



Procrastination



acaciaEAP
employee assistance program

Procrastination can be defined as unnecessarily delaying or avoiding completing a task, despite the negative impacts of not following through.

At times, it may be perceived as laziness or a lack of motivation; however, we can appreciate that, at some point, everyone will engage in this behaviour. Instead of perceiving procrastination as a negative, it is more beneficial for us to consider its function and purpose.

Like all behaviours at their extreme, procrastination can have serious consequences. This is why it's highly beneficial to be conscious of what contributes to this and how you may better respond to and manage when we procrastinate.

Tasks we Procrastinate

You may be trying to recall the last time you found yourself putting off a task or avoiding the inevitable. If you think big picture it may seem like a while; however, what if you thought about the last time you hit snooze on your alarm, or held off sending that email until the end of day?

It's fair to say procrastination is known and familiar to us all. For the most part, it is something that we integrate into how we go about our day to day.

The concern of course is when we start to cancel that doctors appointment, miss important deadlines or don't show up for that important family event. Some people, however, may notice a more pervasive pattern of procrastinating that impacts many areas of their life.

Regardless, understanding what areas and activities in life we find ourselves putting off is very important. This can help us take steps to change these behaviours to ensure we complete things we need to do in a timely manner so as to minimise any potential negative consequences.

To assist with this, we need to understand our reasons for procrastinating in the first place.

Understanding Why We Procrastinate

Often people can feel a bit perplexed about procrastination. A reasonable question that is regularly asked is why would we continue to procrastinate on important tasks if doing so is going to have negative consequences and impacts.

This is a fair and reasonable question. Why would we put off an important work or study task to the last minute, creating additional and unnecessary stress as well as risk doing a poor job or not doing as well as what we would like?

Part of the reason we procrastinate is more about finding a way to cope with tasks that create challenging emotions and negative moods. These moods might include anxiety, stress, frustration, or boredom, as well as a sense of failure or a low sense of confidence about ourselves or our ability to do the task.

Put simply, procrastination can be seen as a coping strategy that we use to avoid the discomfort that doing the task might create.

How Can We Stop Procrastinating?

Make a Realistic Timeline

Create a detailed timeline of the tasks you need to do. Allocate certain blocks of time for tasks that you have to complete, and write these down in your calendar.

Try to be realistic with the amount of time that you allocate. If you are going to find something particularly difficult, you should allocate more time to that task. If you are going to find a particular task interesting where you might lose track of time, consider allocating less time for it.



Mark Tasks Off

Write a list of everything you have to complete – in a calendar or a to-do list – and tick them off as you go. Marking things off as you go makes you more aware of your progress towards an endpoint, and the task may seem less overwhelming.

Break Up Tasks

If you have complicated or longer tasks, break them up into smaller, easily achievable ones. Completing tasks leads to a sense of achievement, which engenders positive emotions, such as pride and calm, which can motivate you to finish them all.

Be Nice to Yourself

Don't be hard on yourself if you find that you start procrastinating on the task at hand. Remember, that procrastination isn't necessarily a negative thing. It's a way that we can cope with tasks that we find uncomfortable.

Final Words

Procrastination is a normal behaviour that we all engage in to varying degrees. Fortunately, there are steps that we can take to minimise the amount that we procrastinate. If you need further support in coping with procrastination, Acacia and our team of highly experienced professionals can support you.