

PROCRASTINATION

An ADHD Perspective

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Everybody Procrastinates.

Why?

PROCRASTINATION PERKS

Everybody

- ◉ Warp Speed
- ◉ Efficiency
- ◉ Things get decided for us
- ◉ Less pressure to do it right/perfectly
- ◉ Finite amount of time to suffer
- ◉ Time to complete expands

ADHD specific

- ◉ Adrenaline → clarity of thought, exec. Fx
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PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH

- Procrastination is a symptom of “deeper issues” that must be resolved before improvement
 - “You must not really want it badly enough.”
 - “You are sabotaging your own success.”
 - “If I do a good job, people will have high expectations.”
 - “People will find out I’m a fraud/incompetent.”
 - “My dad might feel threatened if I succeed.”
 - “You just aren’t willing to grow up and be a responsible adult.”
 - “Don’t you realize that if you don’t pay you taxes that....”

DR. K'S MINI NEURO LESSON

- ◉ Back of brain - fun-loving, responds to whatever is right in front of us, really likes/needs fun, the “now” wins.
- ◉ Front - exec functioning - planning, sequencing, organizing, and managing the back part of the brain!
- ◉ When front is awake/aroused, dopamine and electrical charges talk to and manage impulses (so the back doesn't run the show)
- ◉ The underaroused brain is one of the main reasons we struggle so much.

NEUROBIOLOGICAL APPROACH

- Procrastination is a collection of behaviors that come from brain “malfunction”
 - “I have to get off this sofa and do my taxes but I can’t make myself move.”
 - “That is so awful, I just can’t force myself to do it now.”
 - “I need to switch gears, but I can’t seem to stop.”
 - “I have lots of time to do that later.”
 - “I’ll pay the bills right after I have the last piece of chocolate cake.”

ADHD SPECIALITIES

◉ Decision-making

- “I don’t know whether to book the flight at 4 pm on Tuesday or at 8 am Wednesday?”

◉ Efficiency experts

- “I should clean the mirror since I’m in the bathroom now, and call the client later.”
- The American cheese wrapper fable

◉ Wisdom

- “Life is too short to be bothered with the trivia that is important to other less-evolved people.

MORE ADHD SPECIALITIES

◉ The Shame Spiral

- “I should have sent my grandma a birthday card last week, so...”

◉ Legitimate anxiety

- “What if I missed a credit card payment, and there was a fine, and they closed my account... because I haven’t looked in that pile for four months?”

◉ Not entitled to work on the good/fun stuff

- “I don’t get to do the good stuff because I haven’t paid my taxes or cleaned my apartment.” “I’m grounded.”

THE ADHD TIME WINDOW

- Can't get ready for the future until the event comes into our time horizon.
 - Peripheral vision example
- In ADHD, the event must be so close in time that everything is left to the last minute and everything is a crisis
 - “Others” judge the ADHD action -- “You must not care about the consequences.”

BARKLEY'S "EVENT HORIZON"

- ◉ The “now” dictates action
- ◉ At age 7-8, children can look forward and back 12 hours
 - School night: “Mom, I need brownies for my class tomorrow.”
- ◉ Adolescent - look forward and back several days
 - Start work on school project before deadline
- ◉ Early 30's - look forward and back 8-12 weeks
 - Initiate projects 3 months in advance.

ADHD “EVENT HORIZON”

- Frequently stopped at the adolescent stage
 - Start work 48 hours before project is due
 - Given a project 8 weeks in advance, it does not exist.
 - Until we “see it” we won’t take action

AVOIDANCE VS SELF-MEDICATING

Wake up our brain

- ◉ Drink caffeine
- ◉ Sugar/Carbohydrates
- ◉ Nail biting, skin picking, hair pulling
 - self-stimulating and self-soothing)
- ◉ Shame/negative self-talk
- ◉ Scaring/Terrorizing ourselves
 - if we don't get our estimated taxes paid, we could go to jail
- ◉ Video games, email
- ◉ Worrying
- ◉ Fidgeting

Soothe our brain

- ◉ Take a nap
- ◉ Sugar/Carbohydrates
- ◉ Skin picking, hair pulling,
- ◉ Read self-help books
- ◉ Excessive research
- ◉ Micro-planning
- ◉ Minimizing
 - The IRS really doesn't care if we miss that stupid deadline
- ◉ Marijuana
- ◉ Fidgeting, nail biting

WHAT TO DO

- ◉ Respect the neurobiology
- ◉ Make it easier
- ◉ Get some help

BEWARE OF “JUST”

- ◉ The second you hear yourself say “I just need to ...” let it be an alert
- ◉ Whatever the task is, it’s probably ADD-unfriendly i.e. involves a decision, is not easy (for you)

ADHD-UNFRIENDLY TASKS

- ◉ Not fun, scary, not rewarding, boring, monotonous, finishing - small details, documenting, explaining to others ...
- ◉ Why it hurts
 - Underarousal - so brain not on your side
- ◉ If a task isn't fun for a kid, the kid won't do it.
 - It is your job as a parent to find a way to make that task fun (or at least mildly pleasant)
- ◉ You are your own parent - be creative
 - Game? Music? Books on tape? With friend?
- ◉ “Just Do It” “Power through” “Make myself”
 - Telling yourself the above is a set-up for failure
- ◉ Delegate if at all possible!

IT'S NOT ABOUT WILLPOWER

- ◉ Can't versus won't
- ◉ As an experiment, stop spending your time, energy, smarts and creativity trying to understand the deep underlying psychological reasons for not doing “x”
- ◉ As an alternative, consider that what is going on is a “brain-thing”
- ◉ How can you help your brain?

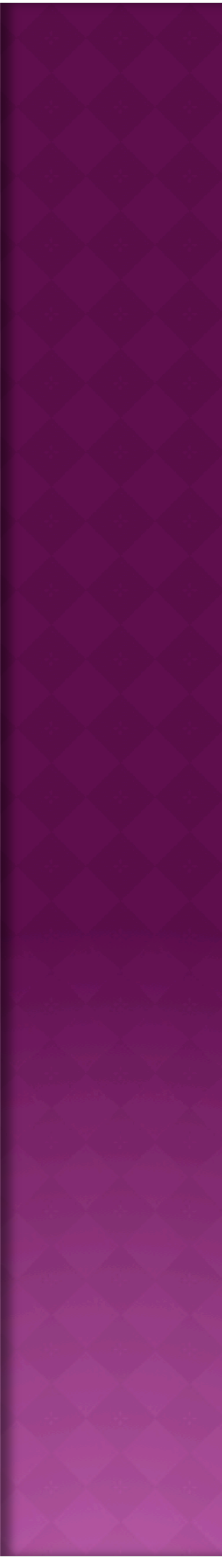
COUCH PARALYSIS

- ⦿ “Normal” viewpoint
 - “You’re relaxing on the couch.”
- ⦿ ADHD view
 - “My brain is on overload trying to get me out of the couch but you can’t see it and don’t understand.”
- ⦿ Issue is under-arousal of the front of brain, try:
 - Music - remote on stereo, MP3 on phone, laughter - Onion Videos
 - Phone a friend
 - Set phone alarm/timer and throw the phone across the room
 - Object at rest stays at rest, object in motion ...
 - Stimulant medications

IF TASKS MAKE YOU ANXIOUS

- ◉ Best cure for anxiety: take action
- ◉ Leaping into future - Oh, look at all the possibilities - “What if?”
 - Take the pressure off - “un-scare” yourself
- ◉ Issue: emotional reactivity, worry about getting emotionally thrown off and being useless for rest of day
 - Place event before set activity that will automatically elevate your mood
 - Bookend
 - Body Double
 - Time Limits

PERK-O-LATER - TIME LIMITS



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TIMERS

- ◉ When they don't work/you don't like them
 - Stopping. “Just tell yourself 5 minutes” - NO!
 - Makes it ineffective
 - We need to rebuild personal integrity
 - If we don't trust that we will stop, we have no reason to believe that it will be safe next time to start
 - We overdo it and reinforce how painful it is
 - Resetting timers (hyperfocus/transition) - throw it across the room
- ◉ Any timer better than no timer, but if you can find one with 10, 5 min. warnings.
- ◉ We rebel against too much structure, don't do this all day and give yourself choices

USING THE DISTRACTIONS

- ◉ Back of brain vs. front (respect it!)
- ◉ Brushing teeth, straightening painting, oh my god I forgot to/need to ... !
 - Let this be fascinating to you
 - Write them down
 - Game - play with this
 - Building muscle
 - If you can't stand it, stop timer and come back (but very risky)
 - Let it be your carrot/lure - the staring dog
 - Let it be your reward

“IF YOU AREN’T GOING TO DO IT RIGHT, DON’T DO IT AT ALL”

○ Issues

- Perfectionism/High standards
- Hyperfocus/stuck in grooves
- Endless research
- Time Limit
- “Good enough for now”
- Do a really really terrible, embarrassing, virtually useless first draft

NOT IN THE MOOD

- ◉ Belief that tomorrow we will be rested, our blood sugar level, not so anxious, more self-confident, centered Generally, nope
- ◉ Learn some “reset” buttons for yourself
 - Meditation, music, laughter, friends, etc.
- ◉ Waves
 - “Bad Brain Days”
 - I’m not going to do it today, but if I were going to do it, I would need ... phone number, stamps, easy, non-threatening steps

PRE-FLIGHT CHECKLIST

- Example: Exercise - one thing missing, the whole thing is off (also groceries, errands)
 - List - only have to do this once - surrogate exec.
Fx - this is the piece we have trouble with - organization, sequencing
 - All the things necessary for the plane to take off
 - Reset - right after you have exercised (if possible) and still remember/believe that it really does make you feel better - i.e. chilled water, clean socks, MP3 plugged in (located)

HOW TO FOLLOW UP !!!!

◉ Blank slate

- Leave yourself a note as to what you figured out/ where you were
- Leave yourself a ridiculously simple last piece to finish - stamps on envelopes - to get back in the groove
- Tell yourself what actions come next - put phone number in - make it as easy as possible for Next Time”
- Allow time to warm up
- Trust that you already know enough - at least for now, at least to stop (the “research trap”)

“YOU NEED A PLAN FIRST”

- ◉ Beware! We are fabulous at this. It's a trap
- ◉ Can spend hours/days - make beautiful plans
- ◉ Our issue is execution.
- ◉ We will figure out what to do next by doing something now.
- ◉ “Jump in.” Set your timer. I know I'm a renegade on this one
- ◉ Jumping in can include staring and writing: I don't know what to do next!

“FINISH WHAT YOU START”

- Issues: We are bad at estimating how long a task will take, perfectionists, sometimes it will take a few hours to find the form
- Problem - we have very little control of this so it's another set up for failure
- Use amounts of time - can control this
- Redefine “finishing”
- Redefine success, need to learn to give ourselves credit. Time + effort = success

DECISIONS

- ⦿ This is an invisible obstacle that causes TONS of delays
- ⦿ We see soooo many possibilities (especially scary, negative outcomes)
- ⦿ We think better out loud
 - Call a friend
 - Don't worry alone
 - This is the time to do SOME research (set a limit)

CREATE AN EVENT HORIZON

- ◉ Create a new event closer in time - (hard deadline) meeting with a friend to move a piece of the project closer in time
- ◉ Involve other humans!
- ◉ May procrastinate on piece, but with several of these, will make progress overall
- ◉ Meeting with editor, friend to help, one friend to come by (day or so before party)

“IS THIS THE BEST USE OF MY TIME?” EFFICIENCY

- ◉ Scheduling into day planner, in my experience, doesn't work for us
 - Can't find it, don't open it, if it's 2:03pm
 - Heart of my Bootcamp - “Daily Practice”
 - Sequence tasks/events - before or after something - ideally if you are in motion already - as organic as possible
 - 21 days to create habits - conditioned cues - automatic starts, scheduled rewards



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Contact info goes here