Procrastination Problems

Putting off ‘til tomorrow what needs to be done today! Many students are afflicted with the procrastination tendency. Up to 70 percent of them identify as procrastinators, according to Psychology Today. It’s what keeps them up all night cramming or finishing papers. It’s what causes them to tell you they’ll do something but not follow through. It’s an affliction with both mental and physical impacts.

Procrastination isn’t just a form of laziness. It comes about for a variety of reasons, including:
- avoiding negative experiences
- depression
- self-judgment
- anticipating the worst
- a need for love
- perfectionism
- a rigid identity
- fear of others’ response/evaluation
- a lack of training
- low tolerance for frustration
- being passive
- hostility
- not feeling like life is fair
- being overextended

Telltales Signs

While many of us have procrastination tendencies, it doesn’t necessarily mean we are full-fledged procrastinators. Some of us may simply be putting way too much on our daily To Do lists. Dr. Joseph Ferrari, an associate professor of psychology at DePaul University (IL), told Psychology Today that real procrastinators do five telltale things:
1. Underestimate how much time it’ll take to get something done.
2. Overestimate the amount of time they have left to get something done.
3. Overestimate how motivated they’ll feel the “next time” when they expect they’ll get something done.
4. Mistakenly believe that working when they’re not in the mood is less than optimal.
5. Mistakenly believe that, in order to succeed at a task, they need to feel like doing it.

Helping the Procrastinating Student

We’ve all seen procrastinators do everything but what they need to be doing, whether it’s checking email, going out, taking on other projects or finding people and tasks to distract them. This can really derail college students who need to keep on track with their studies and other commitments in order to succeed. Chronic procrastinators even risk dropping out of college.

If you’re concerned that your student may be procrastinating too much, confront the issue in a caring way. Share your concern and why you are worried, using “I” statements (“I’m concerned that you put off your papers until the night before they’re due because I know you’re probably not able to do your best work that way.”). Let her know that you believe in her talents and her intelligence. And suggest that he visit one of the following campus resources for assistance:
- his academic advisor
- the learning center
- the counseling center
- the academic learning lab

These good folks are there to help and have motivated many students to get their procrastination under control. Students who face their procrastinating tendencies now will develop healthier lifelong habits, sooner rather than later.


Excuses, Excuses...

Do any of these sound familiar?
- “I’m not feeling well.”
- “I’m not in the right mood.”
- “I do my best work when I’m under pressure.”
- “This is too hard.”

If you’re hearing these excuses over and over, it could be time to confront your student in a caring yet firm manner. She may need help recognizing her procrastination patterns.
You just don’t understand it. Your student only has one or two classes each day, but he calls in a panic after missing an assignment deadline or overwhelmed with a huge assignment due tomorrow morning. You wonder… what exactly is he doing with the other 20 plus hours in his day?

One of the greatest challenges experienced by college students is time management. Managing the major priorities in their life related to academics, a job, co-curricular activities, personal wellness and a social life can often leave students feeling overwhelmed and hopeless, ultimately leading to bad habits such as procrastination and poor academic performance.

So, the next time your student calls to share that he did poorly on a test – because he didn’t study, because he overslept, because he was up all night with friends, and slept through his scheduled study group – consider challenging him on how he might manage his time better with some easy “challenge and support” time management tips.

**How Can I Help?**

- Help him assess how he is allocating his time by suggesting that he keep a time log for one week.
- Encourage him to look for the “waste baskets” in his time log. Waste baskets are large chunks of time that disappear and are wasted. Ask him how he can avoid those “waste baskets” in the future.
- Encourage him to identify his “prime times” for studying, socializing, sleeping, etc. When does he feel best or perform best?
- Help your student learn how to prioritize his time. Ask him to create a list of tasks and activities he needs or wants to do, then rank order from most important to least important.
- Suggest that he create a daily to-do list to organize his daily priorities and feel the satisfaction of crossing off the priorities he accomplishes. It’s a great feeling!
- Help him understand the importance of saying “NO” when opportunities arise that don’t mesh with his priorities.
- Encourage this common advice offered by college professors: students should study two hours for every one hour in class.
- Promote the idea of breaking huge tasks into smaller, more manageable tasks, over time. It will be less overwhelming and your student will feel like he is accomplishing the larger task little by little.
- Suggest he assess the distractions that sometimes take his attention away from his priority tasks. Instant messages, television programs, email, and phone calls can be managed better when he controls when they are received and responded to.
- Send a care package filled with tools that will support him in his efforts to better manage his time. Tools to consider including are: a planner, a journal, a dry-erase calendar, a bulletin board, post-it notes, a watch, highlighters, and an alarm clock.

**Time Log**

- Keep a simple record of how time was spent—including sleep, meals, interruptions, and socializing.
- Account for blocks of time in increments of 15 or 30 minutes.
- Keep the log for at least seven straight days.
- After completing the time log for one week, review it and cross check it with self-perceptions of how time is used.

**Prioritizing Tasks**

It is easy to create a quick method for ranking tasks based on high, medium or low priorities. Consider using “signals” for levels of priorities such as:

- A, B, C
- 1, 2, 3
- Symbols
- Highlight with different colors