The Anxiety Avoidance Loop

Why we put things off — and how to break free of the pattern.

What Is the Anxiety Avoidance Loop?

The Anxiety Avoidance Loop is a cycle that keeps anxiety going — and often leads to procrastination.
 Here's how it works:

1. A task triggers anxiety

    ○   Example: "I need to send that email."

    ○   You start thinking about all the possible outcomes, mistakes, or discomfort it might bring.

2. You avoid the task

    ○   Avoidance gives *temporary relief*. You distract yourself with something easier or more pleasant.

3. Relief reinforces avoidance

    ○   Your brain learns: *Avoiding this makes me feel better.*

4. Anxiety increases over time

    ○   The longer you delay, the bigger and scarier the task feels. The guilt and pressure build.

5. Procrastination becomes the default

    ○   Tasks pile up, anxiety grows, and it's harder to break the cycle.

How It Connects to Procrastination

Procrastination isn't just "laziness" — it's often an *anxiety management strategy.* Avoidance feels good in the short term because it takes away the anxious feelings. But in the long run, it increases stress, reduces productivity, and makes the task more overwhelming.

How to Break the Anxiety Avoidance Loop

1. Catch the Early Signs

- Notice when you're hesitating, overthinking, or distracting yourself from the task.

- Ask: *Am I avoiding this because I'm anxious about it?*

2. Use the "Just Start" Rule

- Commit to working on the task for **5 minutes** only.

- Once you start, momentum often makes it easier to keep going.

3. Break It Into Small Steps

- Instead of "clean the kitchen," try: "put dishes in the dishwasher," then "wipe counters."

- Each step feels less overwhelming and gives you a quick win.

4. Shift Your Self-Talk

- Replace *"I have to get it perfect"* with *"Done is better than perfect."*

- Remind yourself: *Starting is the hardest part — once I begin, it gets easier.*

5. Use Time Blocks

- Set a timer for 15–25 minutes (Pomodoro Technique).

- Work only until the timer rings, then take a short break.

6. Practice Tolerating Discomfort

- Recognize that some anxiety is normal.

- Remind yourself: *I can feel uncomfortable and still get things done.*

Quick Reminders to Post Somewhere Visible

- "Avoidance makes anxiety bigger. Action makes it smaller."

- "Start small, start now."

- "Five minutes is all I need to begin."