

ANXIETY · WORKSHEET

Circle of Control Worksheet

Sort your worries into what you can control, what you can influence, and what is out of your hands, then put your energy where it actually makes a difference.

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What this tool does

Much of anxiety comes from pouring energy into things we cannot control. The circle of control is a simple, powerful way to redirect that energy. You picture three zones: an inner circle of things you can directly control, a middle ring of things you can influence but not control, and an outer ring of things outside your control entirely. Then you sort your worries into them.

What lands in your inner circle is usually smaller than anxiety suggests, but it is also where all your real power sits: your own actions, choices, effort, words, boundaries, how you respond, what you give your attention to. The middle ring holds things you can nudge but not dictate, like other people's decisions or how a project turns out: here the move is to take your best action, then release the result.

The outer ring holds the rest: the past, other people's feelings, the economy, the weather, what might happen. Worrying about these changes nothing and drains the energy you need elsewhere.

The point is not to stop caring about things you cannot control. It is to stop spending your limited energy trying to control them, and to channel it instead into the actions that are genuinely yours. This is closely tied to acceptance: making peace with uncertainty in the outer ring while taking committed action in the inner one. People who practice this consistently tend to feel calmer and more effective, because they stop fighting unwinnable battles and start moving on the ones they can win.

How to use it

- 1 Start with the brain-dump**, listing every worry on your mind without sorting anything yet.
- 2 Once everything is listed**, sort each worry into one of the three zones: things you can control, things you can influence, and things out of your hands.
- 3 Be strict about the inner circle**, which holds only your own actions, choices, words, effort, and responses. It is smaller than anxiety suggests, and it is where all your real power sits.
- 4 For the influence ring**, decide your best action and practice releasing the result. You can nudge these things but not dictate them.
- 5 To finish**, choose one concrete next action from your control list and one way to let go of an outer-ring item, then rate how much calmer you feel.

A COMPLETED EXAMPLE

My current worries: *The team restructure at work. My presentation on Thursday. Whether my sister liked her birthday gift. The rain forecast for the weekend hike.*

Things I can control: *How much I rehearse the presentation. Asking my manager one clear question about the restructure instead of guessing.*

Things I can influence: *How the presentation lands, by preparing well and keeping it short.*

Things I can't control: *The restructure decision. The weather. How my sister felt about the gift.*

The next action I'll take: *Rehearse the presentation out loud twice on Wednesday evening.*

How I'll let go: *When the restructure pops into my head, remind myself the decision is made above my pay grade and come back to what I'm doing.*

How much calmer do I feel? (0-10): *7*

1 What's weighing on you?

Brain-dump the worries on your mind right now.

My current worries (one per line)

2 In my control

What can you directly control? These are your actions, choices, effort, words, and responses.

Things I can control

3 I can influence (but not control)

Things you can nudge but not dictate. Take your best action, then let go of the result.

Things I can influence

4 Out of my control

Things outside your hands entirely. Practice letting these go.

Things I can't control

5 Focus your energy

Turn the inner circle into action and release the outer one.

The next action I'll take on something in my control

How I'll let go of something out of my control

How much calmer do I feel? (0-10)

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Circle one.

Looking back

Looking across several uses, what share of your worries landed outside your control? Most people are surprised how large the outer ring is.

Which worry keeps reappearing in the outer ring, and what would genuinely letting it go look like this week?

When you took the action from your inner circle, what happened to the worry attached to it?

Sources

- Harris R. The Happiness Trap: How to Stop Struggling and Start Living. Trumpeter; 2008.
- Covey SR. The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. Free Press; 1989.

Spending energy on things you can't control?

A therapist can help you refocus and ease anxiety with proven methods. Free to search our directory. Start at psychology.com/therapist.

This worksheet is an educational self-help tool, not therapy or a diagnosis. If anxiety is frequent or interfering with your life, please reach out to a licensed mental-health professional. In an emergency, call your local emergency number or, in the US, call or text 988.

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