

When something is very frightening we want to prevent it happening again, so we might try to avoid any similar situations that might make us feel in danger. Avoidance can be a way to cope with difficult thoughts feelings and memories by avoiding anything that reminds us of it.

How do we avoid things?

There are lots of different ways people avoid things. These include:

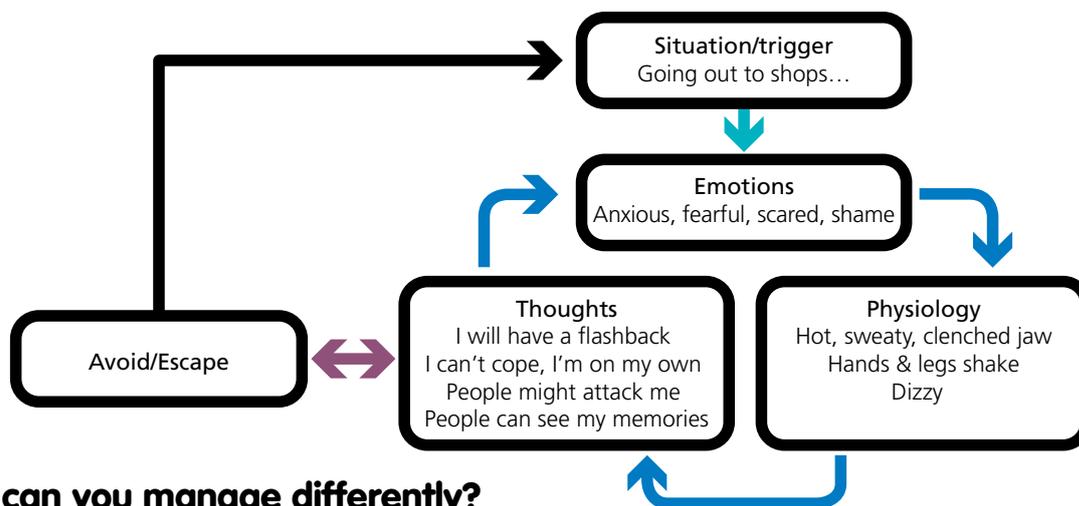
- Not going out
- Keeping away from people or not talking to others
- Doing things to try to block out memories and feelings
(this might include drinking alcohol, taking medication or self-harming)

Why is it unhelpful?

Avoidance can help to keep us safe (for example remembering that a certain food made you ill means we avoid eating it again) and numb painful or distressing emotions as a way to manage them.

However, when we rely on avoidance, it can also be unhelpful and lead to:

- Over-generalisation: one unpleasant experience can put you off something for a long time, but it doesn't mean everything is dangerous
- Missing out on fun and engaging in meaningful and fulfilling activities
- Feeling lonely and different to others
- When we avoid things, we never find out if they are safe or not. This helps maintain the fear



So how can you manage differently?

- Remembering that anxiety is a **normal** response due to what you have been through
- Challenging yourself to try to stay in uncomfortable situations – this is the main way to prove to yourself that nothing bad will happen
- Using relaxation exercises to help you keep calm and reduce your bodies anxiety response
- Talking to others about how you feel
- Avoidance can get in the way of engaging in activities and working towards your goals.
Developing an understanding of your values and what is important and meaningful to you can help to motivate you to work towards these.