

## ADULT ADHD, "PROCRASTIVITY," & HOW YOU DON'T DO THINGS

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### DISCLOSURES (PAST 12 MONTHS)

- **Speaker honoraria:**
  - 2019 APA Convention CE workshop
  - 2019 Pennsylvania Psychological Association Conference WS session
- **Paid fee/royalties** for CE webinars/recordings (J&K Seminars, TZK Seminars)
- **Book royalties** (Routledge/Taylor&Francis, American Psychological Association)
- **Honoraria** for article/reviews (New Hope Media, LLC [Additude Magazine])
- **Honoraria** for APA Psychotherapy Video Training Series DVD
- **Advisor/consultant** for Mantra Health, Inc.
- **Co-owner**, Intentions-2-Action, LLC

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## WHAT IS "PROCRASTIVITY"

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### LESSONS LEARNED FROM "PROCRASTIVITY"

- **PROCRASTIVITY** – Avoiding a higher priority task by engaging in a lower priority, less time-urgent (but productive) endeavor that is ultimately self-defeating.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ramsay (2017). *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 48, 62-69.  
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=procrastivity>  
<sup>3</sup> Ramsay (2020). *Rethinking adult ADHD*. APA.

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### LESSONS LEARNED FROM "PROCRASTIVITY"

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- **PROCRASTIVITY** – Avoiding a higher priority task by engaging in a lower priority, less time-urgent (but productive) endeavor that is ultimately self-defeating.<sup>1,2</sup>
- Elements of procrastivity task (compared with priority task):<sup>3</sup>
  - **Manual** – physical > cognitive (or clear cognitive > vague cognitive)
  - Existing template or **behavioral script** of actionable steps for starting
  - Better sense of what can be accomplished in a **time frame**
  - Clearer sense of task **progress** and maintenance of **gains**
  - Clear **end point** and **completion** of task
  - Procrastivity task may actually require **more time and effort**, but is viewed as more in harmony with one's perceived efficacy than priority task

<sup>1</sup> Ramsay (2017). *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 48, 62-69.  
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=procrastivity>  
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### CBT FOR ADULT ADHD: PREMISES FOR THE ADAPTED MODEL

- Main **cognitive** issue/theme = **impaired self-regulatory efficacy**  
[Self-Distrust cognitions; Self-Mistrust schema]

"I know I can do it, but I don't trust I will do it when I need to do it."

- Main **behavioral** issue = **engagement**, scripting/focusing, decrease avoidance
- Main **emotional** issue = tolerating **discomfort**, emotional flexibility
- Main **implementation** issue = transform **plan into action**, switching modes
- Main **interpersonal** issue = managing **social capital**, self-advocacy/compassion

Ramsay & Rostain (2015). *Cognitive behavioral therapy for adult ADHD* (2nd ed.). Routledge.  
Ramsay (2020). *Rethinking Adult ADHD: Helping clients turn intentions into action*. APA.

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### LESSONS LEARNED FROM "PROCRASTIVITY" (BEHAVIORAL)

- Use lessons from procrastivity to develop priority task plan
- Make the task "manual" or actionable (at least getting "on task")
  - "Go to work/study station"
  - Spend first few minutes **reviewing** assignment, outlining, etc.
  - Re-read** last two paragraphs you wrote
  - Get / touch** an item you need for the task
  - "Behavioral priming" /progressive exposure/graded task/ "launch sequence"
- "Lower the bar" in terms of expectations and "progress"
  - Time based / Task based / Terrain based
- Realistic time frame, start time + end time ("See the shore"), bounded task

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### LESSONS LEARNED FROM "PROCRASTIVITY" (EMOTIONAL MANAGEMENT)

- "Acceptance" of discomfort/emotion to maintain "commitment" to a valued task. (i.e., **Do not have to be "in the mood"; willing vs want**)<sup>1</sup>
- "Mindful" recognition of ADHD sx's, emotional discomfort without escape reaction, change relationship with emotions (feeling does not dictate action)<sup>2</sup>
- State/acknowledge what you are feeling<sup>3</sup> or "emotional labeling"+granularity<sup>4</sup>
- Feel discomfort **AND** engage in task (reframing discomfort)

<sup>1</sup>Hayes et al. (1999). *Acceptance and commitment therapy*. Guilford.

<sup>2</sup>Zylowska (2012). *The mindfulness prescription for adult ADHD*. Trumpeter.

<sup>3</sup>Lieberman et al. (2007). *Psychological Science*, 18, 421-428.

<sup>4</sup>Brooks et al. (2017). *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*. doi:10.1093/scan/nsw121

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**LESSONS LEARNED FROM "PROCRASTIVITY"  
(IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES)**

- Identify task goal but focus on implementation plan (goal + implementation)
  - Goal = Do homework
  - Implementation intention = "If I sit at desk, then I can start math."
  - "If I encounter situation X, I will do goal-consistent behavior Y."
- Identify plans for handling the "tipping points" of:
  - Starting a task
  - Handling distractions, interruptions, barriers (and getting back on task)
  - Re-engaging in a task after planned; transition between tasks
- Implementation plan** = "IF/WHEN X, THEN I WILL DO Y."

Gewirtow et al. (2011a). *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 30, 615-646.  
Gewirtow et al. (2011b). *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 35, 442-455.

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**INTERVENTIONS:  
COGNITIVE MODIFICATION**

"What are you thinking about this task?"

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**ADHD COGNITIONS SCALE<sup>1</sup>**  
(ORIGINALLY = AVOIDANT THOUGHTS SCALE)

- I'll just do this one thing first.
- I do better waiting until the last minute.
- I can't stop right now.
- Though this usually "sucks me in," I'll just do it for a minute.
- I have plenty of time – I'll just do one more thing before I go.
- Being impulsive is a big part of who I am.
- I know I'm supposed to be doing something else but I want to do this now.

<sup>1</sup>Krouse, L. E., Mitchell, J. T., Kimbrel, N. A., Anastopoulos, A. D. (2019). *Journal of Attention Disorders*, 23, 1090-1100. doi: 10.1177/1087054717707580

"The will's greatest vulnerability is to rationalization."  
Ainslie (2010). In (Andreou & White, Eds.) *The Thief of Time*. Oxford UP.

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### STANDARD COGNITIVE INTERVENTIONS ADAPTED TO ADULT ADHD

- Identifying thoughts and their effects
- Cognitive modification
- Cognitive defusion
- Framing and reframing
- Common cognitive distortions
  - Perfectionism
  - All-or-Nothing Thinking
  - Magnification-Minimization
  - Comparative Thinking
- Other cognitive change tactics
  - HW/field experiments
  - Define terms/specificity
  - Perspective-taking
  - Problematic positive thoughts
  - Enough-sufficiency reframe
  - Focusing on strengths and resources

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### LESSONS LEARNED FROM PROCRASTIVITY (COGNITIVE)

- | BEFORE TASK                               | DURING AND AFTER TASK                              |
|---|--|
| • Framing                                 | • Cognitive defusion                               |
| • Task                                    | • Acceptance, commitment                           |
| • Time                                    | • Challenge "back-end perfectionism"               |
| • Effort/Energy                           | • Trust the plan and stop time                     |
| • Normalize discomfort (defusion)         | • Woulda, coulda, shoulda thoughts                 |
| • Challenge "front-end perfectionism"     | • Challenge performance distortions (modification) |
| • Cognitive modification of anticipations |  |

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### RELEVANCE OF LESSONS

- Cognitions are a necessary (but not sufficient) **ligament** between intention and action, framing tasks/time/energy affects emotions and self-regulatory efficacy
- Target high-yield, actionable **pivot points, valuation, bounding**
- Implement = engagement and felt **experience** (rather than conceptual)
- This model provides a way to **understand** and **respond** to slip-ups
- Goal is to **promote** self-determination, self-acceptance, and well-being

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## HOW YOU **DON'T** DO THINGS

- What is the **task/goal** you are not doing? What is its **value** to you?
- **Barriers?** Cog/emot/behav
- Task-interfering **thoughts**?
- Redefine task in more **actionable terms**
- Emotional interference? Discomfort? Ugh?
- Define smallest, specific, actionable **starting step** (off-task → on-task)
- **Escape** behaviors?
- Specific **time** task will be performed (with start- and **end-time**; *bounded*)
- What is your **implementation plan**?  
(IF/WHEN "X," THEN I WILL DO "Y")
- **Where** will the task be performed?

Ramsay (2020). *Rethinking adult ADHD*. DC: APA.

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CONCLUSION  
Q&A

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