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.

- **Please respect privacy and confidentiality** of other 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 focused 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!
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”
“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
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
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
Thank you for joining!

Additional resources can be found on our website: www.jgh.ca/icfp

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