

Are Your Worries Realistic?

Objective: To understand and accept that events are influenced by the laws of probability rather than your worries.

You Should Know

Just because something is possible does not mean it is probable. People with anxiety disorders are often consumed with the idea that something terrible will happen if they don't act in a certain way. They become so overwhelmed by anxiety, they often don't take the time to realistically examine whether what they fear most is likely to come true. For example, it is *possible* that you could be struck by lightning, but statistically it is *not probable*. It is also *possible* that you could win the lottery, but statistically it is *not probable*. Anxiety disorders can make it difficult to distinguish between what is possible and what is probable.

What if you applied the theory of probability to your anxiety disorder? Probability is the likelihood that an event will occur. Of course, it is always possible that your fears may be warranted, but is it probable? Most people with anxiety disorders imagine the worst outcome and act accordingly to prevent it. But think about this: If it is possible for the worst outcome to occur, it is equally possible for the best outcome to take place.

Does This Sound Like You?

Marcia was sure that she would give a terrible presentation at work and feel like an idiot. She practiced giving the presentation to a friend, practiced in front of a mirror, and even took a video of herself and watched it again and again. Every time she did this she increased the probability that she would give a good presentation. She knew that "practice makes perfect," but this didn't make her feel less worried.

What to Do

This exercise will help your rational mind better understand the concept of probability. You will begin by thinking about something you worry about because you think it could have a terrible outcome. Then you will look at nine other possible outcomes. With each outcome, you will consider the likelihood (probability) that the outcome will happen and why.

Determining the Probability of a Good or Bad Outcome

Begin by writing down the worst outcome you can imagine. Then write down other possible outcomes. Try and write down at least nine other possible outcomes, *making sure that at least three of the possibilities are positive ones.*

Now go back and write in the probability that each outcome will occur and the reasons for your probability estimate. Write out whether the probably is low, medium, or high. Here are some examples from Marcia's worksheet.

Possible Outcome	Probability	Reasons/Comments
I will make an idiot out of myself and get fired.	Low	This is not probable because I spent more than 10 hours practicing the presentation. And besides, my work is really appreciated, so why would I be fired for screwing up a presentation?
I will spill a glass of water on my presentation.	Low	I'll take a sip of water before the presentation and won't even have a glass of water near where I am speaking.
I'll get a standing ovation.	Low	Even if I give a great presentation, the subject is not that exciting!
People will be interested in what I say and someone will give me a compliment.	High	This is what happened before.
I'll have to go to the bathroom in the middle of the presentation.	Low	This has never happened, and I'll use the bathroom before I start.
I'll talk too softly, and someone will ask me to speak up.	Medium	This has happened before, but it wasn't too bad.

Now try this for yourself on the next page.

Possible Outcome	Probability	Reasons/Comments

Thinking About It

Did you find yourself becoming anxious during this exercise? What thoughts came to mind when doing this exercise?

Write down some worries where you need to examine the probability of the outcomes

Feedback

Rate this exercise on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

This exercise was helpful.

1 2 3 4

It helped me learn something new.

1 2 3 4

It helped me reach my goal of reducing my anxiety.

1 2 3 4

Comments
