When worry keeps returning

One practical step, and some room for uncertainty

Worry can feel like a busy mind trying very hard to protect you. You may be tired of working through the same question. This sheet offers a brief way to choose a next step. You do not have to work out every possible outcome, or fill in every space.
This sheet includes words you can borrow, because talking with someone you trust, or with a professional, can make difficult things feel more manageable.

1 Is there a practical problem to act on?

Ask once: is something happening now that I can usefully respond to? An unpaid bill may need a call or a plan. 'What if everything goes wrong?' asks for certainty that a plan cannot provide. Some concerns contain both parts. Treat this as a rough guide, not a test to get right. [1]

2 Choose one action within reach

If there is a practical step, make it small and specific: find the bill, ask for advice, or agree a time to talk. If it needs to wait, choose when you will return to it. Other people's help, money, time or safer circumstances may also be needed. [1]

One useful action, and when I could take it

For example: call the advice service tomorrow morning. A few words are enough.

3 Let an unanswered what-if stay unanswered

If there is no useful action now, notice that your mind is asking for an answer. Gently turn towards something in the present: the next part of a task, a meal, or a conversation. Worry may come along too. You do not need to force it away before continuing. [1]

A phrase you could try once

I do not have the whole answer. I can choose what needs my attention now.

Share it once with someone you trust

"Can I tell you what's been on my mind? I don't need you to fix it; it just helps to say it out loud." If you notice you are asking for the same reassurance again and again, that is worth mentioning to a professional too.

If sorting worries or repeating a helpful phrase becomes another search for certainty, put the sheet aside. You can ask for support with that pattern too.

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Make the next step gentler

Use what helps; leave the rest

A little space for worry

If worries keep interrupting, you could try a short planned time to consider them. Note only enough to remember a practical issue, choose an action where possible, then finish. This is optional: avoid repeatedly reviewing, scoring or arguing with every thought. Stop if it increases distress or checking. [1]

One ordinary thing I would like to return to

Something manageable or meaningful, even while a little uncertainty remains.

You can ask for help before it becomes a crisis

Speak with a GP (family doctor) or qualified mental health professional if worry is persistent, hard to manage, or affecting sleep, work or relationships. Describe its impact and ask about assessment and treatment, including CBT. New or concerning physical symptoms deserve medical advice; do not assume they are anxiety. [2, 3]

Words for a support conversation

I am spending a lot of time worrying, and it is affecting my day. Could we look at what is happening and what support might fit?

When things feel too much

For urgent support, contact your GP, an out-of-hours doctor or your mental health team. Someone to listen, day or night: in Ireland, Samaritans 116 123 or text HELLO to 50808; in the UK, Samaritans 116 123; in the US and Canada, call or text 988; in Australia, Lifeline 13 11 14; elsewhere, findahelpline.com lists free helplines by country. Immediate danger or unable to stay safe: call your local emergency number (112 / 999 in Ireland). [4]

Sources and further reading

Practical guidance and research on treatment. These sources do not test this particular handout.

1. NHS: Tackling your worries (www.nhs.uk)
2. NICE CG113: Generalised anxiety - recommendations (www.nice.org.uk)
3. Papola et al. (2024): Psychotherapies for generalised anxiety (pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)
4. HSE: Get urgent help for a mental health crisis (www2.hse.ie)

Sources checked 3 October 2026. The organisations cited have not endorsed this resource. Support lines checked 25 October 2026.

More free information and support routes

More about general anxiety and finding support

Scan for Find Help, or visit jonathanhaverkampf.com and choose Find Help.

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