Expanded Guide: Worry About the Future

The Stoic Fellowship Meeting Guide · Everyday Problems

For facilitators. Read before the meeting, after the Meeting Primer (about 15 minutes).

The Meeting Primer introduces the reading and key terms, and the meeting guide gives the sequence and timing. This guide explains what each part of the meeting is for and what to listen for.

What this meeting is for

This session turns the judgments-and-emotions topic of *What Is Stoicism?* toward the future. Like *Anger*, it asks what we add to events; here the event hasn't happened yet.

A participant should leave able to tell planning from worrying, and to rehearse a setback calmly in a few minutes. Two points matter most:

- **Some fears arrive.** Seneca's test isn't "it won't happen." It's "is it certain?" and, if it comes, "how will I meet it?"
- **Rehearsal ends in a plan.** Imagining the worst helps only when it's calm, brief, and finishes with a response. Rumination replays the fear without one.

Leading it Socratically

- **Walk the worry forward.** "If that's true, what follows? And what would you do then?" Most worries become manageable when followed step by step.
- **Keep examples modest.** A presentation or a difficult conversation works better than a health scare.
- **Respect real fears.** Don't argue someone out of a serious concern. Preparing for real risks is the point.

The discussion: five questions

Each question has a purpose, two follow-ups, and something to listen for. The meeting guide prints the first follow-up as the probe.

1. Think of past worries. How many happened the way you feared?

Purpose: test Seneca's claim against experience.

- What did the worry do for you while you waited?

- When a worry did come true, was it as bad as you imagined?

Listen for how rarely the imagined version matches what happened, and how much the waiting cost.

2. Seneca asks whether the evil is certain. Is that comforting, or dismissive?

Purpose: take the objection seriously.

- If the feared thing is likely, what then?
- When would “it may not happen” be unhelpful to hear?

Listen for both sides. Many fears never arrive; some do. Seneca’s deeper point is that suffering in advance doesn’t help either way.

3. What’s the difference between planning and worrying?

Purpose: draw the practical line.

- How do you know when planning has turned into circling?
- What does a finished plan feel like?

Listen for the idea that planning ends with an action, while worrying returns to the same picture.

4. How could calmly imagining the worst help rather than hurt?

Purpose: introduce the premeditation of adversity.

- What keeps the rehearsal calm and brief?
- Has preparing for a setback ever helped you meet one?

Listen for the conditions: calm, brief, ending in a plan. Without them, imagining the worst is just more worry.

5. If that fear were smaller, what would you do differently this week?

Purpose: show what worry costs in action.

- What’s one step you’ve been putting off?
- What would you need to believe to take it?

Listen for actions that worry has been blocking. Often the step is small.

Going deeper, for a room that is ready: When is worry a useful signal to act, and when is it suffering in advance? Some members will defend worry as motivation. Ask whether the motivation could come from a plan instead.

The practice: rehearse a setback

> Next week you present a proposal to people whose opinion matters to you. You keep picturing yourself losing your place and the room going quiet.

Use the case, or invite each person to choose their own modest worry. Give two quiet minutes for the first two steps, then take two or three answers at each.

1. Picture it. Calmly imagine one thing going wrong. Ask people to picture it plainly, as if watching it happen to someone else.

> **Sample response:** "I lose my place on the third slide and can't remember what comes next."

2. Plan. How would I respond well? Ask for a concrete, calm response.

> **Sample response:** "I'd pause, look at my notes, and say, 'Let me find my place.' Then I'd go on."

3. Release. Let it go and return to what is happening now. Ask how the fear feels after a plan. Share the plan, not the fear.

> **Sample response:** "It feels smaller. I know what I'd do."

The reveal (if time allows). Halfway through, someone asks a question you can't answer. Did your plan cover it? What would responding well look like now? Point out that the same calm applies: "That's a good question. I'll find out and get back to you."

Misunderstandings to watch for

IF YOU HEAR…	THE MISUNDERSTANDING	TRY
"So I shouldn't worry about anything."	Stoicism dismisses real risks.	"Some fears do arrive. What would preparing for one look like?"
"Imagining the worst will make it worse."	Premeditation is rumination.	It's calm, brief, and ends in a plan.
"Worry shows I care."	Worry is a form of care.	"What would care do instead?"
"Positive thinking is the answer."	The Stoic aim is optimism.	The aim is readiness, not a rosy forecast.

Facilitating the people in the room

WHO	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	TRY
The spiraler	One fear leads to another.	“If that’s true, what follows? And what would you do then?”
The dismisser	“Just don’t worry about it.”	“Some fears do arrive. How would you prepare?”
The fixer	Offers solutions to someone’s worry.	“What has helped you with something similar?”
The quiet one	Listening but not speaking.	Offer an easy entry: “What’s one small thing that could go wrong?”

When a fear is serious. If someone names a fear about health, money, or family, acknowledge it and don’t press for details. Offer the shared case. The group is for philosophy, not therapy; if someone seems to be struggling, check in privately afterward.

Questions you may be asked

“Isn’t this just pessimism?” No. The rehearsal is brief and ends in a plan. Its aim is readiness and calm, not expecting the worst.

“What if the worst does happen?” Then the preparation helps. Seneca wasn’t promising that fears are groundless; he was asking us not to suffer them twice.

“Do I need to read anything?” No. Newcomers need no preparation. The Meeting Primer is optional.

Adapting the meeting

- **Mostly newcomers.** Use the shared case for the practice, and give question 3 extra time.
- **Mostly experienced members.** Invite people to rehearse their own modest worry, and leave room for the going-deeper question.
- **Online.** Keep the quiet minutes; ask people to stay on camera if they’re comfortable.
- **A large group.** Share plans in pairs, then hear one from each pair.
- **Short on time.** Skip the reveal or shorten question 5.

Adapted from the Kit’s meeting guide, Worry About the Future.