The essence of anxiety is worrying about some potential threat. It is trying to cope with a future event that you think will be negative. You do this by more attention to possible signs of threat, and looking internally to see whether you will be able to cope with that threat. When you notice your anxious symptoms, you think you can’t cope with the situation and therefore become more anxious. This is the start of the vicious cycle of anxiety.

**How Safety Behaviours Contribute to Anxiety**

In addition to avoidance, many people use safety behaviours or subtle avoidance to help cope with anxiety. These may include relying on medication, the security of your mobile phone, always having an exit plan for potentially anxious situations, or making sure you always have someone with you.

These safety behaviours also play a part in the vicious cycle of anxiety. When you become dependent on them and do not learn that emotion is not dangerous. You don’t learn that distressing emotions tend to come down naturally. Imagine how stressing it would be if the safety behaviours were not available to you.

**Reversing the Vicious Cycle of Anxiety**

You can turn the vicious cycle around to create a positive cycle that will help you overcome anxiety. One important step is gradually confronting feared situations, leading to an improved sense of confidence helping to reduce anxiety. Grade exposure refers to tackling your fears as an alternative to ‘jumping in at the deep end’ and trying to tackle your biggest fear first.

This approach allows you to build your confidence slowly, to use other skills you have learned, to get used to the situations, to challenge your fears about each situational exposure exercise.

By doing this in a structured and repeated way, you have a good chance of reducing your anxiety about those situations.