

When Your Brain Wants Escape

When your nervous system feels overwhelmed, trapped, exhausted, or hopeless, your brain naturally starts looking for a way to reduce the pain. Sometimes it looks for healthy ways to do this, like resting, asking for help, or taking a break.

1. What urge showed up?

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|--|--|--|
| ☐ Sleep all day | ☐ Isolate | ☐ Dissociate |
| ☐ Cancel everything | ☐ Scroll endlessly | ☐ Self-harm |
| ☐ Leave | ☐ Use alcohol or substances | ☐ Hide |
| ☐ Quit | ☐ I wish I could disappear | ☐ Thoughts of suicide |
| ☐ Other:_____ | | |

2. What was happening just before?

What happened?_____

What emotions were present?

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|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| ☐ Shame | ☐ Loneliness | ☐ Guilt |
| ☐ Fear | ☐ Rejection | ☐ Exhaustion |
| ☐ Sadness | ☐ Overwhelm | ☐ Numbness |
| ☐ Anger | ☐ Other:_____ | |

3. What was my brain hoping to accomplish?

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|---|--|---|
| ☐ To stop emotional pain | ☐ Relief from anxiety | ☐ To escape shame |
| ☐ A break | ☐ Rest | ☐ To disappear for a while |
| ☐ To feel safe | ☐ Someone to witness me | ☐ To stop feeling trapped |
| ☐ To avoid being hurt | ☐ Other:_____ | |

4. What do I actually need?

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|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| ☐ Sleep | ☐ To cry | ☐ Comfort |
| ☐ Food | ☐ To solve a problem | ☐ Connection |
| ☐ Water | ☐ To set a boundary | ☐ Medical care |
| ☐ Quiet | ☐ To ask for help | ☐ Professional support |
| ☐ Movement | ☐ To reduce expectations today | ☐ Other:_____ |

5. Match the response to the need

My brain wants...	What might actually help?
Everything to stop	One hour of relief instead of permanent escape
To disappear	Be with someone safe instead of being alone
To numb out	Gentle grounding or containment
To quit everything	Postpone the decision until my nervous system settles
To avoid	Take one tiny step instead of solving everything
Someone to rescue me	Reach out and let someone know I'm struggling
To end my life	Tell someone immediately, follow my safety plan, or contact emergency or crisis services if I cannot stay safe.