

What you have been avoiding: an audit

Avoidance shrinks the world a bit at a time. An audit names the shape of it, without asking you to change anything yet.

Most of what gets called avoidance is reasonable. It protects you from something difficult. The cost is that the difficult thing usually sits next to something you care about, and the avoidance takes both. This worksheet helps you see the pattern, so you and your clinician have something to work with.

i For use alongside therapy, not as a substitute. This worksheet is for naming a pattern, not for stepping into what you have been avoiding. The smallest steps belong in a conversation with a clinician.

WHAT WE MEAN BY AVOIDANCE

Anything you do, or do not do, to keep anxiety smaller in the short term.

Avoidance can be obvious: not going to the meeting, leaving the party early, skipping the appointment. Avoidance can also be quiet: scrolling instead of replying, rehearsing instead of speaking, asking someone else to make the call. The form varies. The function is the same. Something would feel hard, so you do not do it, or you do it in a smaller way.

Research on anxiety treatment describes how safety behaviours and avoidance, while reducing anxiety in the moment, are associated with maintaining anxiety over time (Shayani et al., 2025; Craske et al., 2022). The audit below is the first step in seeing your own pattern. It is not the step of changing the pattern. That work belongs in therapy.

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION

Things you decide not to do for good reasons

Not going to a loud party because you are autistic and the noise is exhausting. Not driving at night because your eyes are not what they were. Not taking on a third job because rest matters. These are choices. They protect what matters.

AVOIDANCE THAT GROWS THE THING

Things you do not do because the anxiety has slowly taken them

Used to go to the cafe, now you do not. Used to make the call yourself, now you ask someone else. Used to drive that road, now you take the long way. The world has quietly got smaller, and the anxiety has stayed the same.

HOW TO USE THE AUDIT ON PAGE 2

- 1 List, do not solve**
For each row, name a situation you have been avoiding. Do not plan the response. Just name it.
- 2 Name both sides**
What does this avoidance cost you, and what does it protect you from? Both are real. Both belong on the page.
- 3 Bring it to a session**
Possible small steps are for thinking aloud in therapy. They are not a homework task to do alone.

FOUR SHAPES AVOIDANCE TENDS TO TAKE

When you are filling in the audit, it can help to know that avoidance is broader than not going somewhere. People sometimes miss their own pattern because they are looking for the obvious shape and missing the quieter ones.

SITUATIONAL

Not going at all

Skipping the meeting, declining the dinner, cancelling the appointment, not booking the thing in the first place.

BEHAVIOURAL

Going, but smaller

Leaving early, staying at the edge of the room, not contributing in the discussion, keeping a quick exit ready.

COGNITIVE

Going, but not arriving

Scrolling on your phone, mentally rehearsing instead of listening, distracting yourself out of the moment.

SAFETY BEHAVIOUR

Going, but with a backup

Bringing the friend who has to come, sitting near the door, checking the route, taking the medication just in case.

REMEMBER Naming what you have been avoiding is not the same as failing to face it. The audit is a description, not a verdict.

Avoidance audit

Eight rows is enough.

One situation per row. If you cannot fill a column, leave it. The audit is more useful when it is honest and partial than when it is complete and tidy.

i For use alongside therapy, not as a substitute. Possible small steps are for thinking aloud with your clinician, not for trying alone.

#	SITUATION	WHAT YOU HAVE BEEN AVOIDING (OR DOING SMALLER)	WHAT IT COSTS YOU	WHAT IT PROTECTS YOU FROM
	EXAMPLE Team Friday drinks	going at all, or leaving after one	feeling outside the team, missing the easy bits	small talk, feeling not enough
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				

IF A COLUMN IS HARD TO FILL

For “what it costs you”

Think about what the avoidance has slowly taken: a friendship, a piece of work, a part of the day, a sense of being capable.

For “what it protects you from”

Be specific about the feeling you would have if you did the thing. Often the worst feeling is not catastrophic, but unbearable in a quieter way.

WHEN THE AUDIT IS FILLED IN

Bring it into a session. The smallest steps are a conversation, not a self-prescribed task.

Avoidance work is one of the more sensitive pieces of therapy. The audit gives a clinician something concrete to start from. If you have not booked yet, the Meet and Greet is a short call to see if we are the right fit.

MEET AND GREET

Free
15 minutes
Online or in-person
No obligation