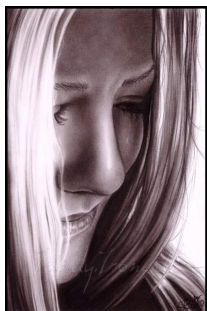


# Sixth Week: How to use your emotions rather than worry about them

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Worry is almost entirely a [cognitive](#) activity that we experience in "language" rather than images. Current research shows that you prefer thinking rather than feeling. You are avoiding emotion.

For example, research on worry indicates that people seldom worry in visual images, but rather think about how bad things can happen and how to avoid them. Tom Borkovec at Pennsylvania State University has found that worry is a form of emotional avoidance-that we worry rather than feel. A similar approach has been taken by Richard Heimberg of Temple University and Douglas Mennin at Yale University. In one study, 71% of worries were thoughts and only 14 % were visual images.<sup>1</sup> Borkovec and others have found that visual images of bad things happening are far more intense emotionally than thoughts about bad things happening. Rather than have a visual image of being alone in your room crying-you think, "Maybe I will end up alone"-and then you come up with a set of possible ways this can happen- and then you think of how you can avoid each problem. Rather than have the emotional visual image of being alone in the room, you engage in the relatively cold, abstract, thoughts-that constitute worry. Thus, your emotions are temporarily suppressed.

## **Worry is a form of emotional avoidance**

In fact, in our own research in New York we have found that people who score higher on factors related to worry have negative views of their emotions. They believe that their feelings will go out of control, their emotions don't make sense, other people would not validate their feelings, and they often feel ashamed, guilty or confused about their feelings.



When you are engaged in the endless "what ifs" of worry, you are dredging up predictions and thoughts about how bad things can happen and then you come up with other thoughts about how to solve problems that don't exist. You are temporarily suppressing your emotions. When you run out of worries-by exhausting yourself or by finally deciding, "I've covered all I can for now"--- you find that your emotional arousal bounces back as free-floating anxiety. This is the tension that you feel in your body, the sweating, the rapid heart-beat, and the insomnia. Your emotions incubate as you worry and these emotions bounce back later. And then you will worry about your emotions: "What's wrong with me?" or "Am I sick?"

### **Evaluate your beliefs about your emotions**



Take a look at the following questionnaire to see if you have a negative view of your own emotions.

### **Leahy Emotional Schema Scale (LESS)**

We are interested in how you deal with your feelings or emotions-for example, how you deal with feelings of anger, sadness, anxiety, or sexual feelings. We all differ in how we deal with these feelings-so there are no right or wrong answers. Please read each sentence carefully and answer each sentence-using the scale below-as to how you deal with your feelings during the past month. Put the number of your response next to the sentence.

Scale:

1=very untrue of me

2=somewhat untrue of me

3=slightly untrue of me

4=slightly true of me

5=somewhat true of me

6=very true of me

1. \_\_\_\_ When I feel down, I try to think about a different way to view things.
2. \_\_\_\_ When I have a feeling that bothers me, I try to think of why it is not important.
3. \_\_\_\_ I often think that I respond with feelings that others would not have.
4. \_\_\_\_ Some feelings are wrong to have.
5. \_\_\_\_ There are things about myself that I just don't understand.
6. \_\_\_\_ I believe that it is important to let myself cry in order to get my feelings "out".
7. \_\_\_\_ If I let myself have some of these feelings, I fear I will lose control.
8. \_\_\_\_ Others understand and accept my feelings.
9. \_\_\_\_ You can't allow yourself to have certain kinds of feelings---like feelings about sex or violence.
10. \_\_\_\_ My feelings don't make sense to me.
11. \_\_\_\_ If other people changed, I would feel a lot better.
12. \_\_\_\_ I think that there are feelings that I have that I am not really aware of.
13. \_\_\_\_ I sometimes fear that if I allowed myself to have a strong feeling, it would not go away.
14. \_\_\_\_ I feel ashamed of my feelings.
15. \_\_\_\_ Things that bother other people don't bother me.
16. \_\_\_\_ No one really cares about my feelings.
17. \_\_\_\_ It is important for me to be reasonable and practical rather than sensitive and open to my feelings.
18. \_\_\_\_ I can't stand it when I have contradictory feelings-like liking and disliking the same person.
19. \_\_\_\_ I am much more sensitive than other people.
20. \_\_\_\_ I try to get rid of an unpleasant feeling immediately.
21. \_\_\_\_ When I feel down, I try to think of the more important things in life---what I value.
22. \_\_\_\_ When I feel down or sad, I question my values.
23. \_\_\_\_ I feel that I can express my feelings openly.
24. \_\_\_\_ I often say to myself, "What's wrong with me?"
25. \_\_\_\_ I think of myself as a shallow person.
26. \_\_\_\_ I want people to believe that I am different from the way I truly feel.
27. \_\_\_\_ I worry that I won't be able to control my feelings.
28. \_\_\_\_ You have to guard against having certain feelings.
29. \_\_\_\_ Strong feelings only last a short period of time.
30. \_\_\_\_ You can't rely on your feelings to tell you what is good for you.
31. \_\_\_\_ I shouldn't have some of the feelings that I have.
32. \_\_\_\_ I often feel "numb" emotionally---like I have no feelings.
33. \_\_\_\_ I think that my feelings are strange or weird.
34. \_\_\_\_ Other people cause me to have unpleasant feelings.
35. \_\_\_\_ When I have conflicting feelings about someone, I get upset or confused.
36. \_\_\_\_ When I have a feeling that bothers me I try to think of something else to think about or to do.
37. \_\_\_\_ When I feel down, I sit by myself and think a lot about how bad I feel.

38. \_\_\_\_ I like being absolutely definite about the way I feel about someone else.
39. \_\_\_\_ Everyone has feelings like mine.
40. \_\_\_\_ I accept my feelings.
41. \_\_\_\_ I think that I have the same feelings that other people have.
42. \_\_\_\_ There are higher values that I aspire to.
43. \_\_\_\_ I think that my feelings now have nothing to do with how I was brought up.
44. \_\_\_\_ I worry that if I have certain feelings I might go crazy.
45. \_\_\_\_ My feelings seem to come out of nowhere.
46. \_\_\_\_ I think it is important to be rational and logical in almost everything.
47. \_\_\_\_ I like being absolutely definite about the way I feel about myself.
48. \_\_\_\_ I focus a lot on my feelings or my physical sensations.
49. \_\_\_\_ I don't want anyone to know about some of my feelings.
50. \_\_\_\_ I don't want to admit to having certain feelings-but I know that I have them.

As you fill out this scale take a look at how you view your emotions. Look at the schematic below. Let's say that you notice that you feel [anxious](#). Do you pay attention to the feeling? Are you even able to label it? Many worriers have alexythymia---they have a hard time differentiating, noticing, remembering and labeling their feelings. But let's say you notice that you are anxious-you are feeling tense, your heart rate is beating rapidly. But you label this emotion as "normal". You say, "I'm having a tough day, lots of pressure. I can accept this feeling, most people would feel this way. I can talk to my friend Bill about the way I feel". You have normalized your feelings. You are much less likely to worry.

But let's say that you are someone who is prone to worry. You are more likely to have a negative interpretation of your feelings. You might feel ashamed-"I must be a loser for feeling so weak"-or you think that you are quite unusual, "Everyone else seems so calm. What's my problem?" Or let's say that you have mixed feelings about someone. You might think you should feel only one way-"I should either like her or not like her-I can't stand having mixed feelings". You might think that your feelings will go out of control, last indefinitely and ruin your day. If you think this way about your emotions then you might binge, drink, or use other strategies to avoid your feelings. Or you might worry.

[Click Here for a Diagram on How You Deal with Your Emotions](#)

## Use Your Emotions Rather than Worry

Here are some simple steps to develop a better [relationship](#) and acceptance of your emotions.

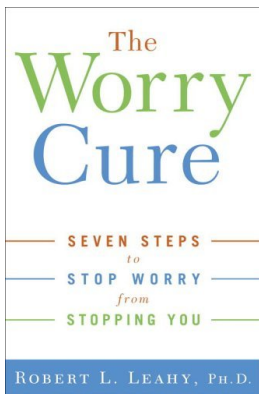
1. Notice Your Emotions
2. Use Your Emotion to Tell You about Your Needs
3. Climb a Ladder of Meaning

4. Accept Your Feelings
5. Use Images to Create Feelings
6. Feel Less Guilty and Ashamed
7. Recognize that Almost Everyone Has These Feelings
8. Accept Contradictory Feelings
9. Be Irrational
10. Face the Worst Case

I will be discussing emotions and anxiety a lot more in future blogs. But think again how you think about your emotions. Are you afraid to feel arousal, tension, or fear? Do you seem to have an overly negative view of feelings? Do you struggle against the way you feel or are you able to let your feelings come and go?

You can humanize your emotions, recognize that contradictory feelings mean you may know a lot about someone, realize that being irrational is part of being alive, and recognize that your feelings of sadness, anxiety and anger may point to what you need-and what is missing.

You can climb a ladder of higher meaning if you realize that sometimes we feel sad because what is missing points to a higher meaning-what you aspire to. If you worry about being [lonely](#), perhaps that illustrates that you are a loving person---and that the higher meaning of painful feelings is what makes life important to us. And also makes it hard for us at times.



I discuss these ideas in two of my books, [The Worry Cure: Seven Steps to Stop Worry from Stopping You](#) and my new book (coming out in a couple of weeks), [Anxiety Free: Unravel Your Fears Before they Unravel You](#).

More in a later blog.

1Tallis, F., Davey, G. C., & Capuzzo, N. (1994). The phenomenology of non-pathological worry: A preliminary investigation. In G. Davey & F. Tallis (Eds.), *Worrying: Perspectives on*

theory, assessment and treatment (pp. 61-89). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Son.

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**Links:**

[1] <http://www.cognitivetherapynyc.com/emotions.pdf>

[2] [http://www.amazon.com/Worry-Cure-Seven-Steps-Stopping/dp/1400097665/sr=8-2/qid=1168229522/ref=pd\\_bbs\\_sr\\_2/102-9636244-5523303?ie=UTF8&s=books](http://www.amazon.com/Worry-Cure-Seven-Steps-Stopping/dp/1400097665/sr=8-2/qid=1168229522/ref=pd_bbs_sr_2/102-9636244-5523303?ie=UTF8&s=books)

[3] [http://www.amazon.com/Anxiety-Free-Unravel-Fears-Before/dp/1401921639/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1234617493&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Anxiety-Free-Unravel-Fears-Before/dp/1401921639/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1234617493&sr=1-1)

[4] <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/anxiety-files>