

An Ounce of Prevention

Complimentary

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Gary J. Meiers, Ph. D., Jo Ann Hammond, Ph. D.,
& Associates, Ltd.

10009 – 85 Avenue, Edmonton, AB T6E 2J9



Website: drsgaryjoannmeierspsychologist.com

Phone: (780) 433-2269

Fax: (780) 431-0463

E-Mail: psychrec@gmail.com

Procrastination

-Dr. Kim Maertz, University of Alberta

What is procrastination?

At its simplest level procrastination means putting off until tomorrow what could be done today.

Procrastination is in fact a very complex psychological behavior that can have numerous causes and is not just a simple problem of poor time management. Procrastination inevitably leads to feelings of guilt, inadequacy, self-doubt, frustration, and depression.

Coping Strategies

Despite its complex nature, procrastination can be beat. Here are some of the most common strategies to get a handle on it.

1. Understand Why You Procrastinate:

There are many potential reasons individuals procrastinate and understanding these can help you overcome your procrastination. Many people assume that they are just lazy or have no self-discipline, but it is rarely this simple. Think about what you might have to gain by procrastinating. It would likely help to explore these reasons with a counsellor where you can develop a plan to deal with them.

Some of the common causes of procrastination include:

(a) Perfectionism:

Perfectionism refers to having unrealistically high standards or expectations for yourself. Fears of doing less than a perfect job can stop you from even beginning the task or cause you to agonize over every aspect of it.

Strategy:

Realize that perfection is unobtainable and that you will feel worse if you don't complete the task at all. Praise yourself for what you have done and reassure yourself that perfection isn't necessary to be successful.

(b) Feeling Inadequate

If you believe that your skills are inadequate, it can sometimes feel easier to not even put yourself to the test rather than try and fail. In this way you can blame your poor performance on lack of effort rather than your "innate skills."

Strategy:

Realize that success is about a consistent work ethic rather than innate abilities. By putting in the effort, you will improve and your sense of inadequacy will ultimately fade.

(c) Undeveloped Study Skills

People who have not developed effective study skills can be very frustrated with the process of studying because it isn't paying off and leaves them feeling bored rather than stimulated. As a result it becomes easier to procrastinate than face your study material.

Strategy:

Developing some effective study skills can leave you feeling more satisfied with yourself and will ultimately pay off in your marks.

Find information on study skills at:

<http://www2.open.ac.uk/students/skillsforstudy>

(d) Aversion to Discomfort

Due to the sheer volume of information you need to assimilate and the complexity of the material, it requires one to face a lot of discomfort.

Some people have never been trained or have never trained themselves to face and work through this discomfort.

Strategy:

Practice pushing yourself on uncomfortable tasks so that you can experience the sense of gratification that this brings. You will never learn to enjoy the feelings of discomfort, but a more positive habit will be reinforced by the longer term gratification of better marks and improved self-esteem.

(e) Resentment

Resentment can be generated from a number of sources including: being pushed, being disillusioned and high expectations. One possible way of expressing your resentment is to passively resist doing the required work since no one can make you do it.

Strategy:

Dealing directly with the source of your resentment would be most appropriate. This may require you to talk directly with affected individuals. Alternatively, you could also write a letter to the person and never send it.

(f) Being Overextended

If you are overloaded with demands, you will likely feel overwhelmed which can paralyze any productive actions.

Strategy:

Begin by evaluating your obligations and demands and prioritize these. Then determine what you can delay, delegate, or possibly even omit from your list. Finally, put all of your energy into your high priority tasks.

(g) Lifestyle Issues

If you are in the habit of sleeping in everyday, have become addicted to the internet, or party too often and too hard, then these lifestyle issues may tie into your procrastination.

Strategy:

First you want to identify which lifestyle issues are affecting your performance and then focus your energy directly on these issues. Specific strategies to deal with them will depend on the issue.

(h) Fear of Success

Some people are afraid of being too successful due to a variety of concerns including: not feeling it is "cool", not wanting to have to maintain these same high standards of success, fears that they will be rejected by their peers, or concerns others will be jealous of them.

Strategy:

Understand that your success transcends your immediate connection with peers or the opinions of others around you. Being successful is a gift you give yourself and it impacts your long-term happiness and well-being.

(i) Overwhelming Negative Emotional States

High levels of anxiety, depression, or other negative emotions makes focusing on tasks difficult and procrastinating easy. Worrying can become your dominant coping strategy rather than taking actions to get your work completed.

Strategy:

If you haven't been able to manage your emotions on your own or with the help of family or friends, it is time to investigate the option of counselling.

2. Visualize Your Life without Procrastination

Imagine yourself without all the stress that procrastination brings, having free time without guilt, and having your work done before the deadlines. This could be you! Visualize how you would act, think, and feel and then make it your life. Begin by acting like a non-procrastinator for an hour, a day, or a week to see what it feels like.

3. Accept That There Is No Magical Cure

Overcoming procrastination will take energy like all good things in life. But realize that it may be more about working smarter than about working harder. Procrastination can actually sap our energy, whereas accomplishing goals can give one back enthusiasm.

4. Set Realistic Goals

Procrastinators tend not to set goals or if they do they are unrealistic and therefore unattainable. Set goals that are specific, measurable, realistic, and time limited. Be sure to write out your goals so you can refer back to them when you need to.

5. Prioritize Your Goals

Since your time is limited, you want to decide what is most important and work on those goals first. Then work your way down to the lower priority items.

6. Develop a Plan or Schedule

Once you have established your goals and prioritized them, you need to develop a specific plan as to how you will achieve them.

This would likely take the form of a daily or weekly schedule or to-do list. A good plan can be the most effective way to overcome procrastination. Don't beat yourself up if you don't stick to the schedule rigidly. All plans require flexibility. Don't forget to schedule in time for exercise, sleep, meals, relaxation, and socializing. Fine-tune your schedule after a week or two to make sure it works for you.

7. Reward Goal Attainment

The best way to develop a positive work habit is to reward yourself when you have achieved even the smallest of tasks since we are more likely to repeat those behaviours that are rewarded. Rewards can include almost anything you enjoy such as TV watching, time with friends, hobbies, talking on the phone, your favorite foods, or a weekend away. Keeping a journal of what you have accomplished can be rewarding in itself.



Helping Children Cope with Trauma

<http://www.aftertheinjury.org/>

A web site designed for parents whose child has experienced a Pediatric injury.

Benefits of EMDR

A series of video stores about the value and benefits of EMDR can be found by Googling "scoopit" then "EMDR"

Net News

Here are some web sites you & your family may find helpful:

Search: European Network Adult ADHD

Search: The Open University: Skills for OU Study

Search: NY Times: Can emotional intelligence be taught?

Self-Help Corner:

City of Edmonton Community Resources: 211
Support Network / Distress Line: 780-482-HELP
Kids Help Line: 1-800-668-6868