

4 Worry Busting Tips

4 Ways to Stop Worrying in its Tracks.

Dr Elizabeth Cohen





Welcome to 4 ways to stop worrying in its tracks.

Are you ready to start busting the worries that have been holding you back?

I have been using these 4 steps to attack worrying for over 15 years in my private practice. I have seen people transform by implementing these tips. The best part of this exercise is that you can use it over and over again. We can bust any and all worries that come your way using this technique.

Please do not be discouraged or hard on yourself when you notice more worries coming up. This is a practice. This is not a one time exercise rather it is an approach to handling when worries rear their heads.

I like to think about these tips like physical exercises. You can't just do sit-ups once and have the abs you want for the rest of your life. You need to keep at it, so just like you would keep supporting your body through repeated exercise I hope you will support your mind by repeating these exercises whenever you need it.

Some people find it helpful to use a special notebook to work on this exercise. Feel free to find a medium that works for you. This is your experience.



Ok, ready to dive in?

Let's start busting these worries

Define Them

First, we have to define your worry very specifically. We are all used to saying, "I am such a worrier" or "I just cannot stop worrying about everything."

While these general statements might be true, they keep us stuck in our perception of ourselves and our worries as being stable and unable to change.

First step in busting these worries is to break them down.

Take out a piece of paper and write out the first worry that comes to mind. Take a deep breath.

Remind yourself that in order to break the worry habit we need to be able to look at the worries. This list might be scary to look at it, but these worries are not new to you. What is new is that you are writing them down. Let's get them out of your head and on paper.





A Little Help

If you are having trouble coming up with worries try this practice:

Fill in for the blank.

I am most worried that will happen.

I'd never be able to handle if occurred

Still stuck? Think about when you knock on wood or say "god forbid." That's your worry.

Here's a warning, often we use "what if" statements about fears. For example, "what if he breaks up with me?" is actually "I am afraid of losing my relationship". If you see your list is filled with "what ifs" try and change it to a statement.

Next rank the worries in order of largest worry to smallest worry. I suggest you rank them on a 0-10 scale where 0 is "doesn't cause much worry" and 10 is "worry leads to severe panic." By ranking your worries you will begin to notice that not all worries cause the same amount of fear. Just this knowledge can lead to a reduction in overall stress.

Now that you have a ranked list of worries let's pick one you would rank lower than 4. It is good to start with lower ranked worries so you can practice the steps before you conquer the doozies.



Body Talks

Second, notice what you feel in your body as you think of the worry you identified.

Scan your body and notice if there are any specific areas that ache, burn or feel tight. We often don't notice how much we hold our worries in our bodies.

However, accompanying the worry the tightening of muscles and holding of breath can lead to various body pains. Try to bring your attention to any areas you notice that are holding the tension and put a gentle hand there. Give it some attention and care. It's hurting. There is no need to stretch or try to fix it. Simply, notice the feeling.

You might choose to take a few deep inhalations. When you inhale see if you can blow your belly up as if there was a balloon inside and when you release the breath see if you can imagine that the balloon is deflating. Repeat this at least 3 times.

Search for Evidence

Now that we have a specific worry to work with and connected to your body we can move on to the third step. In this step we will start becoming detectives to bust your worries. Just like real world detectives we are going to examine the evidence in support or against your worry thought.

I will use a common worry example to illustrate how this is done. First we start with the worry thought that has been clearly specified “The project I am handing in to my boss won’t be chosen by the client.” Next, we treat it as a hypothesis rather than a fact and ask ourselves what evidence we have to support this hypothesis. There are questions that can help us with the process of collecting evidence. The two most important ones are,

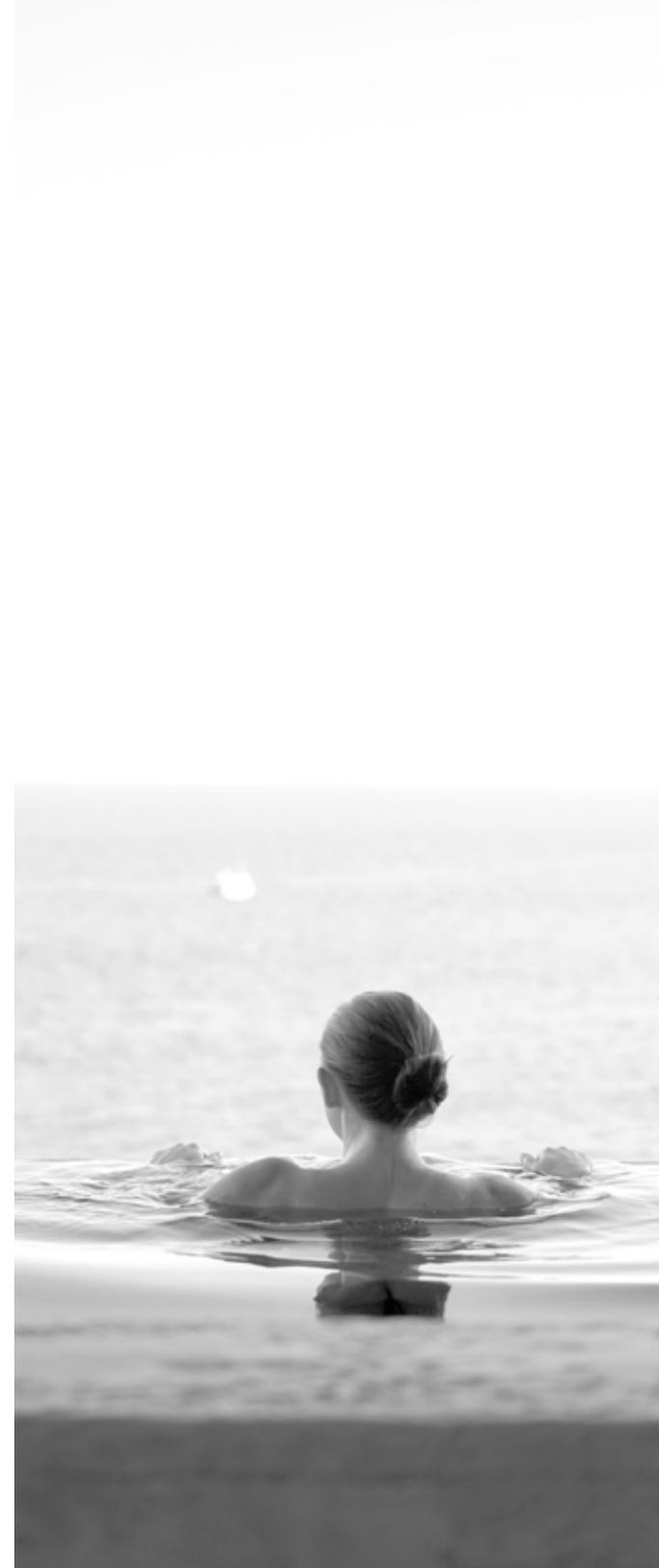
- 1. “Have I felt like this before and did what I was most afraid of happen?”**
- 2. “If my worry came true could I handle it? Would I remember it a month from now, 6 months from now, a year from now?”**

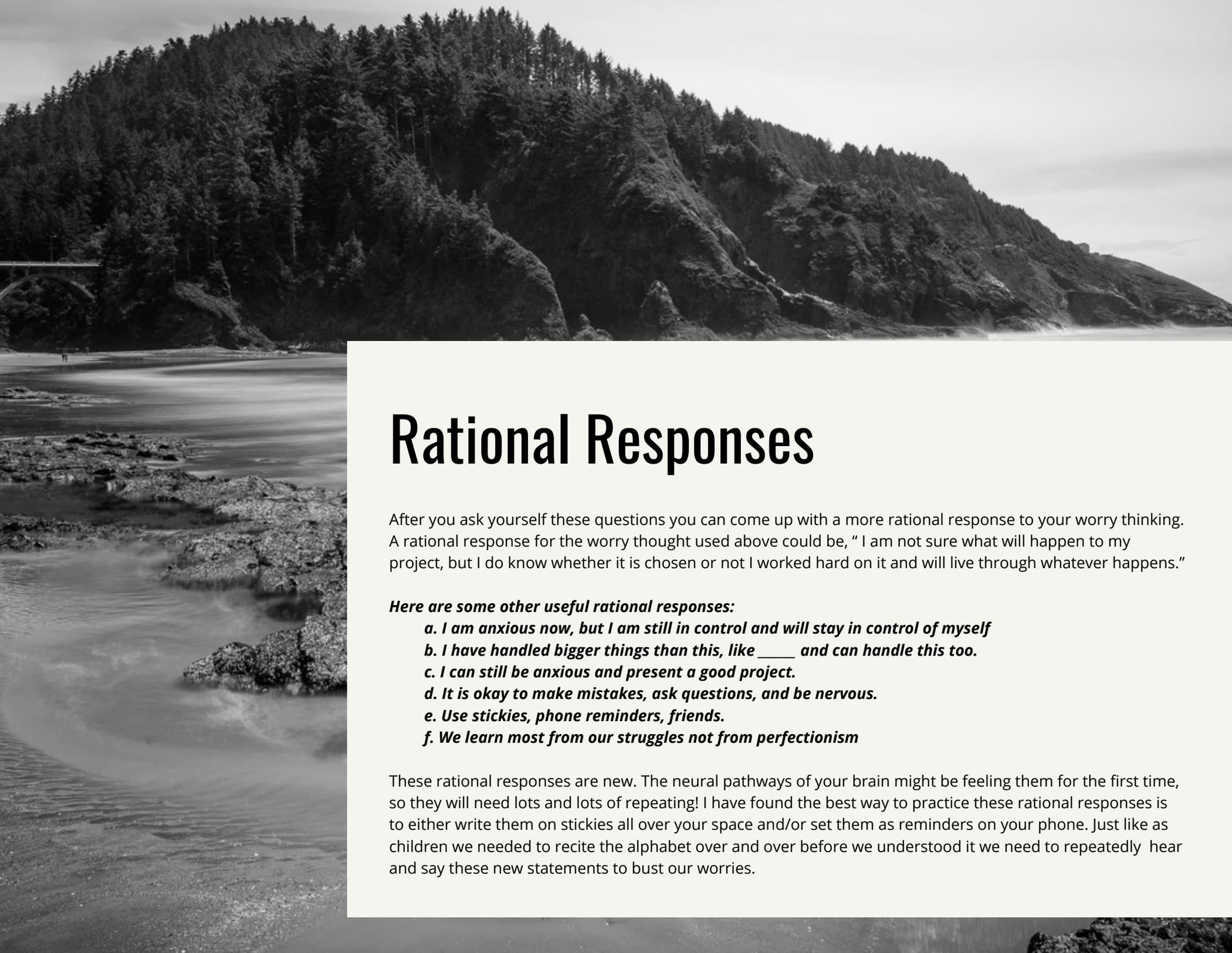
These questions highlight the two most common cognitive mistakes we make when we worry. First, we over-estimate the likelihood of something bad happening and we underestimate our ability to handle situation. These two questions are key in busting worries.

Here are some other great questions to ask yourself when gathering evidence for or against your worry thought:

- a. Am I 100% sure of these awful consequences?**
- b. Does ___ have to lead to _____?**
- c. Do I have a crystal ball?**
- d. Could there be another explanation?**
- e. Does ___’s opinion reflect that of everyone else?**
- f. Is ___ so important that my entire future resides with this outcome?**
- g. What is really the worst thing that can happen here?**
- h. What would I tell a friend who had this same worry?**

You may already notice that after asking yourself these questions you feel more flow in your thinking. After all, worry thoughts are very rigid. Challenging your worry thoughts can help your think more fluidly.





Rational Responses

After you ask yourself these questions you can come up with a more rational response to your worry thinking. A rational response for the worry thought used above could be, “I am not sure what will happen to my project, but I do know whether it is chosen or not I worked hard on it and will live through whatever happens.”

Here are some other useful rational responses:

- a. I am anxious now, but I am still in control and will stay in control of myself***
- b. I have handled bigger things than this, like ____ and can handle this too.***
- c. I can still be anxious and present a good project.***
- d. It is okay to make mistakes, ask questions, and be nervous.***
- e. Use stickies, phone reminders, friends.***
- f. We learn most from our struggles not from perfectionism***

These rational responses are new. The neural pathways of your brain might be feeling them for the first time, so they will need lots and lots of repeating! I have found the best way to practice these rational responses is to either write them on stickies all over your space and/or set them as reminders on your phone. Just like as children we needed to recite the alphabet over and over before we understood it we need to repeatedly hear and say these new statements to bust our worries.

Gentle, Patient, Compassionate

As I mentioned earlier, this won't happen overnight. After all, nothing really juicy and worthwhile happens quickly. So, be gentle with yourself. Be patient with yourself. Be compassionate when your worry thoughts come up. You have had these thoughts for a long time. You are learning a new way of relating to your thoughts. Practice, practice, practice. You cannot do it wrong since you are already here trying.

Please let me know how it is going by posting on my facebook page. I love to problem solve with you as you challenge yourself to bust your worries.

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