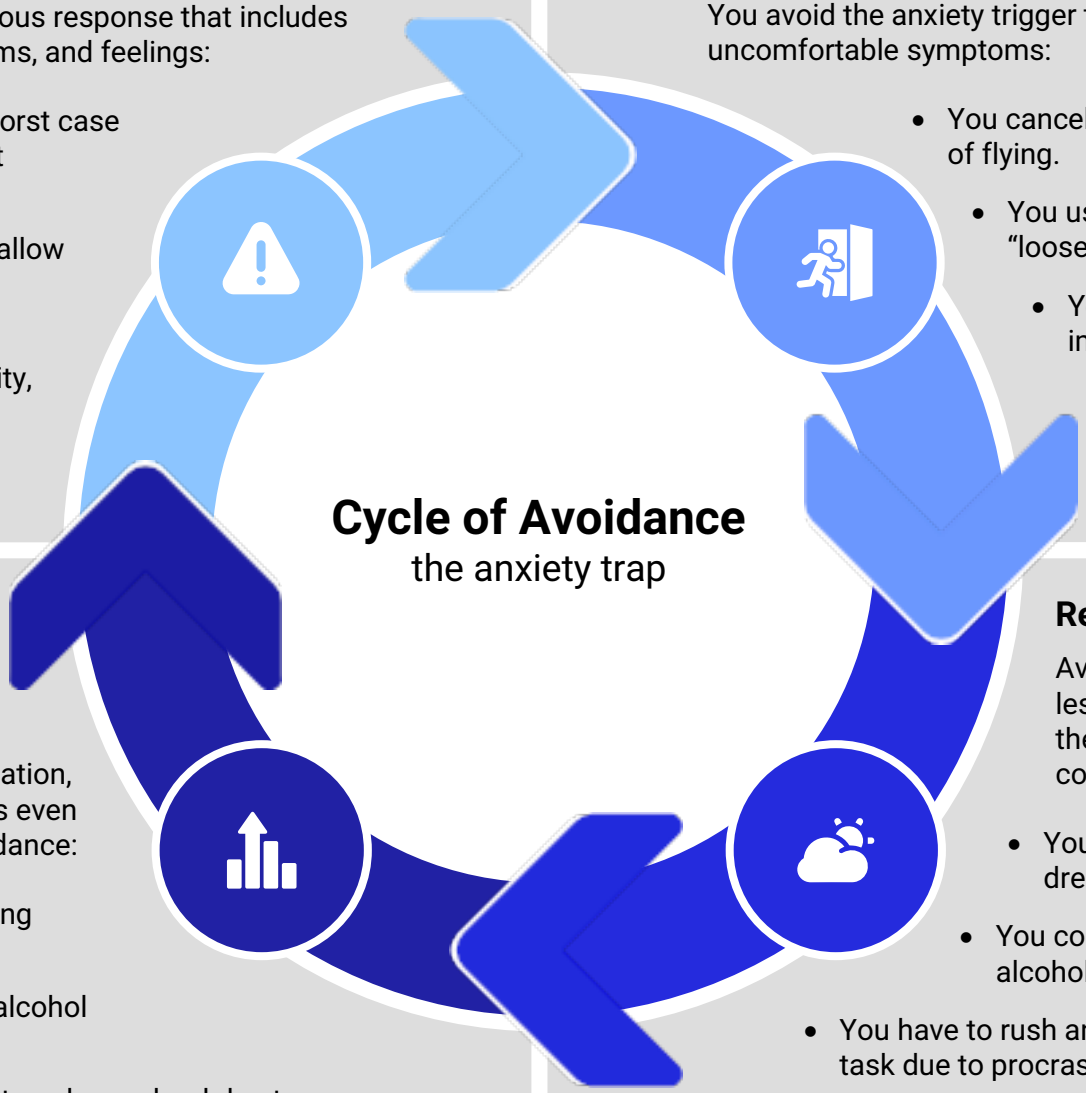
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Cycle of Avoidance

the anxiety trap



Anxiety

A situation triggers an anxious response that includes thoughts, physical symptoms, and feelings:

- **Thoughts:** fixation on worst case scenarios, doubts about ability to cope
- **Physical symptoms:** shallow breathing, racing heart, shaking, sweating
- **Feelings:** dread, irritability, restlessness

Avoidance

You avoid the anxiety trigger to escape the uncomfortable symptoms:

- You cancel a vacation due to fear of flying.
- You use drugs or alcohol to "loosen up" before socializing.
- You procrastinate on an important task.

Relief

Avoiding the anxiety trigger lessens the discomfort, but the relief is temporary and comes at a cost:

- You miss out on your dream vacation.
- You come to rely on drugs or alcohol to socialize.
- You have to rush an important task due to procrastinating.

Intensification

You begin to associate *avoidance* with *feeling better*. As a result, the next time you face a similar situation, the anxiety is worse and it's even more tempting to use avoidance:

- You give up on ever taking a vacation.
- You use *more* drugs or alcohol to socialize.
- You start doing poorly at work or school due to rushed projects, causing more anxiety and procrastination.

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