

# Therapeutic Webinars

## CBT Stream

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# Disclaimer

- **These webinars are not therapeutic or clinical encounters.** They are informational sessions. Presenters cannot provide individualized input to participants.
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- **We cannot address acute safety concerns** within the context of these webinars. If you are feeling unsafe with yourself, please leave the webinar and contact crisis services, such as **Tracom: 514-483-3033** or ultimately **911**.

# What is uncertainty?

- A lot of the work we know about uncertainty comes from the study of generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)
- Uncertainty is a term to describe the state of “not knowing” and is often focussed on the future
  - “What if...?” is a common attempt to cope with an uncertain future
- Feeling anxious or stressed without knowing why, or not being able to “put your finger on it” is another clue
- Uncertainty is not always bad, but we tend to perceive it as such



# What is locus of control?

- Locus of control refers to a person's perceived (or actual) sense of control as being either **internal** (within oneself) or **external** (outside oneself)
- In real life, control is rarely all-or-nothing, it is a continuum



# Examples of control

- Audience participation:
- What are some things totally not in our control?
- What are some things completely under our control?
- Can we think of some examples of things that are only partly under our control?
  - e.g. situations where we can partly influence but not entirely control the outcome?



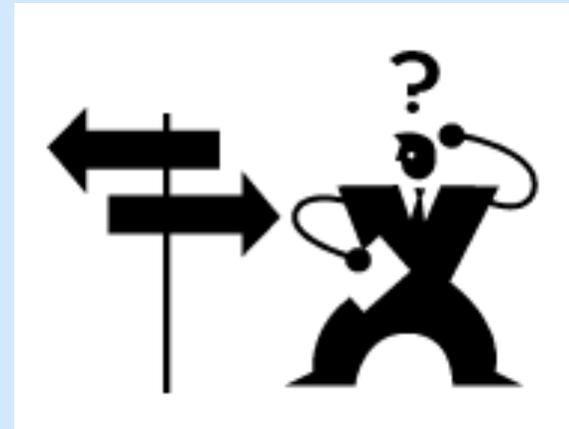
# Why are uncertainty and lack of control so unpleasant?

- Evolutionary psychology – safety & threat orientation
- Uncertainty is much more tolerable when we have an overall sense of control and agency in our lives in general
  - A sense of “being able to roll with the punches” or good overall coping skills helps with accepting uncertainty
- If we don’t have the above, we typically try to focus our efforts on preventing bad things from happening...
- But life doesn’t really care about our plans!



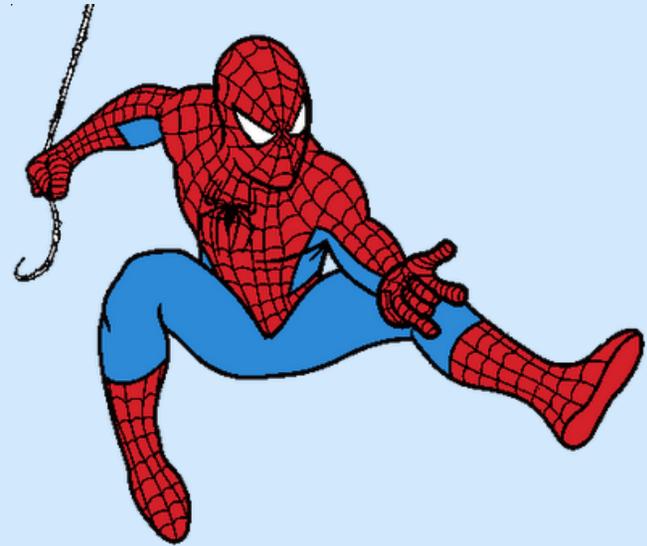
# Intolerance of Uncertainty & Anxiety

- When we think our only hope of safety is to plan ahead and prevent bad things from happening
  - We need certainty to plan effectively
- Not having certainty then becomes a barrier to our planning and creates anxiety
  - *"If something is unpredictable I just can't cope"*
- Another factor maintaining the anxiety is positive beliefs about worry
  - *"It helps me prepare"; "It makes me a good person"*



# Control and Responsibility

- “With great power comes great responsibility”
- Control and responsibility are two sides of the same coin
- So if we have control, we are responsible
- If we don't have control we are **not** responsible



# Productive and Unproductive Worry

- Anxiety is productive when it leads to effective action
  - e.g. helping to study before an exam; creating motivation to complete tasks
- Worry is unproductive when...
  - it is something that is not under your control
  - the fears are vague and not tangible
  - excessively future oriented/not based in fact
- Can we think of other examples?



# 3 Questions to Cope with Anxiety

- Is this situation under my control?
  - If yes, go to next question
  - If no, distract, walk away, engage in something else
- Can I do something about it right now?
  - If yes, go to next question
  - If no, book a time in the future to problem-solve
- Is it worth my time and energy to get involved? What are my reasonable expectations of a positive outcome?



# Identifying what is under our control

- This is one of the hardest questions to honestly answer
- Comes back to the idea of control & responsibility
- Giving self permission to “walk away”
- Recognizing one’s own limits
  - You gotta know when to hold ‘em, know when to fold ‘em, know when to walk away, know when to run



# Permission to walk away

- Remind yourself that you don't have control and trying to take control will only frustrate you
- It is **OKAY** to let go and focus on something else
- Choose something distracting and engaging; especially something enjoyable
- This is not avoidance because you actually **cannot take effective action**, you're not avoiding anything that you really could be doing



# Booking a time to problem-solve

- If you can't address a problem right away (e.g. in the middle of driving, a phone call etc.) make a note to deal with it later
- Actually putting a note in a phone, tablet, agenda etc. is more effective than a "mental note" which requires ongoing effort and drains our working memory; keeps our mental "to-do" list chronically activated
- Sit down and follow the problem solving steps (topic of a future webinar!)
  - Notice if you are running around in circles or "ruminating" this is a sign that you may not be problem-solving but getting stuck in a rut

## Letting go of control you never really had... and taking control elsewhere

- If we remember that not having control also means that we don't have responsibility, we can let this fact be ... **freeing**
- Instead we can turn our focus onto small, concrete, specific things in our lives where we do have control and can take **immediate action**



# Get engaged in productive action

- Can we think of some examples of actions that would increase our sense of control and/or pleasure?
  - Reading, gardening, calling friends
  - Volunteering, joining a social group or joint activity
  - Other ideas?

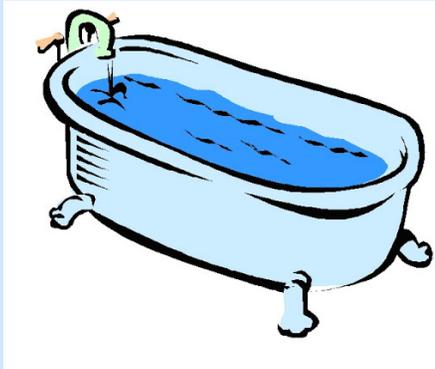


# How do we cope with uncertainty?

- If you know that this is **unproductive worry**:
  - Be Aware
  - Don't Respond
  - Let Go
  - Be Present-Focussed
  - Deal with a wandering mind
- In other words, remember that nobody likes uncertainty, but don't feed the beast



# Tolerating Distress & Self-Soothing



- What are some activities that you could use to distract yourself or soothe yourself when there is something going on that is upsetting but out of your control?
- Using other webinars especially mindfulness, exercise and DBT/distress tolerance
- Being kind to yourself and recognizing this is normal to be distressed

# Questions





Thank you for joining!

Additional resources can be found on our website:  
**[www.jgh.ca/icfp](http://www.jgh.ca/icfp)**

**Next CBT Webinar:** Monday June 1<sup>st</sup> @ 10am  
**Topic:** What counts as OCD in a pandemic?