

“Worry Time”

“Worry time” is a useful strategy when used *in addition to* other unhooking skills. By itself, it’s not much use. But when used in conjunction with the *regular practice* of unhooking skills such as “dropping anchor”, “leaves on a stream”, “dipping in and out of the river”, or any mindfulness skills that help you to unhook from your thoughts and refocus your attention, then it’s often very helpful. Basically, you put aside five to fifteen minutes each day, at a specified time, during which you do nothing but sit down and attend, with openness and curiosity, to your worrying. This is your “worry time”.

For the rest of the day, outside of your “worry time”, whenever worrying thoughts pop up, you say to yourself, “Thanks mind. I know you’re trying to help. And I’ll tackle this later in my ‘worry time’.

For now, I have to focus on other things. So by all means, keep generating those worries—but just know, I can’t give them my attention right now.” *Note: this isn't a way to distract you from worries, make them go away. It's a way to unhook from them, so you're not "caught up" or "lost" in them. Sometimes your worries will hang around - or go away for a while, but then come back. And that's okay; you simply acknowledge the worries are present, and allow your mind to chatter away like a radio playing in the background, while you focus your attention on what's important here and now.*

When you get to your “worry time,” don’t just sit there and allow yourself to get caught up in worrying; instead, respond to your worries effectively. Either practice observing the flow of your worries (as in “leaves on a stream”) or disrupting your worrying (as in “dropping anchor” or “dipping in and out of the river”) or unhooking from thoughts and refocusing attention (as in mindful breathing or a mindful body scan).

Alternatively, spend some (or all) of this time teasing out the values from beneath your worries. You’ll discover there are always important values deeply linked to whatever it is you’re worrying about. Identify those values and use them to create an effective action plan. That way, instead of worrying, you can focus your energy and attention on values-guided action.