

You Don't Need Reassurance about Your Worries

Objective: To give up seeking reassurance from others or from yourself as a way to cope with your worries.

Many people with anxiety disorders constantly seek reassurance from others that things will be okay. Sometimes people seek reassurance from friends or loved ones. For example, Michael worried about his pregnant wife, even though she seemed to be having an easy pregnancy. He insisted that she call or text him every hour of the day when they were apart.

Other people seek reassurance from medical professionals. Paul had several panic attacks and thought he was having a heart attack. Each time, he insisted on going to the emergency room, even though the doctors told him that there was nothing wrong with his heart.

Still others are constantly reading self-help books or searching the internet for reassurance. For example, Annie Marie was recently divorced and was worried that she would never find anyone else to love. She had six books on finding love that she read over and over again.

In the past, many psychologists prescribed self-affirmations, a form of self-reassurance, as a way to cope with worries and anxieties. They would have their patients say positive things to themselves in the mirror or carry around slips of paper with reassuring words written on them. Now we know that this type of self-reassurance will likely just prolong your worries just like seeking reassurance from others.

When you constantly seek reassurance, you are engaging with your worries as if they were real. It is much more helpful in the long run to recognize your worries for what they are and then just let them go.

Does This Sound Like You?

Mavis had three younger siblings. Even though they were all in their twenties and thirties, she described herself as the "mother hen." Her father hadn't been involved with the family for years, and now that her mother passed away, Mavis felt that it was her job to keep the family together. Mavis made it clear that she wanted to hear from her siblings at least once a day. She told them, "This is the way we keep our family together," but in fact they all had busy lives and found that reporting to their older sister every day was a burden. Mavis was aware that her siblings were beginning to resent her insistence on checking in in every day. However, when she thought about not hearing from them, she began to feel very anxious and upset. She decided that her siblings would just have to put up with her because she was doing the job that her parents would have done.

Is there someone you need hear from every day? Is there more than one person? Write their names below.

Are there people you always call when you are worried?

How do you think they feel about your need to hear from them?

What are some things you seek reassurance about?

What will happen if you don't get the reassurance you need?

Try It

Every time you feel you need reassurance about something that worries you, write it in the chart below. Then write down how would you like to get reassurance—but don't seek it! Instead, just think about your worry for a few minutes while breathing deeply. Let the thoughts and feelings associated with your need for reassurance just float away. Then, after you have done this, rate your need for reassurance from 0 to 10, with 0 = I don't really need reassurance anymore to 10 = I must have reassurance immediately.

What you need reassurance about	What you would like to hear or what you want people to do	Rate your need for reassurance from 0 to 10.

Make every effort you can to stop asking for reassurance about your worries. Tell the people you would turn to for reassurance that you are trying to change this habit. Write down what you can say to them.

Now think of all the free time you will have when you stop seeking reassurance for your worries! Write down some positive things you could do for yourself with this extra time.
