

OVERCOMING PROCRASTINATION

There is no one definition of procrastination. For the sake of simplicity procrastination can be defined as:

choosing to delay &/or avoid attempting or completing a task in favour of doing something else. This could be a lower priority task that may still be considered productive, or something that is experienced as being pleasurable & enjoyable.

Examples:

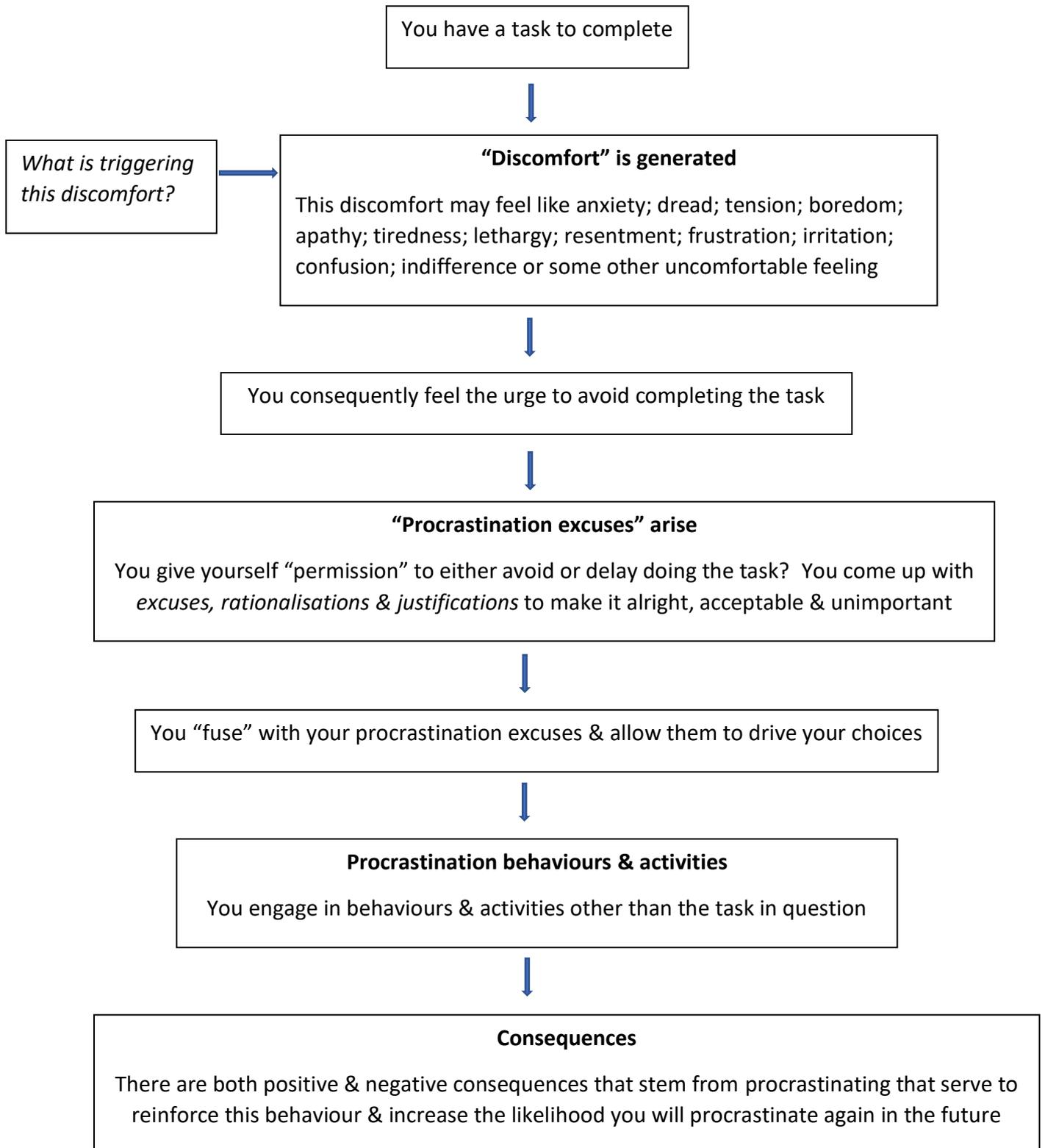
- You have an assignment to complete for university. Instead of getting down to work you choose to clean out the draws of your desk & sort through your files so they are better organised
- You have to do the grocery shopping before picking the kids up from school. Instead of making a shopping list & leaving early to get the shopping done before school pick up, you lie on the couch & watch Netflix leaving you no time to do the shopping
- You have to contact a friend to say you won't be attending their birthday party. Instead of sending them a text message you choose to go to the gym & exercise
- You need to go online & contact your bank to enquire about what appears to be a fraudulent transaction. You choose to go for a coffee with a friend instead
- You have an important meeting to attend at work. You choose not to go by saying you are busy & need to reschedule
- You have to tell your partner had a minor car accident causing damage to the vehicle. You put off doing so by talking to your partner about other things
- You have a report to submit at work. You have completed most of what needs to be done. Instead of finishing it & turning it in, you surf the net in your office with the door shut

The above examples illustrate the key features of procrastination. The task in question doesn't get done when it needs to be done.

These worksheets are designed to help you:

- 1. Understand why you procrastinate or the factors that perpetuate your *procrastination cycle***
- 2. How you can overcome your tendency to procrastinate**

THE PROCRASTINATION CYCLE



Use the [procrastination cycle monitoring worksheet](#) to examine examples of your own instances of procrastination. Use this information to answer the following questions.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR PROCRASTINATION CYCLE

What tasks/areas of your life do you tend to procrastinate about most often? Tick the ones that are relevant to you.

Work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Returning emails or phone calls <input type="radio"/> Meeting deadlines <input type="radio"/> Organising/attending meetings <input type="radio"/> Starting work <input type="radio"/> Finishing work <input type="radio"/> Asking for help/clarification 	Interpersonal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Catching up with friends/family <input type="radio"/> RSVPing <input type="radio"/> Attending functions <input type="radio"/> Arranging functions <input type="radio"/> Returning phone calls/emails/social media messages <input type="radio"/> Having important conversations <input type="radio"/> Discussing problems 	Household: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Cleaning <input type="radio"/> Cooking <input type="radio"/> Laundry <input type="radio"/> Gardening <input type="radio"/> Repairs <input type="radio"/> Maintenance <input type="radio"/> Grocery shopping
Finances: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Opening mail <input type="radio"/> Paying bills <input type="radio"/> Budgeting 	Study: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Attending classes/school <input type="radio"/> Starting assignments <input type="radio"/> Finishing assignments <input type="radio"/> Asking for help/clarification <input type="radio"/> Studying for exams/tests 	Miscellaneous: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Making decisions <input type="radio"/> Addressing problems <input type="radio"/> Taking care of yourself & your health <input type="radio"/> Making changes

Others: _____

Reflect on the discomfort you feel when faced with completing these tasks? What feelings do you experience?

Anxiety	Tension	Boredom	Anger	Agitation	Isolated
Stress	Pressure	Lethargy	Frustration	Complacent	Intimidated
Fear	Apathy	Confusion	Irritation	Defeated	Indifferent
Dread	Tiredness	Disgust	Annoyance	Despondent	Pessimistic

Others: _____

What do you think this discomfort is about? Consider what you are thinking; saying to yourself; remembering; picturing; imagining when you focus on completing the task? What beliefs; assumptions; expectations; rules or standards are being triggered?

The following are often cited as triggers for discomfort that drive the urge to procrastinate:

Area of preoccupation	Thoughts, self-talk, memories, images, pictures	Unhelpful beliefs, assumptions, expectations, rules or standards
Preoccupation with being <i>incapable or incompetent</i>	"I can't do it" "I'm stupid" Imagining failure	"I'm not good enough" "If I try, I am likely to fail"
Preoccupation with <i>making mistakes or not being "perfect"</i>	"I can't get this wrong" "I always stuff things up" "I will probably get it wrong or it won't be good enough" Remembering failing a test in school & feeling awful Remembering not getting the promotion you wanted at work Hearing your father's voice telling you "you need to do better"	"I need to be perfect, make no mistakes & achieve all the time" "I must not fail" "There is a right way & a wrong way to do everything" "Near enough or doing my best is not good enough"
Preoccupation with <i>being judged negatively by others</i>	"What if x thinks I'm an idiot?" Images of being teased as a child Picturing yourself being ostracized & alone	"I need to be liked, loved & approved of by others" "It would be terrible if others thought less of me"
Preoccupation with <i>being able to do only what you feel like doing or what you think is relevant or necessary</i>	"This sucks" "I deserve to be able to decide how I spend my time" Remembering how irritated you felt when you had to write reports at work that no one read	"I should be able to do what I want at all times" "It is awful & unbearable to feel frustrated" "I am the best judge of what to do & how to do it"
Preoccupation with things <i>going wrong & the consequences being "catastrophic"</i>	"What if xyz happens?" Picturing/imagining xyz happening?" Remembering when you tried to cook a roast & when you served it to your guests it was raw & inedible	"If something is potentially dangerous or unpleasant. I should avoid it at all costs"
Preoccupation with <i>needing others</i>	"I can't do this alone" Picturing yourself failing	"I need to depend on others" "I can't do it on my own"

Reflect on the table above. While this is by no means intended to be exhaustive, it does capture what often underlies the discomfort that triggers the procrastination cycle. Can you relate to any of the areas of preoccupation & their associated unhelpful beliefs, assumptions, expectations, rules & standards? List these in the space below.

Area of preoccupation	Thoughts, self-talk, memories, images, pictures	Unhelpful beliefs, assumptions, expectations, rules or standards

Identify your procrastination excuses. Consider the following examples. Tick any that apply to you. If need be modify these excuses so they relate more specifically to you.

"I will do it later"	
"I've got plenty of time. I don't have to do it now"	
"I don't have enough time to do it now. I will wait until I do"	
"I'm too tired to do it now. It's better if I wait until I'm rested"	
"I'm not in the right headspace now. It's better if I wait until I'm more switched on"	
"I won't be able to get it all finished if I start now". I should wait until I have more time"	
"I don't have everything I need to do it now. I should wait until I do"	
"I don't fully understand what I have to do. I can't do it now"	
"I will do it once I have done xyz"	
"I have been working really hard. I deserve to take a break"	
"It's too nice a day to spend doing xyz"	
"I need to get xyz done first"	
"I won't get it right/It won't be good enough so why bother?"	
"It's really not that important"	
"I shouldn't have to do xyz. I should get to choose how I spend my time"	
"I work better under pressure so I will leave it for later"	
"I really don't see the point/value/relevance of doing xyz. It's a waste of time"	

Others:

Identify your procrastination behaviours or activities. These are the things you do instead of the task at hand. Consider the list below. Tick the ones that apply to you

<p>Pleasurable tasks: tasks that generate pleasure & enjoyment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Watching TV/Netflix/Stan etc ○ Surfing the net ○ Listening to/playing music ○ Gaming ○ Exercising 	<p>Distractions: activities that act as a way of not thinking about the task at hand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sleeping ○ Eating ○ Day dreaming ○ Drinking alcohol ○ Doing drugs ○ Having sex ○ Shopping
<p>Lower priority tasks: tasks that may still be productive however are not a priority:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Exercising ○ Household chores ○ Paperwork ○ Reading/researching 	<p>Socialising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Chatting online ○ Phone/video calls ○ Catching up with others in person

Others:

What are the consequences of procrastinating? Consider the costs & the benefits of procrastinating

Benefits of procrastinating	Costs of procrastinating

Reflect on the benefits & consider what is the main *function, purpose or pay-off* that comes from procrastinating? What is it doing for you? How does it relate to the source of your discomfort?

What is the biggest *cost or negative outcome* that comes from procrastinating?

How *motivated* are you to overcome your tendency to procrastinate?

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: OVERCOMING PROCRASTINATION

1. Understand your own procrastination cycle: Reflect on the work you have done above. This will enable you to better understand your own unique procrastination cycle & the factors that perpetuate your tendency to procrastinate. This information is essential in order for you to overcome procrastination & change your behaviour.

Use the:

- a. [Procrastination cycle monitoring worksheet](#) to examine different occasions when you procrastinate in order to better understand the factors responsible for perpetuating or driving your tendency to procrastinate
- b. [Summary & management of my procrastination cycle worksheet](#) to bring all of the information you have generated together

Your answers to all of the above will be found in the following:

2. Identify your high-risk situations: Clearly identify when you are most likely to procrastinate & over what task or issue. These are your high-risk times for procrastination.
3. Understand & address what is generating the discomfort you feel about the task in question: Identify the underlying beliefs, assumptions, expectations, rules or standards that may be triggering your discomfort. Become aware of the thoughts, memories & images these generate that further contribute to your discomfort. See the following worksheets to help you tackle the process of recognising, managing & modifying this discomfort.
 - a. [Origins of core beliefs](#)
 - b. [Past experiences, memories & core beliefs](#)
 - c. [Disputing core beliefs](#)
 - d. [Costs & benefits of core beliefs](#)
 - e. [Writing a letter to the source of your core belief](#)
 - f. [Bridging the intellectual & emotional gap in core beliefs](#)
4. Be aware of your procrastination excuses: List the ways you give yourself permission to procrastinate. You need to know these ahead of time in order to be ready to combat their influence over your choices & actions.
5. Defuse from your procrastination excuses: Apply skills in defusing & disentangling yourself from negative & unhelpful thoughts. See the worksheet on [defusion](#).
6. Dispute your procrastination excuses: Apply skills in disputing negative & unhelpful thoughts. See worksheet on [disputation](#).

7. Be aware of & plan for your procrastination behaviours or activities: List the activities you engage in instead of the task at hand. Consider ways in which you can minimise your tendency to engage in these behaviours. See worksheet on [managing procrastination behaviours](#).

8. Build motivation to overcome procrastination: Changing behaviour is usually never easy. It takes time & effort, which can often lead us to give up trying or persevering. Reflect on the costs of procrastinating & be clear about the benefits of changing this behaviour. This will help you stay motivated when faced with the challenges of creating change. For further assistance see the worksheet on [building motivation to change](#).