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Think Outside The Box

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What Is Worry?

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Let's start at the very beginning. What is worry, anyway? It is impossible to try and deal with something that you do not understand, so the first step is to recognize worry - what it includes and what it means for you personally.

If you like, you can take a moment to think of your own definition.

Tip: You might find it helpful to have a journal at hand to make notes, jot down insights and record changes in feelings as you go along. If you have one at hand, take a moment to draw up a few sentences that capture the essence of worry for you.

The banner features the Explorable logo at the top center. Below it are three quiz cards, each with a representative image and a title. The first card shows roller skates on a wooden deck, the second shows a fan of colorful pencils, and the third shows a Ferris wheel at sunset. A link to 'See all quizzes' is located at the bottom right of the banner.

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Quiz Time!

Quiz:
Psychology 101 Part 2

Quiz:
Psychology 101 Part 2

Quiz:
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How Is Worry Defined?

For the purposes of this course, we'll talk about worry in broad strokes. We'll use "worry", "anxiety" and "stress" interchangeably, but we'll classify worry as:

Any thoughts, feelings, images, ideas, and fears, that are all negative in their nature and which happen in response to either real or imagined future problems.

How does this compare to your definition?

Of course, the broad definition above encompasses quite a lot! This could include stress

about an upcoming operation, worry about finances or stressful thoughts around your children's future. If you quickly imagine something right now that is bothering you, you'll probably find that it can be classified as worry using this definition.

Identify Your Worries

Now, as you imagine this current worry, ask yourself if it's a thought, feeling, image etc., if it's negative in nature and if it's real or imagined. This is actually a lot harder to do than it at first seems.

Whether something is really likely to happen or not is not always so clear cut. For example, imagine you one day find a new and very strange looking mole on your back that, according to everything you know, looks pretty dangerous. Remembering how many people in your distant family have had skin cancer, you start to worry – could you have skin cancer too?

Realistic vs. Imaginary Worries

In the following articles, we'll look at why your reaction to an event like this is completely unique to you – but also very much under your control. We've pieced together a broad outline of what worry is, but when it comes to the "real" vs "imaginary" part, things get tricky. Let's look now at the next section to see how we can tell the difference between worries that are real and those that are just imaginary.

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