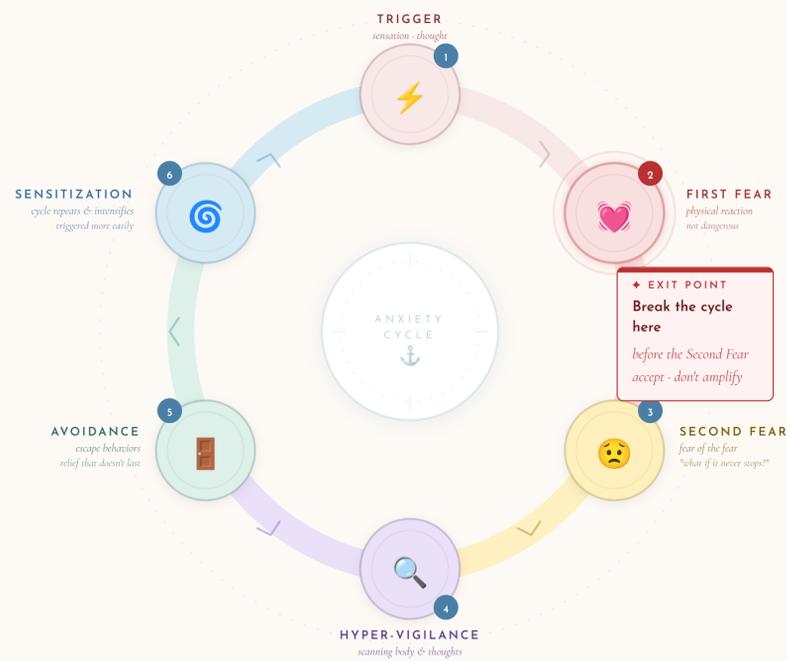


The Anxiety Cycle

Six stages feed and reinforce each other.
The exit lies between the First Fear and the Second Fear.



Float · Don't Fight · The Storm Will Pass

Understanding Each Stage

What happens at every step — and how the cycle sustains itself.

1 TRIGGER



The cycle begins with a sensation or thought — a racing heartbeat, a dizzy spell, an intrusive idea. **On its own, this signal is completely normal.** Everyone experiences these sensations. The body is simply registering information, not signaling danger.

2 FIRST FEAR ✦ EXIT POINT



The body reacts: heart rate rises, breathing shifts, muscles tense. **This is uncomfortable — but it is not dangerous.** At this stage, the cycle can still resolve on its own. If we allow the sensation to pass without judgment, it will fade. *This is the moment to step out.*

3 SECOND FEAR



This is where the cycle truly takes hold. **The mind begins to fear the fear itself:** "Why am I feeling this?" "What if it never stops?" This second layer of anxiety is far more powerful than the original trigger. It is the fuel that keeps the cycle running — and the stage we must learn to interrupt.

4 HYPER-VIGILANCE



Now on high alert, the nervous system constantly scans the body and mind for more signs of danger. **Every heartbeat, every thought becomes a potential threat.** This hyper-vigilance paradoxically generates more sensations to notice — reinforcing the belief that something is genuinely wrong.

5 AVOIDANCE



To escape the discomfort, the mind turns to avoidance — withdrawing from situations, sensations, or thoughts that might trigger the cycle. **While avoidance brings short-term relief, it teaches the nervous system that the trigger is truly dangerous.** Each episode makes the cycle stronger.

6 SENSITIZATION



Over time, the nervous system becomes sensitized — reacting more quickly and intensely to smaller triggers. What once required a major stressor can now be set off by almost nothing. **This is not a flaw. It is a learned pattern.** And learned patterns, with the right understanding, can be unlearned.

THE EXIT IS ALWAYS BEFORE STAGE 3

Accepting the First Fear without amplifying it is what breaks the cycle.

Understanding this is the beginning of healing.

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