Worry: Uncertainty and My Responses

Who this is for: Adults exploring excessive worry within uncertainty-focused CBT.

What this helps with: Identify uncertainty-related beliefs; distinguish useful action from repeated certainty-seeking.

Why this works: If not knowing feels unacceptable, worry and repeated checking can become attempts to feel prepared. Immediate relief or a sense of planning may leave the need for certainty unchanged. Explore your own pattern.

How to use: 1. Choose one recent worry with your therapist. 2. Map the uncertainty, meaning, response and effects. 3. Separate practical needs from a question that cannot be settled now.

Guided example (fictional)

1. A colleague had not replied; their view was unknown.

2. 'I must know I have not upset them.' Worry felt like preparation.

3. Re-read the message and repeatedly asked for reassurance.

4. Brief relief; doubt returned. Explore the need to know before continuing.

Your turn - one example, brief notes

1. Situation and uncertainty

What happened? What could you not know or control?

2. Meaning and promised benefit

What felt difficult about not knowing? What did worry promise?

3. Worry and coping responses

What did you think, check, seek or avoid? What practical action was needed?

4. Immediate and later effects

What helped briefly? What happened later? Which pattern needs exploring?

Reflection: What was a practical need? What certainty was unavailable? Which response could we investigate?

Optional next step: Notice one other everyday uncertainty and compare your response.

Support note: Keep genuine responsibilities, health advice and safety requirements visible. This is a focused working map, not a full GAD assessment or treatment plan.

Model: Dugas and colleagues' intolerance-of-uncertainty model. Original wording and layout; not a validated treatment programme.

Dugas, Gagnon, Ladouceur & Freeston (1998), Generalized anxiety disorder: a preliminary test of a conceptual model. BRT, 36, 215-226. DOI: 10.1016/S0005-7967(97)00070-3

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