

# Family Assets ... Building Blocks for Life



## Fact Sheet



Family Life Month Packet  
Family and Consumer Sciences

## Getting Past Procrastination

Nancy Recker, Extension Agent, Family and Consumer Sciences, Allen County

Procrastination, that ancient art of putting off today what you can do tomorrow, has at one time or another afflicted everyone. For some people it's a persistent problem and for others it only happens in certain areas of their lives. The end results are usually the same though—wasted time, missed opportunities, increased anxiety, poor performance, guilt, and even avoiding people who depend on us. Procrastination doesn't feel good and it eventually catches up with you. It's like living under your own personal cloud.

Procrastination is letting the low-priority tasks get in the way of the high-priority ones. It's doing things like watching TV or reading a book instead of doing the household chores. It's talking with friends or colleagues even though that big project is due soon. It's also talking to your partner about non-consequential things instead of discussing your relationship concerns.

People usually do fine with the things they want and like to do for fun, but when tasks are perceived as difficult, inconvenient or even scary, that's when procrastination most often occurs. They have lots of excuses to make themselves feel better. See how many of these excuses you may have used:

- I'll start my diet tomorrow after I eat this last piece of pie.
- I work better under pressure so I don't need to start that project yet.
- I'll wait until I'm in the mood to do it.
- I need to clean up my work area first.

- I'm too tired right now. Maybe if I just take a little nap....
- My cough really isn't that bad. It will just take time to get over it.
- There's plenty of time to get it done.

When we talk to ourselves and use these excuses, they seem quite convincing, but don't be fooled by how innocent they sound. They are the cause for postponing important tasks and duties.

### Causes

Procrastination is a bad habit that has two general causes. "Crooked thinking" is one strategy used to justify behavior. Perfectionism, inadequacy and discomfort are the three main issues here that cause delay. Those who believe everything must be perfect have trouble completing jobs because they worry about producing the perfect project, preventing them from finishing on time. When people feel incompetent they often believe they'll fail and they avoid doing the job so their skills won't be tested. Fear of discomfort also delays the completion of jobs but the more the delay, the worse the discomforting pattern becomes. Behavioral patterns are the second cause of procrastination. Getting started on something new or difficult may seem impossible. It's like the physics concept of inertia—a mass at rest tends to stay at rest. But avoiding responsibilities reinforces procrastination, which makes it harder to get things going.

Procrastination is a serious problem for many people. It can undermine their sense of well being and prevent them from experiencing the full potential of their lives. Finding out what helps stop procrastination will be one of the more valuable of life's discoveries. There are no sure preventatives or cures, but here are some things to try:

1. **Use rational self-talk.** Use the two-column technique to write down excuses and then realistic thoughts opposite each excuse.
2. **Positive self-statements.** Use self-motivating thoughts such as "The sooner I get it done, the sooner I can play." "There's no time like the present."
3. **Don't catastrophe.** Jumping to the conclusion that you'll fail or you're no good at something will only create fear that will stop you cold. Negative predictions are not facts.
4. **Design clear goals.** Be specific about what you want and what needs to be done. Set a timetable and keep sights within reason. Goals that are too big can scare you away from starting.
5. **Set priorities.** Write down the most important things first and work down your list in that order.
6. **Partialize the tasks.** Break projects down into smaller and more manageable parts. You get more done if you do it piece by piece.
7. **Get organized.** Have all materials ready before beginning and use a schedule.
8. **Take a stand.** Commit yourself to doing a project.
9. **Use prompts.** Write reminders to yourself and put them in conspicuous places to help you remember and follow through with your plans.
10. **Reward yourself.** When you've finished your task, celebrate! Let yourself enjoy the completion of even the smallest tasks.

Get started today on that thing you've been putting off. Do something daily on this project even if it's only for five minutes. Once you've started, it will be so much easier to keep going.

## Reference

Yamauchi, K. (1987). *Innovations in clinical practice: A source book* (Vol. 6) by P.A. Keller and S.R. Heyman. Sarasota, FL: Professional Resource Exchange.

Family and Consumer Sciences, 1787 Neil Avenue, Columbus, OH 43210

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