

Asking About Avoidance Gently

Anxiety and worry | Clinicians | 10 to 15 minutes

Explore avoidance with curiosity and collaboratively select a safe next step.

Use this conversation when a client wants something to change but has been postponing or avoiding a safe activity. Begin by understanding what the behavior does for them. Permission and shared choice remain central throughout.

Understand the protection

Clinician: "Would it be okay to look at what happens when this task comes up?" Client: "I keep putting it off." Clinician: "What does putting it off help you avoid or manage in that moment?" Reflect the answer before considering change: "It gives you a break from the fear of criticism."

Explore cost and choice

Clinician: "What does that relief cost you later, if anything?" If the client says there is no cost: "Then we may have a different priority today. What would be useful?" If they want change: "What is the smallest safe step that would move toward what matters to you?"

Protect autonomy

If the client says, "I am not ready," respond: "We can pause. Would understanding the barrier, finding support, or choosing another goal be more helpful?" If they choose practice, agree on a specific step and ask, "What will we learn even if anxiety shows up?"

Client language to reflect and the next choice we agreed on