Regulation or Avoidance?

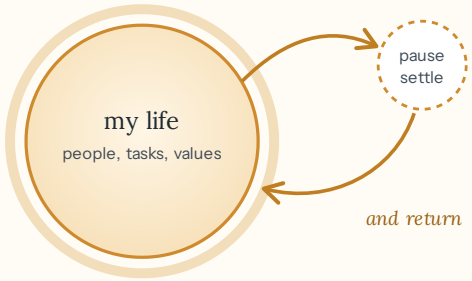
LEARN · THE FUNCTION, NOT THE FORM

Is this strategy helping me return to life, or helping me escape from it?

The same action can be regulation or avoidance. What matters is its function: what it does for you, and what happens next. Avoidance brings real, quick relief, which is why it is so human and so easy to repeat. Over time, though, it can keep fears in place and shrink the space you have to live in (Hayes et al., 1996; Salkovskis, 1991).

Step back to come back

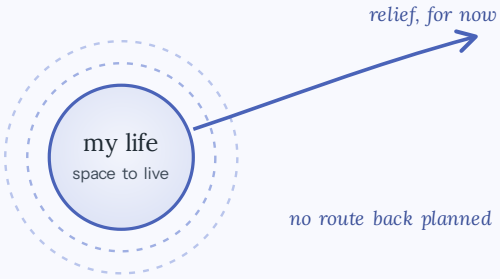
regulation



a short, chosen pause that helps me re-engage;
over time, capacity can grow

Step away to stay away

avoidance



quick relief that keeps me from what matters;
over time, life can narrow

01 Two ways a strategy can work

most sit somewhere in between

Regulation		Avoidance
To settle enough to re-engage	*What it's for*	To make the feeling stop
A pause, with a rough plan to return	*How long*	Open-ended, with no return in mind
Makes room for it, or eases it	*With the feeling*	Pushes it away or numbs it
More able to face the situation	*Straight afterwards*	Relief, sometimes with dread or guilt
Confidence and capacity can grow	*Over weeks*	The feared thing may feel bigger; life can shrink
Chosen, flexible	*How it feels to choose*	Automatic, hard not to do

02 The same action can be either

it depends on what it's for

A walk

regulation: to clear my head before the hard conversation

avoidance: so the conversation never happens

Scrolling

regulation: a planned five-minute break, then back to work

avoidance: hours that keep the task out of mind

An early night

regulation: rest because I'm genuinely depleted

avoidance: sleep as a way to switch the day off

Not all stepping back is avoidance

Rest, pacing with illness or pain, planned breaks, sleep, saying no, and leaving an unsafe situation can all be wise and protective.

Avoidance isn't a character flaw

It is a learned way of getting relief. Noticing it, without judgement, is what makes a different choice possible.

A note on the evidence. Across many studies, avoidance has been linked with more symptoms of anxiety, depression and related difficulties (Aldao et al., 2010). Most of that research is cross-sectional, so cause and effect are hard to separate. Researchers also argue that no strategy helps in every situation; what matters is how well it fits the moment, and whether we notice when it stops working (Bonanno & Burton, 2013).

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03 Check one strategy

tick a circle on each line

The strategy: _____ **When I use it:** _____

Why am I reaching for it?	*to settle so I can engage*	*to make the feeling stop*
Do I plan to come back to it?	*yes, roughly when*	*no, or not sure*
Afterwards, can I face things more?	*more able*	*less able*
Over weeks, is my life getting…	*bigger*	*smaller*
Does it fit what matters to me?	*fits my values*	*pulls me away*
Am I choosing it?	*chosen*	*automatic*

Right now, this strategy is mostly: ○ regulation ○ a mix ○ avoidance *no wrong answers here*

04 Sort my strategies

when does it help, and when does it tip over?

My strategy	When it helps me return	When it becomes escape	How I'll keep it on the regulation side

05 My return plan

step back to come back

When I notice _____

I will step back by _____ *for about* _____

and then I will return to _____

If I don't return, a gentle next step is _____

Linking a specific moment to a specific action in an "if…, then…" plan can make follow-through more likely (Gollwitzer, 1999).

06 Reflection

what am I noticing?

What I've learned about my own patterns

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Bring to my next session

a strategy I'm unsure about, or one I'd like to change

_____

_____

_____

_____

SOURCES

Aldao, A., Nolen-Hoeksema, S., & Schweizer, S. (2010). Emotion-regulation strategies across psychopathology: A meta-analytic review. *Clinical Psychology Review, 30*(2), 217-237.

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