

AVOIDING AND HIDING

ORIGINS AND BACKGROUND

The pattern of avoiding and hiding refers to the mindset or behavior of selectively escaping or bypassing people or situations in order to not face or deal with them. Avoiding and hiding are two similar terms with slightly different meanings. Avoiding means getting away from, and hiding means concealing from sight. Avoiding is more an action or movement and hiding, or being invisible, is more the motive or desired outcome. They are used together to describe this pattern.

In psychology, Avoidant Personality Disorder is treated as a psychological and mental disorder. The causes are believed to be a combination of social, genetic and psychological factors. Research shows that it may have a link to the way a child is brought up before self-identity is well-established, for example, physical or mental abuse, including from peers, teachers or caretakers such as parents.

Other related factors include socio-economic status and parental influence, especially lack of parental love and care. In adulthood, certain experiences such as being rejected by others, including members of the opposite sex, can also lead to this type of problem. Some research finds that parental abuse such as ridiculing or insulting can cause a child to internalize the humiliation and develop a negative view of self. The child will tend to believe they are unworthy of attention and not believe they will get others' love.

The above is a brief overview of the Avoidant Personality Disorder.

The pattern of avoiding and hiding we are discussing in this chapter is obviously not necessarily a personality disorder; rather, it is more a pattern of the consciousness.

Avoiding and hiding are not just human behaviors; animals and plants have amazing abilities to avoid and hide for their safety. We can say this is the natural ability of all life forms. This mechanism also plays an important part in the survival and continuation of the human species. However, if the natural ability to avoid and hide becomes a pattern, it can influence our thoughts and behavior and lead to various negative effects in life.

HOW IS THIS PATTERN FORMED?

The formation and development of this pattern is extremely complex, involving all the common factors related to how patterns are formed. Let's look at some of the factors in this complex process.

Social factors are the main players. We humans are social beings, forming all kinds of relationships with others. From this perspective, we can say relationships play a crucial role in determining both the process of growth and the outcome.

For example, when a relationship with someone is no longer nourishing and healthy, but instead is making you feel uncomfortable or even pressured, the tendency will be to avoid. This is the act of the instinct of 'Seek benefit (interest) and avoid harm'. It is just the same as the behavior of 'eating fruit when it is ripe, throwing it away when it is rotten'.

Take an infant as an example. When an infant expresses its need and the need is fulfilled, it will want more of that relationship. If its need is ignored, it will doubt the relationship. If the need is negated or rejected, it will avoid the relationship. If a demand is put on the infant, it will reinforce the desire to avoid. In the process of growing, a child is constantly perceiving and learning how well they are accepted, approved of and cared for; how much freedom they have and whether they can be themselves and whether the environment is nourishing. All these can affect how a child perceives a relationship. To an infant, when not crying feels safer than crying, gradually it will learn to refrain from crying. When a child needs answers but doesn't get them, they will avoid interacting because they cannot experience benefit from the relationship.

Some other things parents do could also jeopardize their relationship with their children. For example, parents may neglect the child and their needs by failing to see the child's upset or fear; or if the child is feeling wronged, disciplining them by telling them to behave or be polite. Or, when a child feels anxious or helpless, the parents blame the child for being lazy, stupid or naughty, instead of offering constructive help. Or, a parent repeatedly tells the child what they should do or how they should be, in a way that shows little approval and affirmation and makes the child feel very sad, upset or uncomfortable. These ways of relating to a child will cause them to develop a lot of fears around relationship. In order to survive, the child can only choose to live in tension, pressure and anxiety and be extremely cautious in relationship. After a period of time, the child becomes used to being in such a state, and the feeling of discomfort, pressure and restriction can start to feel 'normal'. To that child, a relationship becomes a burden or a symbol of one.

When a child has grown up in such an environment, pressure and anxiety are likely to show up in their relationships, especially when things are

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not going smoothly. Deep in the person's consciousness, impressions and correlations are formed: relationship=demand; relationship=judgment; relationship=pressure. These correlations can reappear or be recalled in relationships later in life. Whenever there is a hint or sign of demand or criticism, pressure can be felt. Eventually the person comes to the conclusion that it is much more comfortable to just be alone, because it is pressure-free.

It is not hard to imagine how it would feel when a person is with someone else or other people, and constantly feels the need to be seen as 'good' and therefore compelled to hide anything that could be seen as 'not good'. They have to be very careful with what they say and do and are often afraid of receiving criticism or disapproval. They always wonder what other people are thinking of them. They would often rather do things they don't like in order to take care of others' needs or please others and they always try their best to not 'trouble' other people. These situations show that the pattern of avoiding and hiding has started to form. If the situation doesn't improve, the pattern soon becomes established.

If a person feels or believes they are in a safe environment, they will be willing or feel comfortable opening up. If not, they may choose to avoid and hide. The perception of the environment may not reflect the truth; rather, it is mainly their subjective feeling due to beliefs and patterns.

Avoiding and hiding can continue to develop in adulthood. Personal factors related to the heart, such as lack of trust and being closed, and the over-development of the instinct of 'seek benefit (interest) and avoid harm; seek simplicity (easy solution) and avoid complexity (extra work)' can be involved.

GENERAL AND SPECIFIC MANIFESTATIONS

This pattern can manifest in many different forms on the consciousness and behavioral levels. For the convenience of discussion, manifestations are divided into two categories: the overt form and the covert form. The overt and covert patterns actually do not have any direct link to each other. A person with the overt pattern does not necessarily have the covert pattern, and vice versa. Let's look at these two categories in detail.

1. Overt Form of the Pattern of Avoiding and Hiding

The overt pattern mainly manifests as withdrawal, low self-esteem, avoiding challenges due to the inability to face them. There is a strong desire to be recognized and accepted and at the same time a fear of making mistakes and being blamed, causing internal conflict that is hard to resolve. There is a strong reluctance to make contact with people due

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to the fear of embarrassing oneself in front them. People with this pattern often choose to do work that can be done independently to reduce the chance of encountering others. They are eager or even fantasize about having a loving relationship in which they are fully loved and accepted. However, because they don't feel they are worthy or deserving of such a relationship, they usually don't actively pursue one. They will only build a relationship when they are certain they won't be rejected. They also have a strong tendency to focus mostly on their shortcomings and degrade themselves.

Some related characteristics include:

- a) Easily feeling nervous and worried.
- b) Easily feeling hurt by others' criticism or disagreement. Overly worried about being blamed or rejected.
- c) Strong belief of being socially clumsy, unattractive or inferior.
- d) Overly sensitive or shy. Afraid of revealing embarrassment.
- e) Unless absolutely certain, hesitating to make the first move to interact with others.
- f) Towards unfamiliar things, even if they are just ordinary, tends to magnify the potential difficulty, danger or risk.
- g) In order to ensure a sense of 'comfort' and 'safety', imposing all kinds of restrictions on everyday living.
- h) Avoiding social or professional activities that involve frequent or intense contact with people due to a fear of criticism or rejection.
- i) Apart from family members and a very small number (one or two) of friends, has very few close relationships.

Specific factors involved in the formation

Apart from the general factors mentioned earlier, there are some specific factors involved in the formation of the overt pattern. For example:

Low self-esteem caused by things such as being seen as 'incompetent' or 'under-achieving' in childhood and disadvantages in physical appearance, intelligence, memory, personality, causing self-debasement and believing yourself to be inferior to others.

If discomfort far outweighs comfort, a person will eventually ask themselves, 'Why do I bother to interact or socialize with people?' At this time, if they force themselves to interact, they may feel even more frustrated and depressed, which will further reinforce their negative view of themselves and further harm their self-esteem.

When social experience is not nourishing for life, but rather is a source of pressure and discomfort, or arouses a feeling of being unsafe, in order to keep safe and not be disliked, avoiding and hiding might seem to be the best option. We all have the instinct to 'Seek benefit (interest) and avoid harm; seek simplicity (easy solution) and avoid complexity (extra work)'. This instinct will be activated automatically.

2. Covert Form of the Pattern of Avoiding and Hiding

The covert form of the pattern refers to avoiding or hiding things we dislike, disapprove of, or even hate according to our value and moral judgments. These things include the activities of consciousness and the things we have done or do. Despite being aware of them, for various reasons we do not have the courage or the will to face them or deal with them; we can only avoid or ignore them. They can therefore remain hidden, sometimes for a long time. When reason is at work, we are able to exert control and keep those things well hidden. However, when reason is lost, they reveal their true face. Furthermore, when activities (including activities of the consciousness) go against our moral and value systems, dissonance can arise. This could prompt us to wear a mask, hiding what we deem unacceptable. A person like this can become two- or even multi-faced.

The covert form of avoiding and hiding causes a person to be unable to face deep-rooted problems and truly make change to life. It will also make it difficult for a person to truly be themselves, so it is not beneficial for health and growth. Sincere and honest communication on the heart level can be difficult too, as can feeling any real connection. Working together with others and building mutually beneficial and enhancing relationships can also pose a challenge.

Some related characteristics:

Covert patterns mainly mask things about ourselves that we don't want to recall or face. They can be thoughts, ideas or views we are not proud of and behavior we do not approve of. A covert pattern will often mask other unhealthy patterns, which probably constitute the most significant portion of the content.

At some level, a person is aware of their problems and dislikes or disapproves of them. While they do not dare to face or deal with them, they don't want to be controlled by their problems either. When with others, they are prompted to do their best to behave according to their ideal image of themselves. However, this could result in having two people living in the same body - one they dislike and one they want to be.

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They will do all they can to prevent other people from touching the part they can't face. When other people do touch that 'special place', they will adopt mechanisms such as denying, resisting or fighting in order to avoid facing it. There is also fear and worry that, with the hidden part revealed, their image, worth and 'dignity' could be diminished. This is why they will do all they can to defend their 'dignity'.

Although they might have made some initial effort to face and change these problems at some point, their efforts didn't succeed and eventually they gave up. Deep down they do not have the courage or desire to touch the hidden part. Possible reasons include not wanting to negate their worth, not knowing what will happen if they do, fearing that they will not be able to keep things under control, or being unsure about the impact on their identity.

They may hope that as long as they can exert enough self-control and reason and be seen as 'normal' in social life, the 'special part' will just disappear. They also hope that even if it doesn't, it will not cause too much harm.

THE VALIDITY AND ADVANTAGE

Although the pattern of avoiding and hiding can cause significant harm to life, it is not all negative. For example, with the overt form, which means a person may suffer from low self-esteem, one could very well be more modest, more understanding, less competitive, less aggressive, more approachable, good at thinking, more thorough and thoughtful and more trustworthy. We are not saying that low self-esteem should be encouraged; rather, we wish to exemplify that even a person who suffers from low self-esteem can also have many strengths and positive qualities. You should not feel hopeless. Knowing your own strengths and positive qualities is important for building self-confidence, which helps lay the foundation for accepting yourself and restoring self-esteem.

In the case of the covert form, the fact that a person is motivated and willing to make the effort to do well or to be seen that way, says that they aspire to be a better person and are willing to take the initiative to keep the hidden things from taking hold. Even though this does not change them substantially, at least life can be maintained at a reasonably balanced level.

POSSIBLE NEGATIVE EFFECTS

The negative effects of the covert and overt forms are also different.

Overt form:

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This pattern can inhibit the full manifestation of your social functioning and potential. It can restrict your relationship with yourself and others. It will also affect the healthy manifestation of many abilities, including creativity. All this can, in turn, have a negative influence on health, quality of life and work life.

Covert form

When your own actions and thoughts don't keep up with your moral values, internal conflict can arise. This may cause you to feel split, as though there were two different people living together. Wearing a mask to prevent the hidden part from showing can make it difficult to completely be yourself in a true way. It can also cause deep-seated uneasiness, anxiety, self-disapproval, guilt or self-blame.

This pattern can eventually cause loss of inner calm, peace and sense of freedom and create an obstacle to gaining realization and wisdom. It can therefore seriously affect the overall development of life.

Not facing and dealing with problems both fails to make them disappear and also allows them to continue to develop and worsen. The negative effects these problems create will only get worse and worse, too. Even when balance is able to be maintained on the surface, it is a false, low-level balance which can be tipped easily. Besides, it can seriously undermine your motivation to keep changing life, so the opportunity to uplift life can be seriously compromised.

POSSIBLE REPLACEMENT PATTERNS

To change the overt form:

1) Develop a fair and balanced view of yourself. Raise your self-image.

The issue of low self-esteem is mainly caused by a failure to see and treat yourself fairly and soundly. Therefore, to tackle the problem of low self-esteem, it is necessary to start by changing the way you see yourself. Learn to discover your own strengths and positive qualities and acknowledge your achievements and progress, even when very small. Learn to see other people objectively and recognize that every person has weaknesses and shortcomings. Avoid thinking that other people are perfect and seeing nothing good about yourself. Elevating your self-image is the key to building confidence and self-esteem.

2) Yuan Gong practice is especially important for this pattern.

Yuan Gong practice builds your Qi and helps it flow better. When Qi is in a better condition, it can nourish Shen better. Shen will be clearer and more stable and better at being the master of life. Your ability to be in control and adjust your thoughts and state will be improved. Yuan Gong

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practice can also cultivate the unification of Jing, Qi and Shen and the relaxed, calm, natural and joyful state, which provides the opportunity to feel positive and comfortable both being yourself and being with yourself. Furthermore, Yuan Gong practice can cultivate the ability to focus on yourself instead of on the external, which lays the foundation for changing this pattern.

3) Put your attention on yourself, rather than the external or other people.

No matter what you do, constantly keep the connection with yourself - the more the better. The goal of this internal focus is to maintain a relaxed, calm, natural and joyful state. Make this goal a high priority of life. When interacting with others, it is even more important to do so. Whatever you do, your focus is not about whether someone else is happy or not; rather, it is whether you are happy or not. Shift your goal from 'pleasing others' to 'pleasing yourself'.

4) Cultivate Five Xin, especially trust and openness.

Start with the people and environment you are already familiar with. Trust that they do not have the intention, motivation or reason to harm you. Trust that they are willing to have a healthy relationship with you and will enjoy it, too. When you have made good progress with the people and environment you are familiar with, expand your trust and openness to people and situations you are less familiar with.

5) Cultivate more trust and openness towards yourself.

See every interaction with others as an opportunity to learn and practice and never stop giving yourself this opportunity. Although it may take some time to change this pattern, every bit of progress deserves your own acknowledgement. Trust your ability to adjust yourself because you have demonstrated this ability. Trust that through continual adjustments, you will make progress.

6) Be aware of your internal dialogue with yourself.

Do you doubt yourself and tell yourself 'No, I can't' or do you tell yourself 'Yes, I can'? So what if you haven't achieved what you would like this time? Commend yourself for your courage to try. Tell yourself that doing your best is already gaining full marks. Learn not to anticipate 'failure'. Sometimes, you have to just go ahead like nothing else matters in the whole world, without worrying about the result. In fact, very often things do turn out to be much easier and less scary than we thought. Once the first step is made and the initial fear is overcome, the experience can be very positive and rewarding. Confidence can be built bit by bit this way.

- 7) When progress slows down, identify the underlying causes and the patterns and deal with them. This can help make the breakthrough you need to continue to move forward.

Connecting with other people is a wonderful experience. Joy will double and sadness halved when you share them with others. Through sharing, loneliness can disappear and help can be available when needed. It is extremely nourishing to be accepted, supported, embraced, cared about and seen! Yes, relationships can be extremely nourishing! Even if it does not seem that way yet, you need to believe that things can change. When you have this belief, your perception and reality will start to change immediately. You will see that many people are ready to accept and recognize you without expecting anything in return.

To change the Covert Form:

- 1) First of all, learn to fully accept yourself.

Accept everything about yourself - good and 'bad'. No matter whether looking at your experience, your action/behaviour, your thoughts/ideas/views or your patterns, accept them all. Help the 'bad' parts with your open and loving heart by looking at, accepting and inviting them to be a 'formal' part of your life. Feel any discomfort you experience in this process, for example, uneasiness, embarrassment, shame, anxiety, fear, sorrow, guilt, self-blame or regret. Face these feelings and dissolve them one by one with Five Xin until they are completely cleared. This is the first step to relieve your Xin Ling from internal conflict. Since there is no need to avoid or hide anything, you can enjoy more freedom. From there you can deal with the 'bad' parts and gradually transform them. When this transformation is successful, you will enjoy even more freedom and life can truly move forward.

- 2) Maintain a high level of self-awareness and watch out for signs of avoiding and hiding.

Very often it is when we feel uncomfortable that we have the urge to avoid and we try to divert the focus or mask the problem through all kinds of tactics. If you catch yourself doing this, the first thing is to calm down and tell yourself that there is no need to avoid and hide and that facing problems is not a scary thing. Being honest with your problems is being honest with yourself, and this is the best way to build self-respect and win others' respect. The motivation of hiding and avoiding is so others don't see you in a negative light and lose trust and respect for you. However, it does just the opposite.

- 3) Use humor to replace avoiding and hiding.

To laugh at your shortcomings is a good way to face things you don't like. In fact, it is not necessary to take your weaknesses or shortcomings so

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seriously, as though your image or reputation would be completely destroyed if they are exposed. The truth is no one is perfect; everyone has shortcomings and problems and it is completely normal. Use humor to expose them and laugh them away – there is no need to hide.

CONCLUSION

Can you remember a time - perhaps a childhood memory - when you were fearless and could do things you wanted to with a free and light heart? When did you start putting masks on your problems? Perhaps you wanted to protect yourself, so you started to construct a 'you' – a person you wanted to be seen as. However, when you wear a mask for too long, it becomes your identity - a false identity. Not only that, you will be burdened and weighed down - it will consume you and make you feel tired. Furthermore, it is totally meaningless. Is this the way to continue to be?

For sure, we humans are social beings. Being part of the totality of society and life, every person has many roles to play. For society to operate in a way that facilitates normal social activities and the smooth running of society and its many institutions, social and cultural norms have to be formed and followed. A person can actively and positively play various roles and switch between them and this is not wearing a mask. Rather, it is a manifestation of responsibility. We can be the best of ourselves and find joy in all the roles we play.

If you want to live in society in a way that you can be true to yourself and have healthy relationships with others, you can start making an effort now. Have a firm belief that you will be accepted no matter what. Have an even firmer belief that you are being supported and understood, rather than judged.

The more we avoid and hide our problems, the more they will pile up and fester. One day they could explode and cause more harm. Waking up to them and exposing them to the sunlight is the best way to transform them. This way you can turn them into nutrients for your health and growth.