

THE NEW CALM COURIER

December 2003

SPECIAL ISSUE:

Worry!

This issue is devoted to the topic of worry. Worry is at the heart of all anxiety. It can occupy your conscious mind, sitting in the back of the mind, and directing your choices and behaviors. Worry can keep you up at night, lead you to drink during the day, and even affect your sex life. We devote this issue of the *New Calm Courier* to worry, out of deep respect for a formidable psychological foe. - Editor

What, Me Worry?

by Lawrence M. Glanz, Ph.D.

There is an old joke that says: "There are only two things you need to worry about: whether you are sick or well. If you are well, you have nothing to worry about. If you are sick, there are only two things to worry about: whether you live or die. If you live, you have nothing to worry about. If you die, you have only two things to worry about: heaven or hell. If you go to heaven, you have nothing to worry about. If you go to hell, you will be so busy talking to your friends, you have nothing to worry about. So why worry?"

It is a good joke, but too many people fail to heed its

underlying message. In fact, millions of people are plagued by worry. It takes many forms, and it has wide ranging consequences. Many people are aware that they worry, but others are so accustomed to their own worrying, that they are only dimly aware that they are doing it.

Worry is invisible in the sense that it takes place in the mind of the worrier, but it is very powerful. It often takes the form of certain thoughts or images that repeat themselves. For example: "When is he going to come home?"; "I shouldn't have said that to her. What will she think of me?"; "What if my headache is the first sign of cancer?"; "If I fail this test, I will

be ruined."

Worry begets more worry. One upsetting thought often leads to a cascade of others. Potential disasters, calamities, and embarrassments all flood the mind, and crowd out any positive thoughts or feelings. The body responds with alarm, thereby activating its defenses against possible danger. The result? You feel miserable.

Another old joke is: "Say Miss, why are you wearing that funny looking charm?" "Well, because it keeps the wild animals away." But Ma'am, there are no wild animals anywhere near here." "That just proves how well it is working."

It is an old axiom that most

(Continued on Page 3)

Inside This Issue:

- ▶ Worry About Worry (or, how some addictions get started)
- ▶ Book Review: *The Worry Control Workbook*, by Mary Ellen Copeland
- ▶ Freak Out, A poem by J.S.
- ▶ Living with a Worrier: Helpful Hints

Editor's Note: The Calm Courier is published four times a year. By Cognitive Dynamic Therapy Associates. It is intended to inform and communicate with people who are interested in the anxiety disorders.

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Phone: 412-687-8700, or e-mail: glanz@cogdyn.com for information on subscriptions, or to discuss your questions about anxiety with the editor, Lawrence M. Glanz, Ph.D. See www.cogdyn.com for back issues.

Worry, and How Some Addictions Get Started

by Lawrence M. Glanz, Ph.D.

When I see people with anxiety, I always ask them about substance abuse problems. I do not mean to be insulting. My clinical experience as well as the psychological literature tell me that many people who suffer from excessive worry wind up hitting the bottle or the pills. They may or may not fit the picture of classic alcoholism, but their substance use can lead to abuse.

One common pattern is for people who worry to find that they can't stand worrying, but that they can't seem to stop it either. They worry about the fact that they worry too much. Like getting compound interest on your account, it adds up a lot faster. "My worrying is going to cause me to have an ulcer or a nervous breakdown."

Mind you, I like worriers. They are among the nicest people I know. In fact, some of

them are too nice. (They worry about being nice; they can never be nice enough.) The same pattern can affect worriers who worry about getting worried. They really can become preoccupied with it, somewhat like a dog chasing its tail.

They worry about the fact that they worry too much.

At some point, this kind of worrying can become intolerable. The worrier identifies some problem that might arise; predicting that this problem will come up causes him to start worrying, and knowing how he gets when he starts to worry... Well, you get the point. Eventually, to prevent the worry from escalating, some people self-medicate with drugs or alcohol.

Alcohol is usually the easiest

substance to obtain, and it does work, at least for a while. For example, some people who complain that they can't sleep like to drink late in the evening. The alcohol dulls the inner worrying machinery and induces drowsiness. Curiously, many worriers do not worry about their own drinking. Perhaps this is because moderate drinking is socially acceptable, or perhaps it is a form of denial. The pattern can continue for many years before any noticeable problems develop.

This article is not meant to create more worry for the worrier. It is simply meant as a wake-up call to worriers who may be using alcohol for its dulling effect on worrying. There is some risk to doing this; if you are looking for a medication to help with worrying, it is best to consult a doctor. You may be surprised about how well-informed doctors are becoming about anxiety problems. If they can't help, they can often refer you to someone who can.

Book Review: *The Worry Control Workbook*

By Mary Ellen Copeland (New Harbinger Publications, Inc.)

Reviewed by Lawrence M. Glanz, Ph.D.



The author, Mary Ellen Copeland, confesses in the introduction that she is a life-long worrier. She got it from her mother. By her own estimate, at her worst, she spent as much as 25% of her time worrying; of course, she found that 99.9% of the things she worried about never came to pass. Her book is addressed to fellow worriers, and although she has studied the subject extensively, the book is never

preachy or condescending.

One feature of this book that I particularly like is Copeland's way of taking you (the worrier) by the hand, and guiding you through step-by-step methods to deal with particular worries. Take the chapter on serious life situations. Copeland realizes that you may worry about things that really matter. She helps turn futile worrying into a method for making constructive plans and realistic decisions. By following the steps she outlines, it is hard

to go wrong.

The chapters cover such topics as dealing with financial worries, health issues, global concerns, and learning to distinguish between things you can and cannot control. Copeland's down-to-earth prose and her easy to follow directions make this book a good guide for the weary worrier. If you don't get at least a little something of value out of this book, well...I think it's time to worry about you. LMG

Living With a Worrier: Helpful Hints

By Lawrence M. Glanz, Ph.D.

Do you live with a worrier? Everyone worries a little; but if you live with a real worrier, you surely know it, because so much of your life revolves around your mate's worry habits. You may find yourself reacting in sympathy with, or perhaps in opposition to it, but if you live with a true blue worrier, it can never be ignored.

As the "worrymate," you may find yourself constantly saying, "Don't worry." You may sometimes hide problems from the worrier in an effort to protect him or her. You may ask other family members to let you handle things, rather than giving your mate something else to worry about. You may strain to be patient with your mate's worrying, or you could be so used to it, that you give up trying to deal with it through logic, or persuasion.

Similar problems may arise if you are the child of a worrier. When you were growing up, perhaps you had had no way of knowing that there was something problematic about your

parent's tendencies. Or perhaps you did realize that your parent was too preoccupied with worry, but you felt helpless to do anything about it.

One man I know grew up with a mother who worried excessively. She hovered over him, worried about her health, cleaned things constantly, and fretted about others' opinions of her and her family. When he grew up, this same man married a woman just like his mother. She too worried constantly, and it didn't really bother him because he had grown up with it. He simply tolerated her, humored her, and loved her. His friends called him a saint, and sometimes, when he was not around, they called him a wimp.

What can you do if you live with a worrier? Is there any hope? Worry is a strong habit; if you live with someone who worries, and you fail to respond sympathetically, it can seem cruel to the worrier. If even one bad thing happens, the worrier may well say, "I told you so."

Here are some tips for living with a worrier. Set a good example. Deal with problems as they arise, but plan for the future. Recognize that there are no sure things, perfect people, or decisions without risk. When your mate expresses worry to you, don't give unsolicited advice. Set limits on how much you will listen to, and how far you are willing to go to placate your worrier. Tell the worrier how much you can take, and where you need to draw the line for the sake of your relationship and your own health. If the worrier admits that his or her worrying is indeed a problem, find a way to get some outside help, from a doctor, a psychologist, a clergyman, or someone you respect. Worry really does have an impact on family members. But even a life-long worrier can get help. So don't despair, and if at all possible, don't worry.



What, Me Worry? *(Continued from Page 1)*

of the things we worry about never come to pass, but as this joke suggests, that doesn't prevent us from being superstitious. Many people worry as a kind of protection. They unconsciously believe that their worry helps to prevent bad things from happening. If they don't worry and something bad does happen, maybe they *should have* worried about it; perhaps it would not have then taken place, or at least they would not have been taken off guard.

Yes, that's right. Worry often serves as an attempt to stay on guard. Worriers generally hate surprises. They avoid shocks, and worrying protects them from being shocked. If you worry ahead of time, maybe you can cushion the blow, whatever it may be. Does it work? Ask a worrier. Is it worth the emotional distress? That is a good question. As for me, I think I'd rather be shaking hands in hell.

Freak Out

A Poem by J.S.

The following poem is by a gentleman who is a deluxe worrier. He works for an agency, and after a particularly stressful day, he penned these thoughts that reflect his inner worry voice in a stream of consciousness. A few days later, feeling much better, he laughed at what he wrote. But as you shall see, the title of his poem is quite descriptive.

The buildings are falling
in on me;
I will become immobile.
My hand isn't attached.
I want to kill my mother.
I'm going to go crazy.
This is never going to end.
Things will never get better,
even if I feel better.
I can't even breathe completely;
I won't be able to continue
to speak.
I'm going to snap out

at my therapist.
I'm going to cuss.
I won't be able to drive.
I will have to ask my mother
to drive me.
It's the medicine again.
I hate all my clients;
they cause me stress.
I'm feeling trapped.
There's a void inside me.
I have no life,
no one to call or turn to.
I'm lost by myself.

Self-Help

Oakland Shadyside Friends Meeting House
4836 Ellsworth 2nd floor, Pittsburgh PA 15213
412/578-2450

Panic/Anxiety Support Group:
St. Rosalia Meeting Room, Greenfield Ave, Greenfield, PA
Contact: Jim Madero 412/421-1874

Upper St Clair, Our Redeemer Church
Rte 195 & Gateshead Dr, Washington PA 15301
Contact: Kate 412/531-4748

South Park Grace Lutheran Church
6810 Hilldale Dr , Pittsburgh PA 15236
Contact: Bonnie 412/653-6132



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