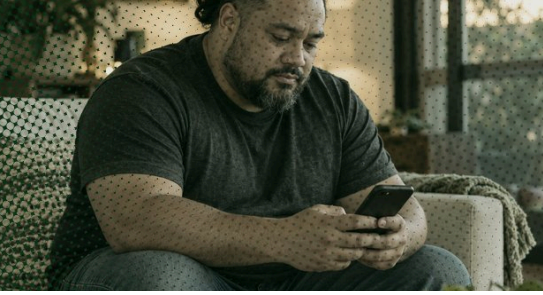
mindhealth FACT SHEET

EMOTIONAL AVOIDANCE · FACING WHAT WE FEEL

Emotional avoidance

What we won't feel tends to run us anyway, just from the shadows.



Pushing it down
Numbing, busy-ness, distraction

Steering around it
Avoiding people, places, reminders

The build-up
It leaks out sideways

01 The cost of not feeling

Avoiding painful feelings is human: we distract, stay busy, numb out, or steer around anything that might stir them up. It works in the short term, which is exactly why we keep doing it. But emotions we won't feel don't disappear; they build, leak out sideways as irritability, tension or low mood, and quietly shrink our lives as the list of things we avoid grows.

02 Feeling it is the way through

Feelings work like waves: allowed to rise, they peak and pass. Avoidance interrupts that natural fall, so the feeling (and the fear of it) sticks around. Turning towards emotions, in tolerable doses, teaches us they're uncomfortable but survivable. This is the heart of approaches like ACT: making room for what we feel, so we can do what matters anyway.

03 What genuinely helps

- Naming the feeling instead of numbing it
- Letting it rise and fall, in tolerable doses
- Noticing what you've been steering around
- Reducing avoidance gently, step by step
- ACT or similar therapy to build the skill

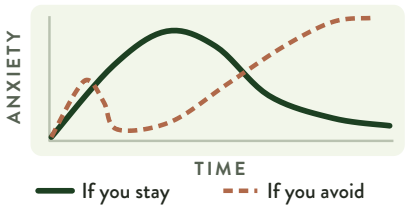
A PRACTICAL STORY

From pushing it down to letting it move through



THE PATTERN

Avoid vs allow



Avoiding brings quick relief but keeps the feeling alive. Allowing it lets the wave rise, peak and fall.

PRACTICAL TOOLKIT

Turn towards it

1. Name what you're feeling, plainly
2. Let it be there for ninety seconds
3. Notice it crest and start to pass

Feelings are survivable, even the big ones.

WHEN TO SEEK HELP

If avoiding feelings is narrowing your life or keeping you stuck, a psychologist can help. Ask your GP about a Mental Health Treatment Plan for rebates.

DID YOU KNOW?

Experiential avoidance, trying not to have unwanted feelings, is a central idea in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), developed by Steven Hayes and colleagues.

Hayes et al., Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 1996

THE KEY TAKEAWAY

You don't have to enjoy a feeling to let it pass. Let the wave rise instead of fighting it, and its intensity will crest and ease, even if the feeling itself takes longer.

Need support right now? Lifeline **13 11 14** · Emergency **000** — available 24/7. More options: **mindhealth.com.au/urgent-help**

TALK TO US WHEN YOU'RE READY

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