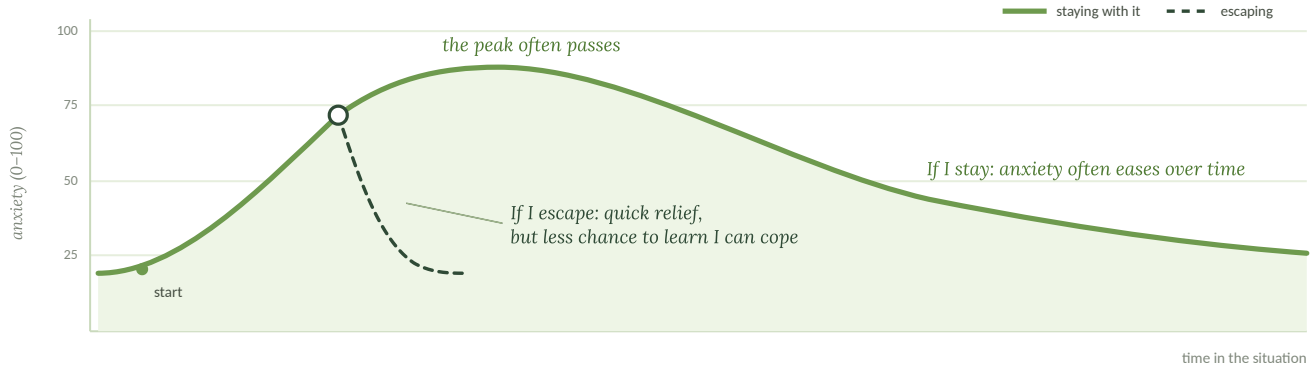


The Anxiety Curve

PSYCHOEDUCATION · EXPOSURE AND LEARNING

What can happen to anxiety when we stay with it, and when we escape

Anxiety tends to rise when we face something we fear. It feels as though it will keep climbing, but for many people it reaches a peak and gradually eases. Escaping brings quick relief, yet it can also make the situation feel more threatening next time.



1

Anxiety rises

The body's alarm switches on. This is uncomfortable, but not dangerous.

2

It feels like it won't stop

Our minds often predict it will keep climbing, or that we won't cope.

3

The peak often passes

For many people, anxiety levels off and eases, even without doing anything.

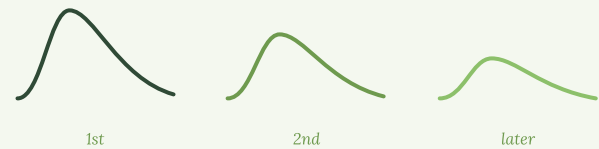
4

Learning happens

Staying can show us the feared outcome didn't happen, or that we coped.

Across repeated practice

the peak often becomes lower and easier to ride



What matters most isn't how low anxiety falls in one go, but what you learn. Research suggests learning can still happen even when anxiety stays fairly high.

01 My practice log

rate anxiety 0 (none) to 100 (most imaginable)

Situation what I faced	Predicted peak	Before start	Peak actual	End when I finished	What I learned about the situation, or me
	/100	/100	/100	/100	
	/100	/100	/100	/100	
	/100	/100	/100	/100	
	/100	/100	/100	/100	
	/100	/100	/100	/100	

Go at your own pace

Practise gradually, ideally with your psychologist's guidance. Choose steps that are challenging but manageable. It's okay to pause and come back to a step.

To bring to my next session

SOURCES

Craske, M. G., Treanor, M., Conway, C. C., Zbozinek, T., & Vervliet, B. (2014). Maximizing exposure therapy: An inhibitory learning approach. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 58, 10–23. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2014.04.006> · Hofmann, S. G., & Hay, A. C. (2018). Rethinking avoidance: Toward a balanced approach to avoidance in treating anxiety disorders. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 55, 14–21.