

Accepting Uncertainty Introduction

Many people have a fear of uncertainty. When someone has this fear, uncertainty, unpredictability and doubt can be felt as awful, even unbearable experiences.

People who fear uncertainty and need guarantees may:

- Say things like: “I can’t cope not knowing,” “I know the chances of it happening are so small, but it still could happen,” “I need to be 100% sure.”
- Prefer that something bad happens right now, rather than go on any longer not knowing what the eventual outcome may be.
- Find it hard to make a decision or put a plan or solution in place because they first need to know how it will work out.



If you have this fear of uncertainty then you may spend a lot of time worrying. You may think that worrying is a way of preparing yourself for the worst, that it is getting you ready for anything that might happen. Worrying is seen as a way of attempting to predict life so that there are no nasty surprises. Therefore you may think that worrying reduces your experience of uncertainty and unpredictability. However, because worrying reduces your feelings of uncertainty, you will continue worrying and worrying and worrying. In other words, you keep worrying because you believe it is your only strategy for making things in life more certain and more predictable – it makes you believe that you have more control.

In reality, has your worrying made anything more certain or more predictable? By worrying, does it change the outcome of what will happen? Isn’t life still as uncertain and unpredictable as it ever was? It is only your perception that you somehow have more control by worrying. But is this really true? In fact, all you’ve done is think of all the worst-case scenarios, worked yourself up and made yourself feel really bad in the process. So ask yourself is it really worth it? Does having a ‘fake’ sense of certainty justify all the negative consequences of worrying? If your answer is ‘No’, then there are two ways you can tackle your intolerance of uncertainty:

Challenge your intolerance of uncertainty
and

Let go of your intolerance of uncertainty (or **Accept** uncertainty)

By addressing your need for certainty, you are dealing with one of your positive beliefs about worry, which leads to more worry. By reducing your need for certainty, you will reduce the drive to worry.

Here at Isorropia Foundation we acknowledge that it can be easier said than done to let go of our need for certainty, the following advice from the team will begin to help you understand and work through some of those difficulties. As humans our attention is very future focused. This instinct leads our minds to worry in an attempt to try and gain certainty. To accept uncertainty we must first recognise or acknowledge when we feel the active decision not to respond to this need but rather to let go and accept it.

If we are more present focused, rather than future focused, it will lead to us being able to accept uncertainty. It is possible at times we may find our minds drifting, but repeat the steps of being aware, not to respond and to let go of that need for certainty.

We can now look at the steps towards acceptance of uncertainty in more detail.

Example:

BE AWARE	I'm telling myself how terrible or unbearable not knowing is. I find myself seeking reassurance. There is this agitated and restless feeling.
DON'T RESPOND	In this situation I have that need for certainty - this is what is leading me to worry. I sit with this feeling, noticing and observing it.
LET GO	Certainty is unnecessary but a part of life. I will visualise my need for certainty floating past like clouds.
BE PRESENT FOCUSED	I will bring my attention to the present using mindfulness and grounding techniques.
DEAL WITH A WANDERING MIND	If my mind comes back to needing certainty, it's okay. I just need to bring my mind back to the present.

Challenge and Acceptance are two different techniques that can be used to address uncertainty. Give both a try and see which works best for you. It is possible to also use a combination of both. Below is a blank version of the Challenging Uncertainty table that we have just looked at. Spend some time filling your own one in, drawing from some of the answers from the previous table.

BE AWARE What is it you notice yourself doing when you are in need of certainty?	
DON'T RESPOND What can you tell yourself to stop the need for certainty?	
LET GO What are the things you can tell yourself to be able to let go of your uncertainty?	
BE PRESENT FOCUSED What can you do/tell yourself to be more present focused?	
DEAL WITH A WANDERING MIND What can you do/tell yourself if your mind wanders back to needing certainty?	