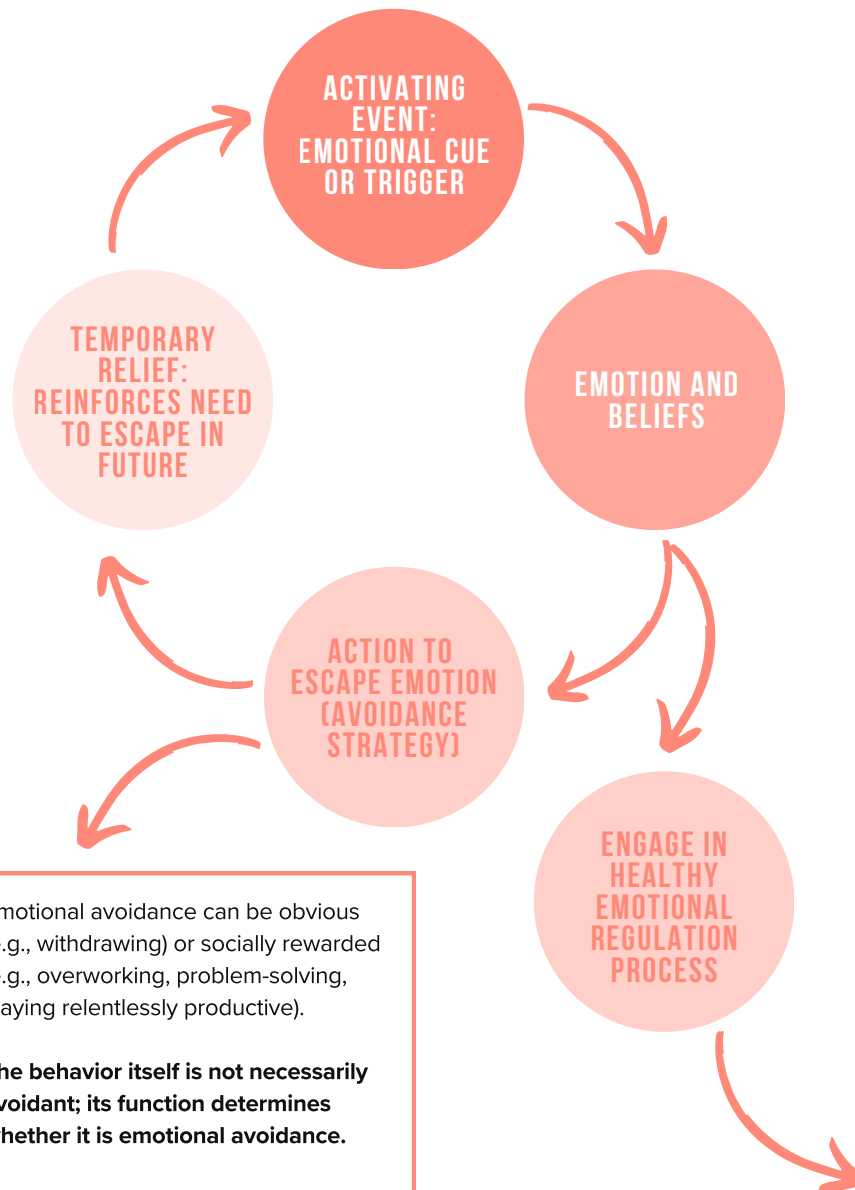


EMOTIONAL RESPONSE CYCLE



Emotional avoidance can be obvious (e.g., withdrawing) or socially rewarded (e.g., overworking, problem-solving, staying relentlessly productive).

The behavior itself is not necessarily avoidant; its function determines whether it is emotional avoidance.

Exercise, work, problem-solving, humor, or distraction can all be adaptive. They become avoidance strategies when their primary function is *"I need to make this feeling stop, get away from it, or prevent myself from experiencing it."*

See page 2 for common avoidance behaviors list.

Consider journaling/writing your responses to the following:

1. Identify the emotion

Recognize bodily sensations and label feelings (feelingswheel.com).

2. Engage curiously

Enquire within self with an attitude of curiosity, observe thoughts passing through mind, identify sources of those thoughts. Identify and replace distorted thinking if present.

3. Acceptance

Accept that you feel this way right now, even if it's uncomfortable. Engage in compassionate and validating self-talk – why does it make sense that you feel this way? What would you say to a friend/child who feels this way?

4. Externalize

View the emotion as a passing event instead of "who you are". Choose to see the emotion as temporary, not fixed within you.

5. Value based action

Take action that is consistent with your values and that is aligned with your needs, identify and access resources/support needed, remaining mindful of attempts to control what is uncontrollable .

EMOTIONAL RESPONSE CYCLE

EMOTIONAL AVOIDANCE BEHAVIORS

- **Distraction:** scrolling, TV, gaming, podcasts, constant stimulation, keeping busy
- **Overworking / overfunctioning:** filling time with tasks, productivity, caregiving, or responsibility
- **Intellectualizing:** analyzing or explaining emotions rather than experiencing them
- **Problem-solving:** immediately trying to “fix” the situation instead of tolerating the feeling
- **Rumination:** repeatedly thinking about an experience while avoiding direct contact with the underlying emotion
- **Emotional suppression:** holding back tears, minimizing feelings, “keeping it together”
- **Withdrawal:** isolating, going quiet, leaving conversations, avoiding people associated with difficult feelings
- **Avoiding vulnerable conversations:** changing the subject, joking, becoming vague, saying “I’m fine”
- **Reassurance seeking:** repeatedly asking others for certainty or validation to reduce emotional discomfort
- **Control behaviors:** excessive planning, checking, organizing, preparing, or trying to control other people’s responses
- **Perfectionism:** focusing on getting things “right” to avoid shame, criticism, disappointment, or inadequacy
- **Procrastination:** avoiding tasks that evoke anxiety, uncertainty, inadequacy, or fear of failure
- **People-pleasing:** prioritizing others’ needs to avoid guilt, rejection, conflict, or disapproval
- **Conflict avoidance:** agreeing, appeasing, withholding needs, or not setting boundaries
- **Self-criticism:** shifting from sadness, fear, hurt, or vulnerability into criticism and judgment of oneself
- **Anger or irritability:** moving into a more protective emotion when sadness, fear, shame, or hurt feels harder to tolerate
- **Numbing:** alcohol/substance use, overeating, shopping, sex, gambling, excessive exercise, sleep, or other behaviors used primarily to escape internal experience
- **Compulsive positivity:** reframing too quickly, focusing on gratitude, or insisting on “looking on the bright side”
- **Detachment:** feeling numb, disconnected, “nothing,” or operating on autopilot
- **Avoiding reminders:** avoiding places, photographs, music, belongings, topics, or situations that activate emotion
- **Relationship substitution:** immediately dating, seeking attention, or sexual connection after loss/rejection to avoid loneliness or grief
- **Constant socializing:** avoiding being alone because quiet creates space for difficult feelings
- **Somatic focus:** becoming preoccupied with physical sensations while having difficulty identifying the emotional experience
- **Sleep avoidance or oversleeping:** either staying awake to avoid quiet/internal experience or using sleep to disengage
- **Premature forgiveness / acceptance:** rushing toward “I’m over it” before anger, grief, or hurt has been processed