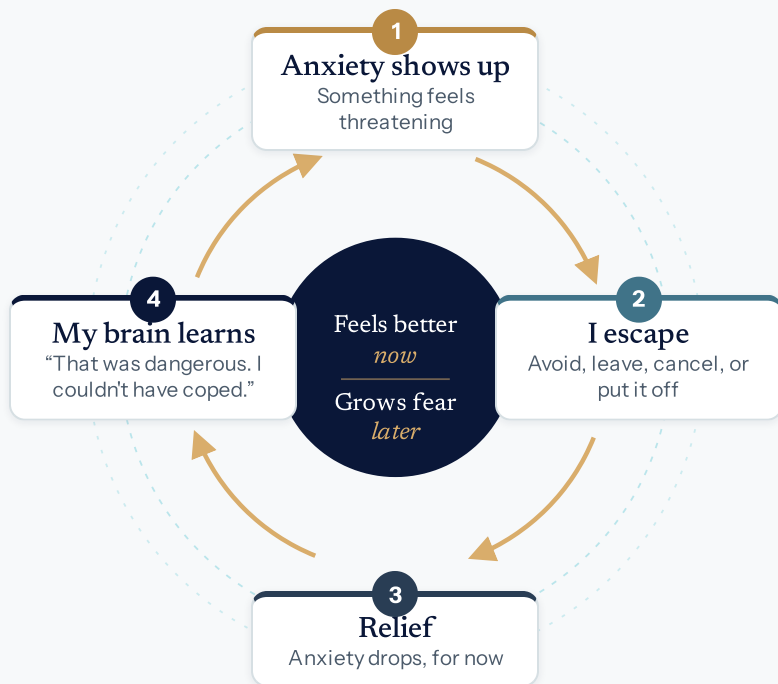


The Avoidance *Trap*

Avoiding what scares us feels like protection. But every escape teaches the brain the fear was right, and the anxiety gets a little bigger next time.



How the cycle works

When anxiety shows up, escaping brings quick relief. That relief is real, and it's exactly what keeps the cycle going: the brain links safety with getting away.

What avoidance never lets you find out:

- The feared outcome often doesn't happen.
- Anxiety peaks and then eases on its own.
- You can handle more than anxiety predicts.

The circle widens. Over time, avoidance tends to spread to similar places, people, and situations, and life can start to feel smaller.

Stepping out of the trap

- 1 **Name it.** Notice what you've been avoiding, and what you're afraid would happen.
- 2 **Build a ladder.** List related situations from easiest to hardest, and rate how anxious each makes you (0 to 10).
- 3 **Start low.** Choose a step that feels challenging but doable, around a 3 or 4.
- 4 **Stay with it.** Remain in the situation long enough for the anxiety to crest and begin to settle.
- 5 **Repeat, then climb.** Practice each step until it feels easier before moving up a rung.
- 6 **Check the evidence.** Afterward, compare what actually happened with what anxiety predicted.

My ladder

Write one situation per rung, easiest at 1 and hardest at 5. Rate each from 0 (calm) to 10 (most anxious), then start climbing at rung 1.

5	_____	__ /10
4	_____	__ /10
3	_____	__ /10
2	_____	__ /10
1	_____	__ /10

Go at your pace.

This isn't about forcing yourself into unsafe or overwhelming situations. Small, steady steps teach your brain something new: *"I can feel anxious and still handle it."* A therapist can help you build and climb your ladder.

