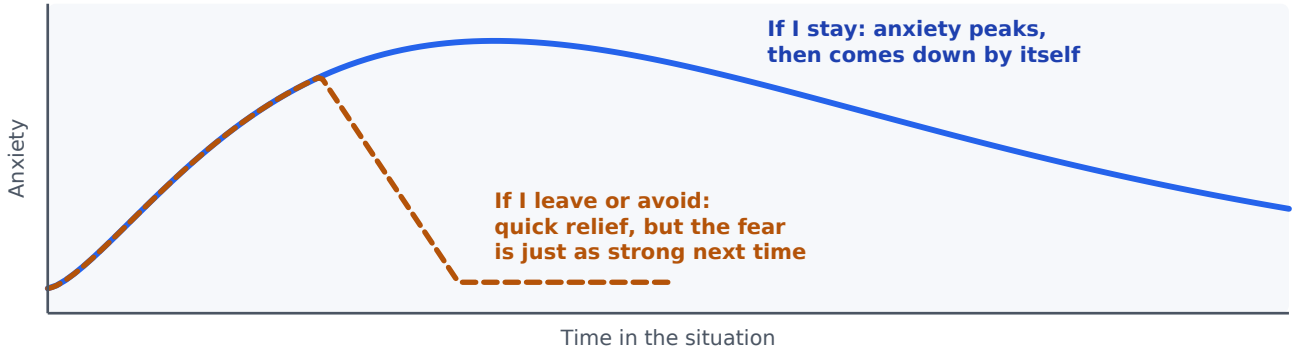
Avoidance: why it keeps anxiety going

How avoiding something brings relief now and more anxiety later.

Getting away from something frightening is a natural thing to do, and the relief is immediate. That is why avoidance is easy to fall into. Over time it makes anxiety worse.



What avoidance teaches your brain

- "That was dangerous, and I only just got away." The alarm is confirmed.
- "I cannot cope with that." Confidence shrinks a little each time.
- "Avoiding works." So next time the urge to avoid is stronger, and it spreads to more situations.

What staying teaches your brain

- Anxiety rises, peaks and comes down by itself, even if you do nothing to make it stop.
- The thing you feared usually does not happen, or you cope with it better than you expected.
- Each time you stay, the next time is a little easier.

Avoidance is not always obvious

- [ ] Putting things off, or making excuses
- [ ] Only doing something with a "safe" person
- [ ] Keeping busy so there is no time to think
- [ ] Drinking or scrolling to take the edge off
- [ ] Leaving early, or arriving late
- [ ] Going, but not really taking part

Where to start

Start with something that feels manageable but not easy, and stay with it long enough for the anxiety to begin to drop. The biggest fears can wait until later.

My notes and questions

© 2026 Patrick O'Hare Therapy · patrickoharetherapy.com
This handout supports your therapy. It does not replace professional advice.

What am I avoiding?

List what you have been avoiding, and how much each thing matters to you.

Name _____ Date _____

Avoidance builds up slowly, so it is easy to miss how much you have stopped doing. List what you are staying away from, how anxious it would make you, and how much it matters to you to get it back.

What I avoid	Anxiety if I did it (0 to 100)	How much I want it back (0 to 10)
Places and situations		
Activities		
People, or kinds of contact		
Body sensations, thoughts or memories		

What has avoiding cost me?

The one I would most like to tackle first

© 2026 Patrick O'Hare Therapy · patrickoharetherapy.com
This handout supports your therapy. It does not replace professional advice.