

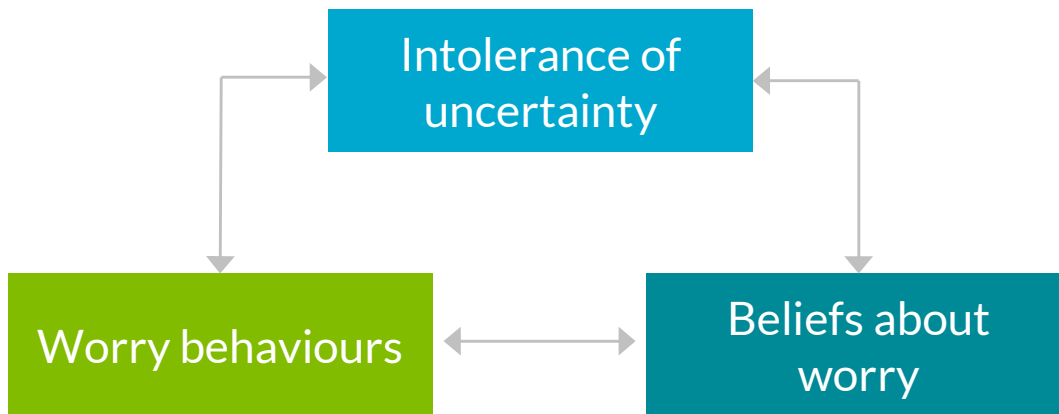
What maintains worry?

Worrying is maintained by a combination of things. We overestimate that future events will be negative, and we feel that we won't be able to cope if the worst did happen.

We believe that worrying about potential problems in the future might help us generate solutions, which makes us worry more. We engage in worry behaviours, such as over-preparing or seeking reassurance, list making or procrastination.

We then experience relief as we think we have done all we can to cope with things 'if the worst happens'.

We believe we have increased the certainty around future events. Experiencing such relief strengthens the use of our worry behaviours and we don't get the opportunity to see what might happen if we didn't worry in the first place.



Intolerance of uncertainty

Uncertainty is unavoidable, and we can't be 100% sure of what will happen next or in the future. People vary in their ability to tolerate uncertainty and those who experience a lot of worry tend to have a low tolerance for uncertainty. It makes them feel stressed, anxious or even panicky, and they feel they need to avoid uncertainty. They may say things like "I need to be 100% sure" and "I can't cope not knowing". They may also find it difficult to make decisions because they aren't certain of the outcome.



Unhelpful beliefs about worry

People who have intolerance of uncertainty tend to believe that worrying will be helpful to them in some way and have positive beliefs about worry. Worrying is seen as a way of preparing for the unknown.

Worriers may also have negative beliefs about worry. This is when we worry about worrying, and the negative consequences our worrying is having. Both positive and negative beliefs about worry keep us stuck in the vicious cycle of worry.

Positive beliefs

Whilst worriers usually dislike the fact that they worry so much, they also often hold positive beliefs that worrying is beneficial and helpful. It is these positive beliefs about the usefulness of worrying that can get us worrying in the first place.

Examples:



Worrying helps me find solutions to problems



Worrying helps me avoid bad things



Worrying motivates me to do things



Worrying prevents bad things



Worrying prepares me for the worst



Worrying shows I care

What are your positive beliefs about worry? (What does it get you? What does it do for you?)

Because of these positive beliefs about worrying, when an issue we are concerned about pops into our mind, we are more likely to pay attention to it. This is because we believe this is a helpful thing to do.

Negative beliefs

We may become distressed by our worries in an attempt to suppress them (which doesn't work), and so we worry about the fact that we are worrying. In this case, worriers are often concerned that worrying is 'bad' and they hold negative beliefs about worrying.

Examples:

Worrying is dangerous and will make me ill/ crazy/ break down

Worrying wastes my time

My worrying is uncontrollable, and I will lose control

My worrying irritates other people around me

This worry will never stop

Worrying doesn't help anything

What are your negative beliefs about worrying? (What impact is it having? What are the downsides?)

Holding these negative beliefs about worrying makes the process of worrying very distressing, creating even more concerns and hence keeping this thinking process going. Furthermore, holding these beliefs makes us want to push the worrisome thoughts away. As we will see later in the course, this only makes the thoughts push back more strongly, and we end up worrying even more.

