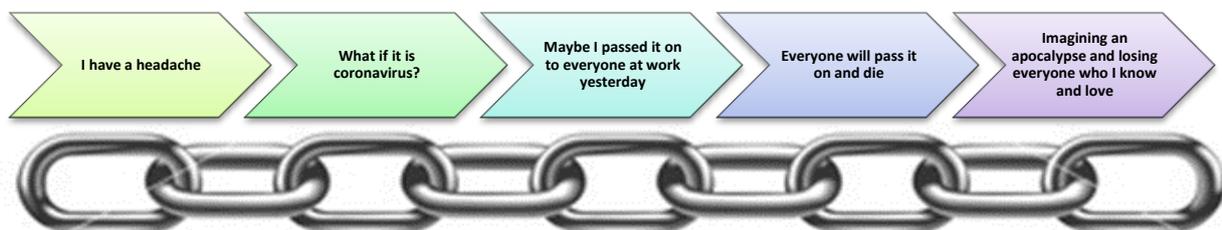
- getting enough rest during work hours and between shifts
- eating healthy foods and engaging in physical activity
- keeping in contact with colleagues, family and friends by phone or online
- being aware of where you can access mental health support at work
- if you're a manager, trying to create mentally healthy work structures.

### What is worry?

Human beings have the amazing ability to think about future events. 'Thinking ahead' means that we can anticipate obstacles or problems, and gives us the opportunity to plan solutions. When it helps us to achieve our goals, 'thinking ahead' can be helpful. For example, hand washing and social distancing are helpful things that we can decide to do in order to prevent the spread of the virus. However, worrying is a way of 'thinking ahead' that often leaves us feeling anxious or apprehensive. When we worry excessively, we often think about worst case scenarios and feel that we won't be able to cope.

### What does worry feel like?

When we worry it can feel like a chain of thoughts and images, which can progress in increasingly catastrophic and unlikely directions. Some people experience worry as uncontrollable – it seems to take on a life of its own. It is natural that many of us may have recently noticed ourselves thinking about worst-case scenarios. The example below illustrates how worries can escalate quickly even from something relatively minor. Have you noticed any thoughts like this?



### *Worry chain*

Worry isn't just in our heads. When it becomes excessive we feel it as anxiety in our bodies too. Physical symptoms of worry and anxiety include:

- Muscle tension or aches and pains.
- Restlessness and an inability to relax.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Difficulty sleeping.
- Feeling easily fatigued.

### Are there different types of worry?

Worry can be helpful or unhelpful, and psychologists often distinguish between worries concerning 'real problems' vs. 'hypothetical problems'.

**Real problem** worries are about actual problems that need solutions right now. For example, given the very real concern about the virus at the moment, there are helpful solutions which include regular handwashing, social distancing, and physical isolation if you have symptoms.

*"My children are off school and I need help looking after them"*

*"I don't have enough food in the house to last more than a few days"*

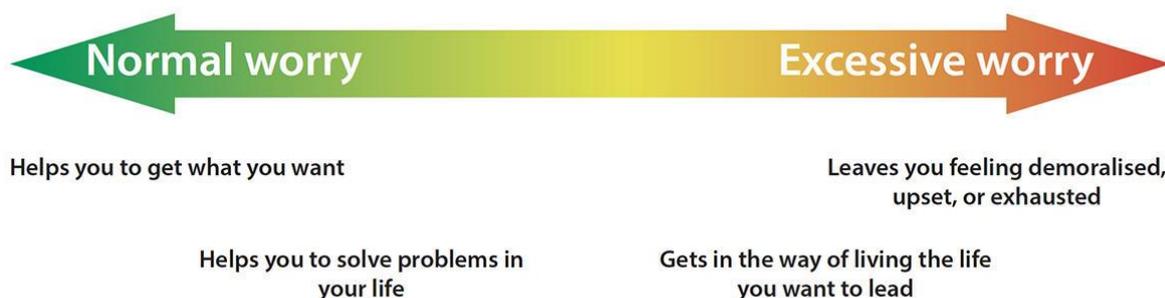
**Hypothetical worries** about the current health crisis might include thinking about worst-case scenarios (what we might call catastrophising). For example, imagining worst case scenarios such as most people dying.

*"What will I do if I lose my job and end up destitute?"*

*"I'm young and healthy but what if I end up on a ventilator?"*

### Living with worry and anxiety amidst global uncertainty

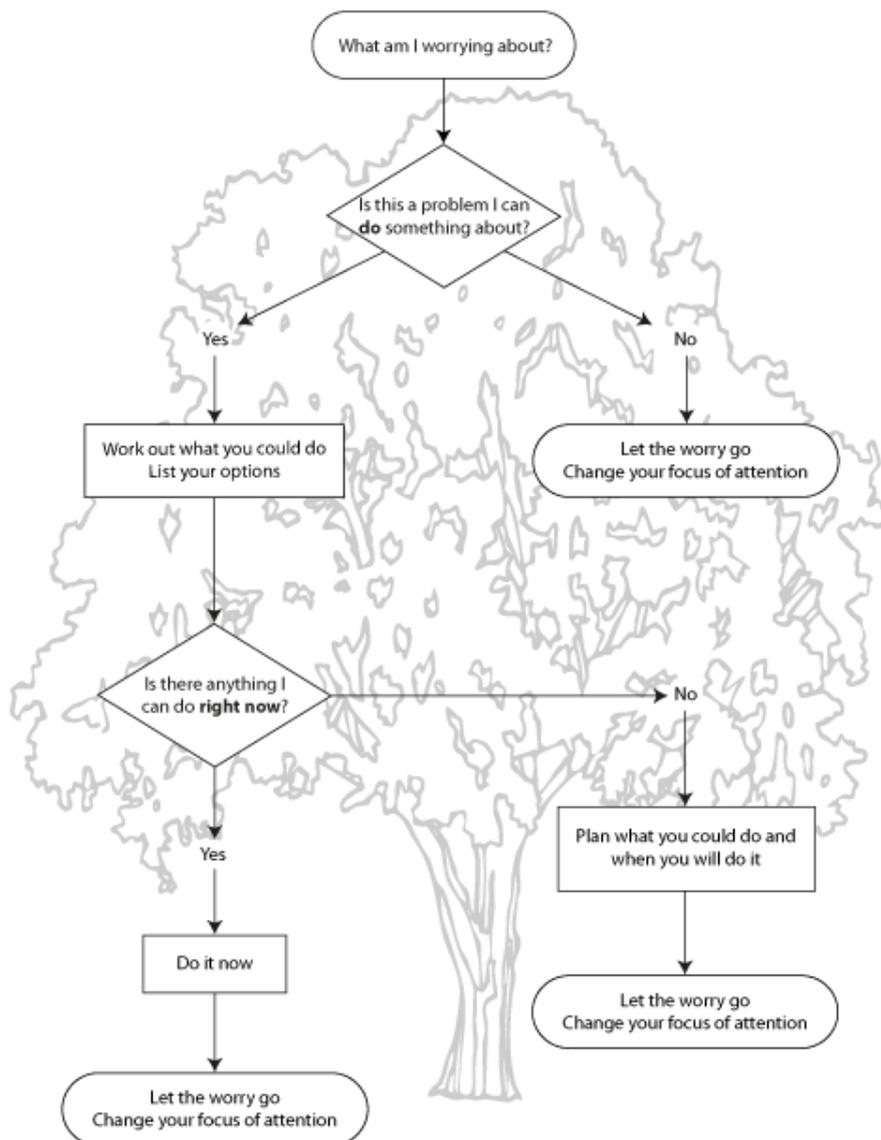
When does worry become a problem? Everyone worries to some degree, and some thinking ahead can help us to plan and cope. There is no 'right' amount of worry. We say that worry becomes a problem when it stops you from living the life you want to live, or if it leaves you feeling demoralised and exhausted.



## What can I do about worry?

It is natural for you to worry at the moment, but if you feel that it's becoming excessive and taking over your life – for example if it's making you anxious, or if you're struggling to sleep – then it might be worth trying to find ways to limit the time you spend worrying, and taking steps to manage your well-being.

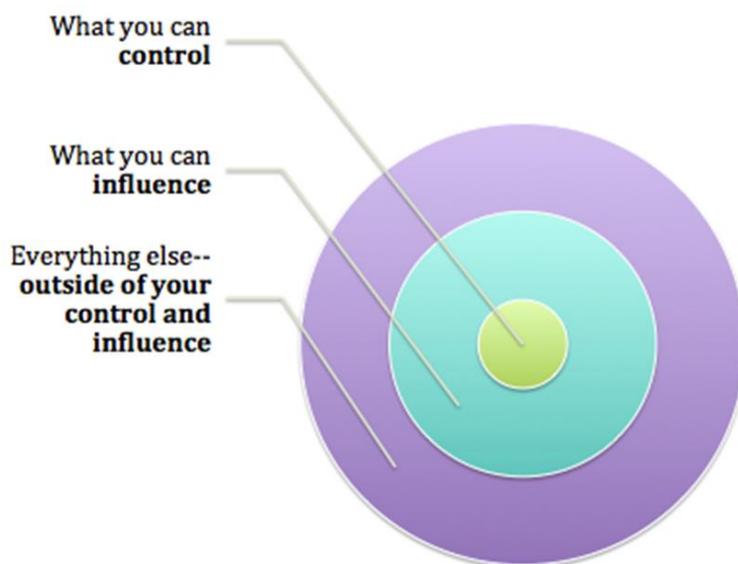
### Worry Decision Tree



## Circle of Control

Your life doesn't just "happen". Whether you know it or not, it is carefully designed by you. The choices, after all, are yours. You choose happiness, sadness, decisiveness, ambivalence, success, courage and fear. Just remember that every moment, every situation provides a new choice and you can choose to be proactive or reactive.

Instead of reacting to or worrying about conditions over which they have little or no control, proactive people focus their time and energy on things they can control. The problems, challenges, and opportunities we face fall into three areas as illustrated.



- **Immediate influence** = problem-focused coping (e.g., address the problem)
- **Some influence** = Problem-focused coping and/or emotion focused coping
- **No influence** = emotion focused coping (e.g., acceptance)

**Problem focused coping:** Address the problem at its source

**Emotion focused coping:** Manage your response to the problem

Use the circle of control to think about the following:

What helpful actions / activities are in my direct control? **Do them...**use a problem focused approach

What helpful actions / activities can I influence? **Do them...**

What is outside of my control / influence? **Manage your response, reframe your thinking and practice acceptance....**

## What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is more than just feeling stressed or worried. While stress and anxious feelings are a common response to a situation where we feel under pressure, they usually pass once the stressful situation has passed, or 'stressor' is removed.

- Everyone feels anxious from time to time. When anxious feelings don't go away, happen without any particular reason or make it hard to cope with daily life it may be the sign of an anxiety condition.
- Anxiety is the most common mental health condition in Australia. On average, one in four people – one in three women and one in five men – will experience anxiety at some stage in their life. Typically, in a 12-month period, over two million Australians experience anxiety.
- There are many ways to help manage anxiety and the sooner people with anxiety get support, the more likely they are to recover.

## Anxiety checklist

The following checklist has been designed by Beyond Blue to assess your experiences of anxiety over the last 2 weeks. Tick the box next to each question that best reflects your thoughts, feelings and behaviour.

Over the last **two weeks**, how often have you been bothered by the following issues?

1. Not at all
2. Several days
3. More than half the days
4. Nearly every day

1. Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge

1. Not at all	2. Several Days	3. More than Half the days	4. Nearly every day

2. Not being able to stop or control worrying

1. Not at all	2. Several Days	3. More than Half the days	4. Nearly every day

3. Worrying too much about different things

1. Not at all	2. Several Days	3. More than Half the days	4. Nearly every day

4. Trouble relaxing

1. Not at all	2. Several Days	3. More than Half the days	4. Nearly every day

5. Being so restless that it's hard to sit still

1. Not at all	2. Several Days	3. More than Half the days	4. Nearly every day

6. Being easily annoyed or irritable

1. Not at all	2. Several Days	3. More than Half the days	4. Nearly every day

7. Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen

1. Not at all	2. Several Days	3. More than Half the days	4. Nearly every day

**Scoring: Refer to each of the 7 questions you answered**

If you ticked response 1 allocate a score of 0	Total out of 7 Q =
If you ticked response 2 allocate a score of 1	Total out of 7 Q =
If you ticked response 3 allocate a score of 2	Total out of 7 Q =
If you ticked response 4 allocate a score of 3	Total out of 7 Q =
<b>Add all your total scores together</b>	

**Total scores:**

**0-4 = indicate that you may currently be experiencing low levels of anxiety**

**What does this mean?**

Your score falls into the **low range**. This means you're doing pretty well.

It's important to remember that this result is not a diagnosis so if you still have concerns about how you're feeling you can always contact our EAP provider **Caraniche on 1800 099 444**.

**What do I do next?**

There are many things you can keep doing to maintain your mental wellbeing:

- Download a wellbeing app to support mindfulness activities
- Continue to build activities aligned with the 5 Ways to Wellbeing (connect, learn, give, be aware and be active) into your day to day. To learn more go to <https://5waystowellbeing.org.au>

**5-14 = indicate that you may currently be moderate levels of anxiety**

**What does this mean?**

Your score falls into the **moderate range**, which means you may be experiencing anxiety that's causing you some distress and making it hard for you to enjoy life.

Anxiety conditions are common and the good news is that there are treatments and support options that work. It's important to seek support early – the sooner you get treatment, the sooner you can recover.

**What do I do next?**

You can **speak with one of our professionals in the Western Health Wellbeing Hub** – they will provide you with immediate support and helpful strategies and information



If now is not the right time for you, you can always chat with one of the following:

- Our EAP provider Caraniche at Work on 1800 099 444 or work@caraniche.com.au
- Learn from others or share your experience via the Beyond Blue forums
- Find out if Beyond Blue's free and confidential mental health coach program - **New Access** is available in your area. No referral required
- Check out a self-help program like myCompass or an online therapist assisted program like MindSpot or Mental Health Online which are designed for people living in Australia experiencing anxiety or depression.

## 15-21 = indicate that you may currently be high levels of anxiety

### What does this mean?

Your score falls into **the high range**, which means you're likely to be experiencing anxiety that's causing you distress and impacting your daily life.

Anxiety conditions are common and the good news is that there are treatments and support options that work. It's important to seek help – the sooner you get treatment, the sooner you can recover.

### What do I do next?

You can **speak with one of our professionals in the Western Health Wellbeing Hub** – they will provide you with immediate support and helpful strategies and information

If now is not the right time for you, you can always chat with one of the following:

- Our EAP provider Caraniche at Work on 1800 099 444 or work@caraniche.com.au
- Beyond Blue's mental health professionals at the Beyond Blue Support Service on 1300 224 636 or via web chat or email, at any time 24/7
- The Cairnmillar Institute is providing free psychological support and can be contacted on **Ph:** 1800 391 393 or via their website: <https://www.cairnmillar.org.au>
- or speak to your GP or health professional

Please remember that the results of this checklist are not a diagnosis. A diagnosis can only be made by a health professional.