

Identifying Avoidance Behaviors

A Self-Awareness Tool for Reducing Anxiety and Regaining Control

What This Worksheet Is For

Avoidance is a short-term strategy that often leads to long-term problems. Whether it's avoiding social situations, tasks, thoughts, or places, the more we avoid, the stronger our fear or discomfort becomes. Avoidance robs us of growth, independence, and meaningful experiences.

This worksheet is designed to help you:

- Identify situations you commonly avoid
- Understand how avoidance affects your life
- Recognize the emotions, thoughts, and urges that lead to avoidance
- Begin shifting toward approach-oriented behavior through exposure or small actions

Clinicians can use this worksheet in both individual and group settings to promote awareness, challenge maladaptive behavior patterns, and develop exposure or behavioral activation goals collaboratively.

Step 1: Spotting Avoidance in Daily Life

Think about your daily or weekly routines. Where do you find yourself pulling away, making excuses, or sidestepping discomfort?

List 3–5 situations you tend to avoid due to anxiety, stress, fear, or discomfort.

| Situation You Avoid | What Do You Tell Yourself? | What Emotion Do You Feel? |
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Step 2: How Avoidance Impacts Your Life

Choose two of the situations above. Reflect on how avoidance has affected your life—emotionally, socially, physically, or professionally.

Situation 1: _____

How has avoiding it affected your life?

Situation 2: _____

How has avoiding it affected your life?

Step 3: Identify Your Avoidance Patterns

What do you usually feel right before avoiding something?

What thoughts run through your mind before you avoid?

What do you typically do instead of facing the situation?

How do you feel immediately after avoiding the situation?

How do you feel later, when you think about what you avoided?

Step 4: Replacing Avoidance with Action

To reduce avoidance, we start with small steps—you don't need to face your biggest fear today. Just notice the pattern and commit to a small, meaningful shift.

Situation: _____

1. Why do you want to stop avoiding this? What could you gain if you faced it?

2. What is one small step you could take toward facing it?

3. What coping strategy could support you during this action?

4. When will you do this step?

5. How will you reward or acknowledge yourself for facing it, even in a small way?

Pro Tip

Use this worksheet to identify functional impairments tied to avoidance. Pair it with exposure hierarchies, values-based action planning, or behavioral experiments. Encourage clients to reflect on both the short-term relief and long-term cost of avoidance, and support them in building confidence through incremental, repeated exposures.