

The Avoidance Ladder

Small Steps Towards What Matters

Avoidance can make us feel safer in the short term, but it often keeps us stuck. This ladder can help you gradually face what you've been avoiding, one manageable step at a time.

What Is an Avoidance Ladder?

An avoidance ladder helps you gradually face situations you tend to avoid, in a safe and manageable way. Avoidance can provide short-term relief, but it often keeps anxiety going. By taking small, steady steps towards what feels difficult, you can build confidence, reduce fear and create new, healthier patterns.

"You don't have to do it all at once. Small steps still move you forward."

Tips for Success

- 1 Start with something that feels only mildly difficult.
- 2 Move up the ladder gradually.
- 3 Stay with the situation long enough to allow anxiety to reduce.
- 4 Repeat each step until it feels easier.
- 5 Be kind and patient with yourself.

When to Use This

Use this ladder for a specific fear or avoidance pattern — a place, activity, conversation or situation you've been putting off. Working through it with a therapist can help if the steps feel too difficult to face alone.

A Gentle Reminder

Progress is rarely a straight line. Moving back down a step, or staying on one step longer than expected, is a normal part of the process — not a setback.

Before You Begin

Choose one avoidance pattern to focus on. Rate each situation by how difficult it currently feels, from mild unease to significant anxiety.

MORE DIFFICULT

Usually more anxiety

STEP 10

STEP 9

STEP 8

STEP 7

STEP 6

STEP 5

STEP 4

STEP 3

STEP 2

STEP 1

Easier · Usually less anxiety

MORE DIFFICULT

Usually more anxiety

Describe the situation:

Describe the situation:

Describe the situation:

Describe the situation:

Describe the situation:

Describe the situation:

Describe the situation:

Describe the situation:

Describe the situation:

Describe the situation:

Easier · Usually less anxiety



NOTICE PROGRESS

Each step builds confidence.



BRAVER STEPS

Courage grows with practice.



MORE OPTIONS

You'll be able to do more of what matters.