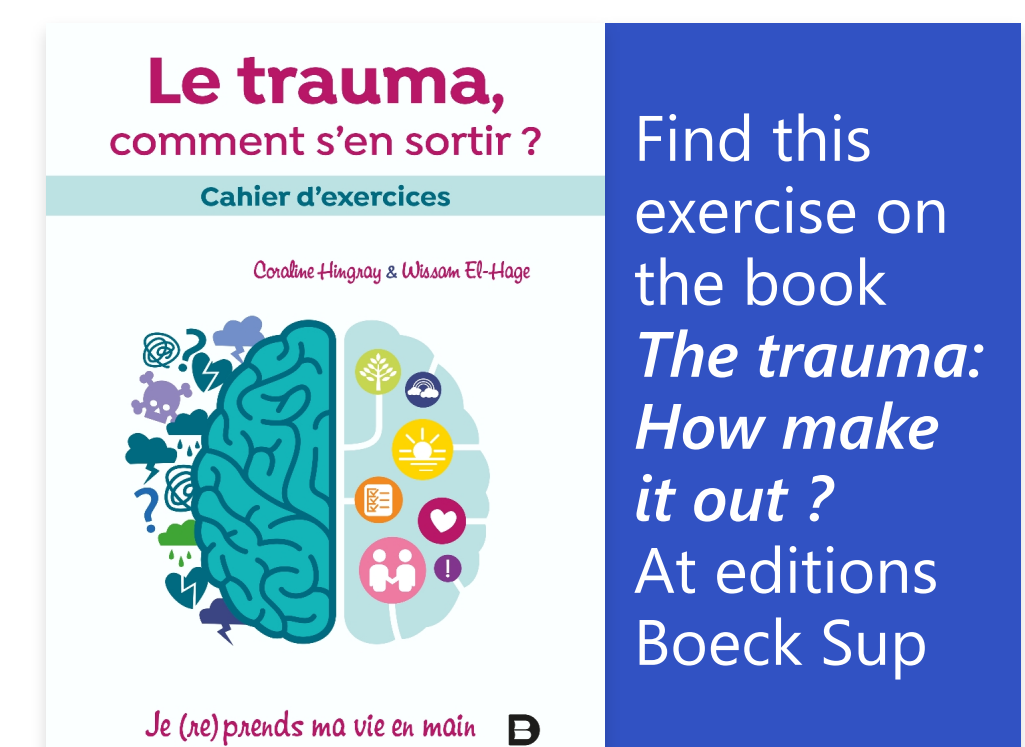


Factsheet

WHY DO I AVOID MORE AND MORE THINGS?



1 True or false

« You have to avoid everything that reminds you of the event, stop talking about it, never go back to the place! »

Absolutely false! In the same way as phobias, fear leads to avoidance behavior, attempts to pretend or forget. This doesn't solve the problem, it just makes it worse.

« You have to avoid avoiding! » **True!** It's a great basic principle in psychology, useful for long-term well-being!

« Fear doesn't prevent danger! But avoidance is dangerous and pernicious! »

Absolutely true!

2 Understanding the Science

The perception of a threat automatically prompts fear and, often, flight behaviour. We are conditioned to escape from threats thanks to the fear that signals it. It's natural and useful to avoid danger! For example, we learn very early on that we shouldn't touch hot objects, cross the road without looking or get too close to the edge of a cliff. In this way, we create multiple ideas with protective associations. Once the association has been created, learning is acquired.

After a trauma, we tend to even avoid situations without real danger due to inappropriate conditioning and false associations arising from the generalization of fear. The brain tends to flag up anything related to the trauma as dangerous or fear-provoking, leading to an avoidance reaction. The brain is conditioned, regardless of whether there's real danger or not. In fact, it confuses fear and danger!

3 My shrink tells me!

With the generalization of fear, you may feel intense emotions in different situations closely or vaguely related to trauma.

But nobody wants to feel fear or pain, so you tend to avoid it!

There are 3 types of avoidance linked to traumatic experiences.

Do you exhibit any of them?

- Behavioural: you avoid all situations, activities and people linked to the event.
- Cognitive: you avoid thinking or talking about it.
- Emotional: you avoid unpleasant emotions (fear, anger, etc.) related to the trauma.

Avoidance is a double-edged sword. While it may provide short-term relief, it also carries certain risks, not the least, your avoidance symptoms.

The risks of avoidance

A direct consequence: avoidance quickly leads to poorer quality of life, autonomy and opportunities. What's more, you can't avoid everything; there will always be something you can't control which will make you think back to the trauma...

An indirect consequence: avoidance maintains and consolidates fear. Avoidance prevents the natural phenomenon of stifling fear, of returning to a state of normality. The brain can quickly learn to distinguish between fear and danger in situations and can reduce inappropriate fear. If you avoid situations or memories that cause distress, then your brain can't learn! Helping the natural process of fear means facing up to what you're afraid of without putting yourself in danger. You'll feel much stronger afterwards!