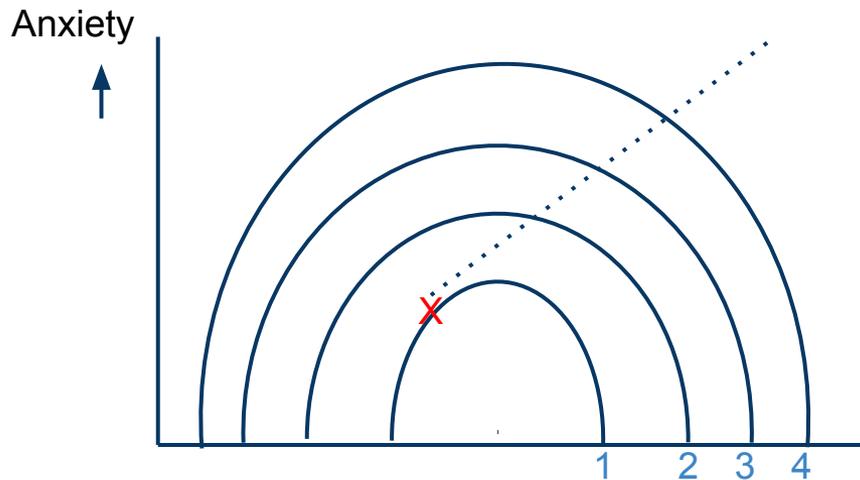
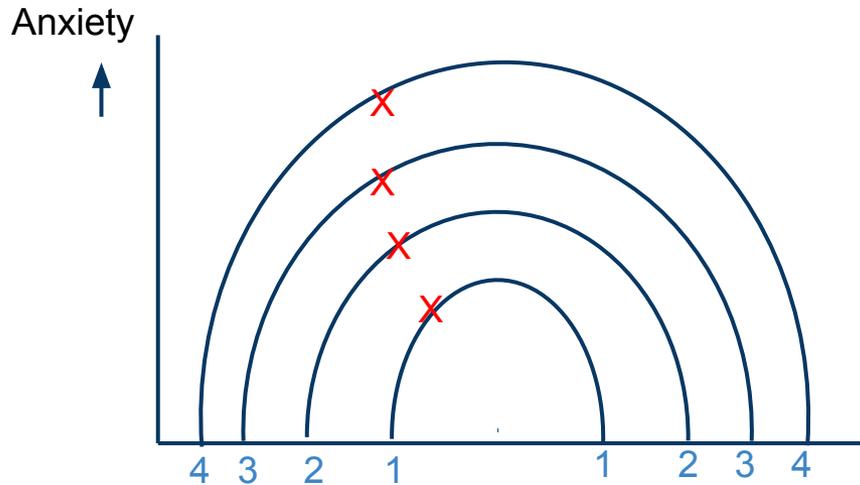


The Anxiety Hump (explanation below)



There are two parts of our nervous system that control our anxiety response. One part boots up our anxiety response and the other part shuts it down. Because of this, it is impossible for anxiety to stay at peak levels for long periods of time (e.g., a panic attack, although very scary, will not go on forever). Anxiety follows a hump shaped curve.

More below...

What causes anxiety to get worse is usually that people tend to do some type of avoidant coping when their anxiety is on the ascendancy [the red Xs].

This allows people to temporarily relieve their anxiety but it has two consequences.

Consequence 1: Next time the person faces the same trigger, their anxiety response is likely to be bigger. Instead of Curve 1, it is more like Curve 2 etc.

Consequence 2: The person feels like their anxiety was going to keep increasing [see the dotted line in the lower diagram]. They usually reach the conclusion that the only reason they were ok was because they used avoidant coping. In reality, their anxiety would've naturally topped out and decreased. They naturally would've cycled through the curve.

The Good News:

If you can experience your anxiety triggers without using avoidant coping, you will cycle through the curve, and the curve will get smaller the next time you encounter the trigger i.e., go from Curve 4 to Curve 3 and so on.

Note that avoidant coping can include overcompensating behaviors e.g. washing your hands excessively if you are worried about germs.

Also note that it's important to try to stay physically soft (as opposed to physically tensing and bracing) when you encounter your triggers. You can use techniques like mindfulness meditation to help learn how to do this.