

# Confronting Avoidance

## ACT skill

It's normal to avoid or push away whatever feels intense or uncomfortable, but this only works for a while. Over time, resisting difficult thoughts and emotions makes them worse and drains your vitality. For a full and meaningful life, you must open to *all* of your inner experience—even the unpleasant parts.

### Commonly Avoided Experiences

Thoughts	Emotions	Sensations
Thoughts that evoke strong emotions, have disturbing content, or trigger anxiety	Any intense feelings, especially ones that are heavier states, such as guilt, anger, or grief	Physical discomfort or actual pain, particularly when part of a chronic condition

### Typical Avoidance Strategies

Distraction	Denial	Projection	Opting Out
While useful in small doses, distraction quickly becomes a way of resisting what you're experiencing. Examples include excessively watching TV, checking your phone, or overworking.	This involves pushing away difficult internal states so you don't have to acknowledge or deal with them. Denial can work over the short term, but it soon traps you in a fantasy world of your own making.	When you don't like what you're feeling, you may externalize it onto others. This allows you to avoid taking ownership of your feelings, viewing someone else as the problem instead.	If you're unwilling to confront tough emotions, you may avoid people, places, and situations that are likely to bring up uncomfortable feelings.

### 1. Name what you are avoiding.

It's common to try to avoid or suppress unpleasant thoughts, emotions, or sensations. Name what you push away most (e.g., anger, physical pain, difficult thought, etc.):

What's the cost of avoiding this and how could you benefit from confronting it?

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## 2. Examine your limiting beliefs.

Your beliefs about your inner experience affect your willingness to be present to it. Write down two beliefs related to what you listed in the previous step, such as the belief that certain emotions or sensations are dangerous, wrong, or proof of weakness.

1.

2.

Are these beliefs 100% true? If not, what would be a more balanced view?

## 3. Welcome your difficult experiences.

Opening to difficult experiences requires patience and an ongoing commitment. Identify a situation that often brings up the undesired thought, emotion, or sensation you previously identified:

Describe two ways you can welcome this experience the next time it arises. This might be as simple as resisting distraction, allowing yourself to feel an emotion, choosing not to flee the situation, staying present to physical discomfort, or something else.

1.

2.