

# Gwendolyn and The Worries

Gwendolyn had a pretty ordinary life. She lived with her mom and her dad and her two dogs (who were very silly). She was learning a lot at school and liked her teachers and friends. She also had friends in her neighborhood, especially Cindy, who always seemed to be happy and have fun. Gwendolyn was happy too...most of the time.

But Gwendolyn had a problem. The Worries. The Worries lived under her bed and mostly came to bother her at night. But they were tricky and could jump up at just about any time and steal her fun. The Worries were really good at stealing and lying. They told her things like: Gwendolyn, you must worry about your friends. Gwendolyn, you must worry about getting sick. Gwendolyn, you must worry about worrying! Gwendolyn HATED The Worries, but she couldn't figure out what to do about them.

Gwendolyn thought very hard about this problem. She talked with one of her teachers and together they came up with some really good ideas. These ideas were so good that The Worries REALLY hated it when Gwendolyn tried them out. And usually, the ideas worked most of the time and Gwendolyn was happier. But The Worries were still there, under her bed, especially at night, telling her to worry and stealing her fun.

Gwendolyn thought very hard about this problem too. One night, when she was getting ready for bed, she could feel The Worries trying to slip into bed with her to start telling their lies. Gwendolyn had just about had enough of these rotten Worries. She stood in the middle of her bedroom and shouted: "OK, you Worries. That's it! Show yourselves! I want to talk to you!"

33  
34 Silence. Hmmm, thought Gwendolyn, they seem a bit shy when  
35 you actually talk to them. So, she took a little softer tone and  
36 said: "Come on, you Worries. I won't hurt you. I just want to  
37 talk."

38  
39 Pretty soon, Gwendolyn saw a Worry! She was surprised  
40 because she'd never actually seen a Worry before. It was kind of  
41 soft and round and blue. Gwendolyn did not expect the Worry to  
42 look sad. She'd always thought about the Worries as mean. So, she  
43 was a little puzzled but she was determined to have it out with this  
44 Worry!

45  
46 Gwendolyn said, "OK, you Worry. Here's the deal. You have  
47 GOT to LEAVE ME ALONE! I am sick and tired of you and your  
48 pals getting in my head, telling me lies, and stealing my fun!" The  
49 Worry didn't say anything but looked even sadder (if that was  
50 possible!). Gwendolyn put her hands on her hips and said, "Well,  
51 what do you have to say for yourself?"

52  
53 The Worry looked at her and said, "Well, you know, we  
54 Worries aren't supposed to talk to humans directly like this. We're  
55 just supposed to sneak in at night, et cetera, et cetera. I'll  
56 probably get in big trouble for this."

57  
58 Gwendolyn thought that this was interesting and it was kind of  
59 fun to think about causing a Worry some trouble for a change. And  
60 Gwendolyn was determined to make some progress with this Worry.  
61 So she pressed on.

62  
63 "Well, are you and all your kind going to get out from under  
64 my bed and go away?" Again, The Worry looked sad. The Worry  
65 said, "We can do that, but I don't think it is a good idea."

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67       **"What?" Gwendolyn almost shouted. "Of course, it is a good**  
68 **idea. You guys are mean and worthless and you make trouble for**  
69 **me almost every day."**

70  
71       **The Worry said, "Well, that might be true but we help you**  
72 **also." Gwendolyn almost dropped the glass of water she had in her**  
73 **hand. "Please! How do you suppose that you help me? That is a**  
74 **ridiculous idea!"**

75  
76       **The Worry looked a tiny bit pleased with itself and said, "I'll**  
77 **tell you. There was one girl, Gail, we left her completely alone and**  
78 **do you know what happened?" The Worry didn't really want an**  
79 **answer because it just kept going. "Gail didn't worry about a thing.**  
80 **She didn't worry about cavities so she forgot to brush her teeth.**  
81 **Then all her teeth fell out! She didn't worry about doing well in**  
82 **school so she didn't study for tests and she is STILL in second**  
83 **grade! She didn't worry about being nice to people so she did**  
84 **exactly what she wanted ALL OF THE TIME and now no one wants**  
85 **to be her friend! We like you and we don't want this to happen to**  
86 **you!" The Worry finally stopped for a breath and Gwendolyn was**  
87 **too stunned to even speak.**

88  
89       **This was very interesting. Gwendolyn had never considered**  
90 **that there could be a good part to The Worries. Gwendolyn said,**  
91 **"So, you are telling me that a little Worry is not all bad and might**  
92 **even be helpful. But you guys are TOO GOOD AT YOUR JOB! You**  
93 **don't stop with a little bit. You pile it on until I can't think straight**  
94 **and can't have fun!"**

95  
96       **The Worry looked worried. "Too true. Too true." And a little**  
97 **bit of pride came on its Worry-face. "We have won the prize for**  
98 **"Best Worries of the Year" on several occasions." Gwendolyn said,**

99 "Look, I have an idea. Let's make a list of the things it is OK for  
100 you to remind me about. Things like brush your teeth, be kind to  
101 others, and so on. BUT you have to PROMISE to bring the volume  
102 down a whole lot. It is ok to REMIND me of things but you are not  
103 allowed to make demands for me to worry ALL of the time!"  
104

105 The Worry thought about this for a moment and said, "I  
106 think the other Worries will agree. As long as we are allowed to  
107 keep you safe and happy, we will try not to make you worry TOO  
108 much. Let's work on that list." And so they did.  
109

110 Now, because The Worries were so good at their job and  
111 even liked being named "Worries of the Year" it took a while for  
112 them to keep their promise. Gwendolyn had to be firm with them  
113 and she still used her other ideas and strategies whenever The  
114 Worries got rowdy. But she discovered that she liked helping them  
115 do their job just enough to keep her safe and happy. Pretty soon,  
116 she didn't think of them as mean and nasty anymore. They  
117 reminded her of puppies that had to be taught to behave. And, like  
118 puppies, they needed a lot of training! So, Gwendolyn continues to  
119 REMIND The Worries to be The Reminders. And they are all much  
120 happier today.

## The Girl Who Saw Stones

This is the story of Anna. It happened long ago in a faraway place....

Anna had just turned 13. For most people, this birthday was one to look forward to, but not for Anna. Anna lived in the country with her mother and her obnoxious brothers. She longed to go to the city, be with her friends and have some excitement in her life. None of this was possible. Anna had to stay at home on her family's farm. She had nothing to look forward to but more boredom and despair. Anna spent most of her days wandering around the family farm, kicking at the many stones in the ground. "What a stupid place," she thought to herself. "An ugly farm with ugly stones." The stones really bothered Anna. They made the farm unbearable to her.

Everyone told her she was wrong about the farm and the stones. Her mother said, "Anna, this is a beautiful farm. Your life is wonderful. If you look carefully, inside each of these stones is a diamond." Anna thought her mother was nuts. Her brothers didn't seem to mind. They told her, "Anna, you're such a grouch. You can use these stones for lots of things." Mostly, they used the stones to chase her away from them. Her father said, "Anna, just ignore the stones. If you don't think about them, they won't bother you so much." None of this was very helpful to Anna. She hated the stones, and she hated her life. She felt very alone and hopeless.

One day, while Anna was wandering around kicking the stones, she heard a noise from behind her. It was a woman she had heard of from the city. Her name was Alanna and she was a famous magician. Everyone knew her. Many of the adults refused to allow their kids to go near her because they believed Alanna was a bad influence on them. Anna was thrilled to meet her, but surprised to find her on the stupid farm with the stupid stones.

Alanna listened to Anna's story about her life and how hopeless she felt. She told Alanna how everyone told her to get over how she feels about the stones; she even told her about her mother believing the stones had diamonds in them. After Anna talked for a very long time, Alanna smiled at her. She said, "I wonder what would happen if you acted AS IF the stones had diamonds in them. What would you do?" Anna thought this was a bit crazy, but said, "Well, if I really thought the stones had diamonds in them, I'd be carving them up to get the diamonds and get the heck out of here." Alanna said, "From now on, act as if the stones have diamonds in them and see what happens." With that, Alanna disappeared.

Anna couldn't think of anything stupider than acting as if the stones had diamonds in them, because she KNEW that they did not. It seemed like a big waste of time and energy. But, she also knew that Alanna had a reputation as a pretty good magician, so she thought, "Well, I don't have anything else to do."

Anna began carving stones. She worked at it every day. Small stones, big stones, it didn't matter. She took chisels and hammers and even other stones to crack them open and look for diamonds. There were no diamonds.

But, a funny thing happened. Anna discovered that she had a knack for carving. After a while, she wasn't just cracking stones open, but she was making beautiful stone designs and statues. People began coming from the city and miles around just to see what Anna had made with the stones. After a while, Anna stopped looking for diamonds altogether and carved the stones just for the joy of creating something new. She could hardly remember the time when she hated the stones so much.

Anna still longed to get to the city and she wasn't sure if she wanted to carve stones forever. But that was ok. Anna knew that by taking a chance and acting AS IF good things can happen, she had found the way to make her dreams come true.

### **Constructing a Therapeutic Metaphorical Story**

**1. Identify the problem and the desired outcome(s).**

In an unchangeable situation, focus on reframing and coping.

In a changeable situation, focus on demonstrating skills and resolving the problem using existing resources.

**2. Select a context for the metaphor.**

Use something familiar to the child, one of child's special interests, or build from a metaphor used by the child.

**3. Think through the isomorphic connections between the child's problem and the story.**

Main character/protagonist the child can identify with.

Identify specific elements of the problem that you want to include in the story. In many cases, the antagonist is the personified/externalized problem.

Identify coping strategies (unchangeable situation) or skills (changeable situation) that you want the client to use that can be built into the story. Consider using a "wise" elder or other helper/hero to introduce the strategies (should have some similarity to the child to promote identification).

Develop the story to include a metaphorical crisis (i.e., the story should be interesting!). Have some challenges and set backs with which the main character successfully copes.

**4. Provide a resolution that indicates coping with the problem.**

Have the main character realize that he/she has changed in some positive way.

Be sure not to include any "magical" solutions. Consider a muted celebration.

(See also Berg & Steiner, 2003; pp. 83-84).

Berg, I.K., & Steiner, T. (2003). *Children's Solution Work*. W.W. Norton and Company.

## **Questions to Guide an Externalizing Conversation** **Adapted from Winslade and Monk (2007)**

### **General principles:**

- Questions are generated from a position of ***genuine curiosity*** and a ***desire to understand*** what the other knows (not to confirm a professional certainty).
- Questions are used to ***generate new experiences***, not to gather information.
- Although you are respectful of people's need to discuss the problem, try to get to know the individual apart from the problem.

### **Asking permission:**

- I'd like to know about how things are going for you right now. Is it ok with you if I ask you some questions? If I ask too many or you don't want to answer some of them, please tell me.

### **Moving toward externalized descriptions/Naming the problem:**

- If we were to give this problem we're talking about a name, what would it be?
- Would you like to hear some ways that other children/students/people have described similar problems, or would you like to keep thinking on your own?
- Is this name working for you? Is there another name that seems to capture the problem better?
- Is [the named problem] the main thing you want to talk about or are there other things that are just as important?

### **Mapping the influence of the externalized problem (effects of the problem on the person; length, breadth, depth):**

- How does [the problem name] affect you?
- When did it start? How long has it been around?
- How much of your life does [the problem name] affect?
  - What does [the problem] talk you into believing about yourself?
  - How does it try to interfere with your ability to have fun?
  - What does it try to tell you about your relationship with your mom? Dad? Etc.
  - How does it interfere with your future plans?
  - Do you approve of [the problem name]'s plans for your life?
  - Do you think [the problem name] has your best interests at heart?
- How deeply has this problem affected your life?
  - Are there times when it is less intense? More intense?
  - Use scaling.

**Discovering abilities/listening for cues of competence (effects of the person on the problem):**

- I understand that [the problem name] is very worrisome for you right now. But would it be all right if we talked for a little bit about times when [the problem name] is not running the show? OR Would it be all right if we put [the problem name] in a box for a while and talk about what is important about you without the problem?
- What would you like me to know about you first?
- What are the things you are most interested in? Proudest of? Things you have going for you that others may not know about you?
- Have you ever used [these talents, abilities, qualities] to help you control [the problem name]? How might that turn out?
- When [the problem name] is really dragging you down, how do you manage to get to school anyway?
- What hopes do you have that keep you from giving in to [the problem name] altogether?

**Developing the counterplot/Building a story of competence:**

- Do you prefer using [your talent] to help you tame [the problem]? What do you think [the problem] would want you to do?
- What reasons do you have for getting [the problem name] out of your life? How would it be good for you? For [named others]?
- What if [the problem name] tried to tell you that it is good for you and should stay a major part of your life?
- When you [describe the unique outcome or exception] did [the problem name] become stronger or weaker? Did you like that?
- What does it say about you that you got over on [the problem name] that time?
- What do you know about yourself now that you didn't know when [the problem name] was winning?
- Who might not be surprised that you did this? What did they know about you?
- Is this [the alternative story] something you want to keep happening? How will your life be different if you keep moving in this direction?



**Brief, Solution-Oriented, Strength-Focused Counseling**  
**Sample Questions**  
**(from Murphy, 2008 and Murphy & Duncan, 2007)**

**Building the Alliance – (use these while exploring the problem from the client's perspective)**

**Questions to Elicit Strengths (Heroic Stories):**

What are the [traits, qualities, characteristics] that describe you when you are at your very best? How did you discover these traits? What were you doing when you first noticed them?

What do these aspects say about you? What do they say about the kind of person you want to become?

What are the characteristics or qualities that others use to describe you when you are at your very best? What were you doing when they noticed this about you?

Who was the first [last, most recent] person to notice these traits in you? What were you doing when this person noticed them?

Who in your life will not be surprised to see you stand up to this difficulty and make it better? What do they know about you that tells them you can do this? What stories about “the real you” would they tell?

**Question to Explore Resilience, Coping, and Supports:**

With everything that is going on, how have you managed to [state a positive; e.g., get to school, do well in math, etc.]?

I've known a lot of kids who would have given up by now. How have you managed to keep going? Who do you turn to for help?

If you were the counselor, what advice would you give someone with your problem?

**Questions to Explore Client Position:**

How much of a problem is this for you? On a scale of 1-10 with 1 meaning no problem at all and 10 meaning a huge problem?

Is this a problem that you want to try to tackle right now? Are there other, more important, things going on in your life that we should talk about?

**Setting a goal – finding out what the client wants**

**Questions to Elicit Client's Goals (Significant, Specific, Small, Start-based, Self-manageable):**

If some magic happened tonight while you were sleeping that suddenly made your problem disappear, what would be the very first thing that you would notice in the morning that would tell you that this magic had happened? How would you be able to tell?

Pretend there are two movies about your life. Movie #1 is your life with the problem. We've talked a good bit about this movie. Now, describe Movie #2 which is about your life without the

problem. Who is in the movie? What will you be doing in this movie? What will [named others] be doing?

If “1” is the worst the problem can ever be and “10” is the problem is completely gone, where are you on the scale right now? What will the next number look like?

What will you be doing instead when [the problem] is no longer part of your life?

As you notice things getting better, what will you notice that you have been doing to make that happen?

What will [other kids, your mother, your teacher] say that you will be doing to accomplish X?

[use the ORS/CORS to] What will it take to move that line just a tiny bit? What will be different when the line moves here?

## **Solution building – (using exceptions)**

### **Questions to Elicit Exceptions:**

When does the problem not occur? Or When is the problem less noticeable?

What is different when the problem is not happening? Who is around? What are they saying and doing?

How do your parents and teachers treat you differently when the problem is not happening?

If your parents or teachers were here now, what would they say is different about you when the problem is not happening?

What is happening in your life that you want to keep happening?

Between now and next time, pay attention to times when the problem is a little less bad and what you are doing to make that happen.

Pay attention to the times you are able to resist the temptation to \_\_\_\_\_.

Notice the things that are happening in your life that you'd like to have more of.

### **Questions to Help Elaborate on Exceptions:**

I'm puzzled. How did you manage not to hit your brother that time? He was really after you and you managed to walk away. How did you do it?

How did you resist the temptation to \_\_\_\_\_ ?

What is different about science class where you are passing?

Who is around when the problem is not happening as much?

How do you explain this unusual event? How did you make it happen?

[When client says, “I don't know” in response to elaboration attempts]

That makes sense. What do you think it could be? What do you think your mom/teacher/brother would say?

Between now and next week, pay attention to the times when you are able to make yourself come to school even though you feel like skipping. Try really hard to notice what you do differently on those days.

### **Questions to Expand Exceptions (greater frequency/other contexts):**

How can you do more of what you are doing that is helpful?

What do you think would happen if you did [successful strategies] in [less successful context]?

What will it take to continue this strategy?

## **Problem busting – (when client doesn't perceive exceptions or problem pattern is paramount)**

### **Questions to Help Detail the Problem/Difficulty:**

[Note: some of these questions may be used above as well]

If I were a fly on the wall, what would I see?

If I had a video camera, what would I see?

Tell me about the last time [the problem] happened.

WHEN does [the problem] occur (e.g., is it most noticeable at different times of day, different days of the week, etc.?)

WHERE does [the problem] occur (e.g., in one class more than another, more often at home or at school, etc.?)

WHO is usually around when [the problem] happens (e.g., certain peers, teachers, older or younger kids, etc.?)

WHAT happens right BEFORE and right AFTER [the problem] (e.g., what kinds of activities are you doing; what are others doing and saying before the problem; how do adults and peers typically respond, what next, how does the problem end?)

What happens first? Then what happens? Then what?

How often does this happen?

How long does it last?

Who is usually around when it happens? What do they do and say?

What stops it? How does it end?

How is this a problem? What bad things happen because of it?

### **Questions to Explore Previously Tried Solutions:**

What have you done about the problem so far?

How did this work?

What have others told you to do to solve the problem?

What other things have you thought about trying?

Of all the things you have tried, what worked even a little bit or for a little while?

How have you handled similar problems in the past? Do you see any place for those ideas with this problem?

### **Questions to Interrupt Ineffective Solution Attempts (Do Something Different)**

Use compliments about the client's ideas and knowledge to encourage the client.

Wonder with the client about what they might do differently during the "problem time."

Encourage them to think of things that are fun, exciting, and different (unleash creativity)

If client does not generate ideas, you may want to suggest a task or give an observation task.

## **Once change occurs –**

### **Questions to Empower Change:**

How did you pull this off?

How did you decide that now was the right time for change?

How are you different now that you've made this change?

What else is different now that you've made this change?

How is this change helpful to you?

How will you make sure that this change keeps going?

What does this say about the kind of person you are, that you were able to make this change?