**What triggers your worrying?**

Worrying can be triggered by various things. Some triggers may be more obvious and linked to external things, for example:

· Seeing a certain image (e.g., in the newspaper or on the T.V. news)

· Hearing certain information (e.g., on the radio or in a conversation)

· Being put in a certain situation (e.g., having to make decisions, perform a task, lead others)

Some triggers may be less obvious. These may be thoughts or images that seem to just pop into your head out of the blue. An initial “What if…” question that comes to mind for no apparent reason, can even be a trigger for worrying. For example, the thought “What if I left the iron on?” might pop into my head. If I think “I probably didn’t” and decide not to worry about it, chances are I will forget about it, and the thought will slip my mind. However, if instead I start to ‘chase’ the thought further (e.g., “The ironing board might catch fire and that will spread to the whole house.” “The house might burn down and then I

will lose everything!”), then the original “What if…” question has now triggered a worry episode.

Write down any external images, information, and situations, or any internal images or

“What if…” thoughts that have triggered worrying for you.

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**What Maintains Worrying?**

People who describe themselves as chronic worriers are often disturbed that they seem to spend much of their waking hours worrying excessively about a number of different life circumstances. They do not understand why this activity continues. They often ask, “Why do I do it?” and “What keeps my worrying going?” Negative Beliefs About Worrying

In addition to the specific things people worry about, people with generalised anxiety disorder may also worry about the fact that they are worrying. In this case, such worriers are often concerned that worrying is “bad” and they hold negative beliefs about the activity of worrying. For example, they may believe that:

· Worrying is uncontrollable, and will take over and result in a loss of control (e.g., “I won’t be able to control my worrying, and it will never stop”).

· Worrying is dangerous, and will cause either physical or mental harm (e.g., “If I keep worrying like this I will go crazy/have a breakdown/become ill”).

Holding these negative beliefs about worrying makes the process of worrying very distressing for you, and this will even keep your worrying going. Researchers believe that it may be these negative beliefs about worrying that are unique to people with generalised anxiety disorder.

What worries-about-worrying do you have? (What are the disadvantages of worrying?)

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Positive Beliefs About Worrying

While worriers may hold negative beliefs about worrying (i.e., that worrying is uncontrollable and harmful), they also often hold positive beliefs that worrying is beneficial and “good”. It is these positive beliefs about the usefulness of worrying that can keep worriers worrying.

Some positive beliefs may be:

Worrying motivates me to do things

Worrying helps me find solutions to problems

Worrying prepares me for the worst

Worrying helps me avoid bad things

Worrying prevents bad things

What positive beliefs do you hold about worrying? (What are the advantages of worrying?)

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Unhelpful Strategies

In an attempt to decrease or stop worrying in the short term, people often use certain strategies. However, in the long term, these strategies actually keep worrying going, making such strategies “unhelpful”. There are two main types of unhelpful strategies.

The first type of unhelpful strategy is avoidance. This may take the form of avoidance of a feared outcome or avoidance of worrying itself. For example, if someone was given the opportunity to take on a new and important project at work, a person with generalised anxiety may worry “What if I can’t do the job? What if I fail?” In order to avoid this feared negative outcome, they may pass the opportunity on to another colleague. An example of avoiding the act of worrying may be avoiding the television news because you know that the news tends to trigger episodes of worrying, or constantly contacting a loved one to allay

fears that something bad has happened to them. This last example is known as reassurance seeking. The problem with avoidance is that people limit their opportunity to be exposed to their worrying, and learn that the outcome isn’t as bad as they thought, that worrying isn’t uncontrollable or dangerous, and that there are other ways of coping besides worrying. Avoidance limits a person’s opportunity to have experiences that disconfirm their worries and their beliefs about worrying. This keeps worrying going because their worries go unchallenged.

How have you avoided feared outcomes or avoided worrying itself?

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