

CBT-Based Client Guide

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Client Workbook

This workbook uses evidence-based cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) strategies to help you understand and manage worry and anxiety. Work through each section with your therapist.

Table of Contents

- What Is GAD? — Psychoeducation
- Worksheet 1: Understanding My Anxiety
- Worksheet 2: Daily Worry Log
- Worksheet 3: Worry Time — Postponing Worry
- Worksheet 4: Thought Record for Worry
- Worksheet 5: Intolerance of Uncertainty
- Worksheet 6: Problem-Solving Steps
- Worksheet 7: Relaxation & Coping Toolbox
- Worksheet 8: Progress Tracker

What Is Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)?

Generalized Anxiety Disorder is characterized by persistent, excessive worry about a number of different things — such as health, work, money, family, or everyday matters — that is difficult to control and causes significant distress or impairment. Unlike worries that come and go, GAD worry tends to feel constant, hard to stop, and out of proportion to the actual situation.

DSM-5 Key Features

Excessive anxiety and worry occurring more days than not for at least 6 months. The worry is difficult to control and is associated with three or more of: restlessness, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, irritability, muscle tension, or sleep disturbance. (APA, 2013)

The Cognitive Model of Worry

In CBT, worry is understood as a thinking pattern driven by two core beliefs: (1) **Positive beliefs about worry** — 'Worrying helps me prepare and stay safe,' and (2) **Negative beliefs about worry** — 'My worry is uncontrollable and dangerous.' These beliefs keep the worry cycle going. The goal of CBT is to examine the accuracy of these beliefs and replace unhelpful thinking patterns with more balanced, realistic ones (Borkovec & Costello, 1993; Wells, 1995).

How Anxiety Shows Up in Your Body and Behavior

Anxiety affects you in three ways:

- **Thoughts:** Catastrophizing, 'what if' thinking, mental going over problems.
- **Body:** Muscle tension, fatigue, headaches, stomach upset, difficulty sleeping.
- **Behavior:** Avoidance, reassurance seeking, over-preparing, difficulty delegating.

Important Research Finding

CBT is among the most well-supported treatments for GAD, with meta-analyses consistently showing large effect sizes for worry reduction and quality-of-life improvement (Cuijpers et al., 2014; Hunot et al., 2007).

Worksheet 1 · Understanding My Anxiety

Before we can change anxiety, we need to understand it. Use this worksheet to map out how anxiety shows up for you personally.

Current anxiety level (circle):

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
None		Mild		Moderate			Severe			Worst ever

What am I most worried about right now?

How does anxiety show up in my body?

What do I tend to do (or avoid) when anxious?

What does my worry cost me (relationships, sleep, enjoyment)?

Reflect

Notice whether your worries are mostly about things within your control or outside it. We will return to this distinction in Worksheet 6.

Worksheet 2 - Daily Worry Log

Track your worries for one week. Recording worries helps you see patterns and begin to separate productive from unproductive concern.

Date/Time	Worry Topic	Intensity (0-10)	Controllable? Y/N	Coping Response Used

After one week, review your log and answer:

What topics come up most often?

Did most worries come true? What does that suggest?

Worksheet 3 · Worry Time — Postponing Worry

Worry time is a structured technique shown to reduce overall worry by containing it to a specific 20-minute window each day (Borkovec et al., 1983). Outside of that window, you practice catching and postponing worries.

How It Works

1. Choose a daily 'worry time' (same time, same place, not near bedtime). 2. When a worry arises outside that window, write it down and tell yourself: 'I'll address this at worry time.' 3. During worry time, review your list and problem-solve or challenge each worry. 4. When time is up, stop — even if you haven't resolved everything.

My designated worry time:

Worries to bring to worry time today:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

What did I notice when I postponed a worry?

Worksheet 4 · Thought Record for Worry

For each worry, walk through the columns below. The goal is not to force positive thinking but to find a more accurate, balanced perspective.

Situation	Automatic Thought	Emotion (0-10)	Evidence For	Evidence Against	Balanced Thought

Thinking errors to watch for:

- Catastrophizing — assuming the worst will happen
- Overestimating probability — treating unlikely events as certain
- Intolerance of uncertainty — believing you must know how things will turn out
- Emotional reasoning — 'I feel afraid, so it must be dangerous'

Worksheet 5 · Intolerance of Uncertainty

A core driver of GAD is intolerance of uncertainty (IU) — the belief that uncertainty is unbearable or dangerous. This worksheet helps you examine and challenge that belief (Dugas et al., 1998).

A current situation where I cannot know the outcome:

What I am telling myself about not knowing:

Evidence that uncertainty IS dangerous

Evidence that uncertainty can be tolerated

A more balanced statement about this uncertainty:

Practice Point

Think of a time you tolerated uncertainty and things turned out fine (or you coped). Uncertainty is uncomfortable — but discomfort is not danger.

Worksheet 6 · Problem-Solving Steps

Use this for worries about real, solvable problems. If the worry is about an imagined or uncontrollable event, return to Worksheet 4 instead.

Clearly define the problem (one sentence):

Brainstorm solutions — write any idea, no judgment:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Pros and cons of the best option:

My plan and first step:

How did it go?

Worksheet 7 · Relaxation & Coping Toolbox

Building a personalized coping toolbox helps you respond to anxiety rather than react to it.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

Systematically tense and release muscle groups for 5-10 seconds each. Research supports PMR as an effective somatic intervention for GAD (Conrad & Roth, 2007). Practice daily for best effect.

Diaphragmatic Breathing

Inhale slowly for 4 counts (belly rises), hold 1 count, exhale for 6 counts. This activates the parasympathetic nervous system, reducing physiological arousal.

My personal coping toolbox:

Physical strategies:

Cognitive strategies:

Behavioral strategies:

Social supports:

Worksheet 8 · Weekly Progress Tracker

Rate yourself each week to track progress over time.

Week	Avg Worry Intensity (0-10)	# of Worry Postponements	Skill I Practiced	What Helped Most

What progress am I most proud of?

What do I still want to work on?

References: APA (2013). DSM-5. American Psychiatric Publishing. | Borkovec et al. (1983). Behav Res Ther. | Cuijpers et al. (2014). Depress Anxiety. | Dugas et al. (1998). Behav Ther. | Wells (1995). Behav Res Ther.