

Understanding My Avoidance

A FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS

What avoidance gives me now, and what it takes over time

Avoidance usually makes sense in the moment: it brings relief from something difficult. Over time, though, it can quietly narrow the life we live. Looking at what it does for you, with curiosity rather than judgement, can be a first step towards choosing differently.

THE TRADE-OFF

Relief is quick. The cost is slow.

Relief arrives within minutes. The costs tend to come later, and quietly build.



01

What am I avoiding?

Situations, people or tasks, and inner experiences too

- ☐ Places or situations
 ☐ People or conversations
 ☐ Tasks or decisions
 ☐ Feelings
 ☐ Thoughts or memories
 ☐ Body sensations

Subtler ways I avoid, such as distraction, reassurance-seeking, over-preparing or leaving early

02

RIGHT NOW

What does avoiding it give me?

- ☐ Relief
 ☐ Less anxiety
 ☐ Feeling safer
 ☐ No conflict

03

LATER ON

What does it cost me?

- ☐ Fears grow
 ☐ Feeling stuck
 ☐ Missed chances
 ☐ Self-criticism

04

What becomes smaller in my life?

Tick the areas avoidance is touching

☐ Relationships	☐ Work or study	☐ Health	☐ Fun and rest	☐ Growth	☐ Values and direction
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What I've stopped doing, or stopped hoping for

05

What would become possible if avoidance were less in charge?

What would you do, who would you see, and what would you let yourself want?

One small, manageable step I could take

Is it working for me?

In the long run, where is avoidance taking me?



Not all avoidance is a problem

Stepping away from real danger, or taking a planned break, can be wise. The question is whether avoidance is protecting you, or keeping your life smaller than you'd like.

What the research suggests: avoidance tends to bring short-term relief while maintaining fear and distress over time, and patterns of avoiding difficult inner experiences have been linked to a range of psychological difficulties (Hayes et al., 1996). Some avoidance can also be adaptive, so a balanced, flexible approach matters (Hofmann & Hay, 2018). If this brings up strong feelings, go gently and consider exploring it with your psychologist.

SOURCES

Hayes, S. C., Wilson, K. G., Gifford, E. V., Follette, V. M., & Strosahl, K. (1996). Experiential avoidance and behavioral disorders: A functional dimensional approach to diagnosis and treatment. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 64(6), 1152–1168.

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.