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PROCRASTINATION IS NOT LAZINESS

Procrastination is the act of delaying or putting off tasks until the last minute or past the deadline. Everyone procrastinates at some point, but for many, the issue does not interfere with their quality of life. However, when avoiding necessary actions becomes a habit, negative consequences follow, and procrastination affects our well-being.

Experts define procrastination as a self-defeating behaviour pattern marked by short-term benefits and long-term costs. Procrastination is not just a time management problem; it is a failure in self-regulation that leads us to act irrationally. Procrastination is associated with negative functioning; people who procrastinate tend to have elevated levels of anxiety and experience more stress and physical illness.



Procrastination in Children and Adolescents

Procrastination in children is a typical behaviour characterised by delaying necessary tasks, often due to underlying challenges rather than laziness. It can emerge as early as preschool, tends to increase with age, and becomes more pronounced as children grow older. Developmental, cognitive, and emotional factors influence procrastination.

Cognitive Factors

- Difficulty with executive functions, such as attention, planning, organising, and prioritising tasks, contributes significantly to procrastination.
- Learning disabilities: Specific challenges, such as reading difficulties.

Emotional Factors

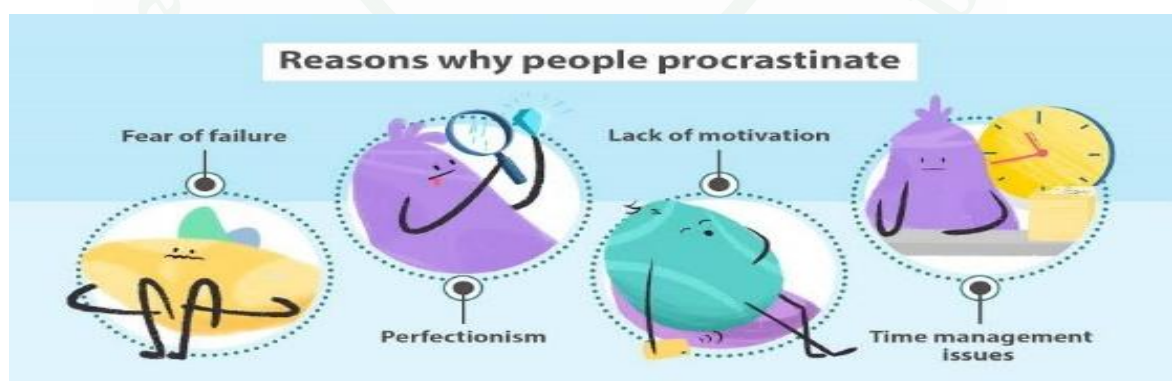
- Anxiety or fear of failure
- Low self-esteem.
- Lack of motivation and depression.

Biological and Environmental Factors

- A preference for short-term relief and immediate gratification over long-term benefits leads to long-term stress.
- Dislike for doing homework at home, a place often associated with relaxation.

Developmental Factors

- Younger children often procrastinate due to impulsivity or difficulty regulating emotions. They tend to delay tasks like cleaning up or completing routines.
- Adolescent children may procrastinate due to challenges in higher-order reasoning, such as planning and thinking ahead. They tend to avoid doing homework and chores due to increased responsibilities.



How does it present and develop?

Behavioural Patterns

- Frequent delays in completing work.
- Waiting until the last minute to finish tasks.
- Avoiding tasks perceived as difficult or unpleasant.
- Losing track of time during breaks or fun activities.
- Claiming completion of tasks when they are not.
- Sleep disturbance.
- Impact on school performance and relationships.
- Emotional reactions like meltdowns or anxiety when facing tasks.
- Complete avoidance of responsibilities, including hygiene and chores.

What are the long-term effects of procrastination in children?

Academic Consequences

- Lower academic performance: Chronic procrastination leads to poor grades and a lack of skill development, creating a cycle of underachievement that can persist into higher education and beyond.
- Reduced potential: Children who procrastinate often fail to reach their full potential due to missed opportunities for learning and growth.



Emotional and Psychological Impact

- Increased stress and anxiety: Procrastination often leads to last-minute pressure, which can lead to chronic stress, anxiety and even depression over time.
- Low self-esteem: Repeated failures of rushed work can cause feelings of inadequacy and reduce confidence in one's abilities.

Health Implications

- Physical health issues: Procrastination is associated with fatigue and poor sleep quality and can lead to physical pain caused by stress.
- Unhealthy coping mechanisms: Adolescents may turn to harmful behaviours, like substance abuse, to cope with the stress caused by procrastination.

Professional and Social Challenges

- Workplace struggles: Poor time management habits developed in childhood can carry over into adulthood, leading to decreased job performance, missed deadlines, and strained professional relationships.

- **Social isolation:** Persistent procrastination can lead to feelings of loneliness and difficulty maintaining relationships, often due to stress and low self-esteem.

Emotional Consequences of Procrastination for Children

- **Increased stress and anxiety.**
- **Feelings of guilt and shame:** Children may feel guilty or ashamed for delaying tasks, especially if their procrastination leads to poor performance or unmet expectations.
- **Low self-esteem:** Repeated procrastination can undermine a child's confidence in their abilities, leading to a diminished sense of self-worth and feelings of inadequacy.
- **Risk of depression:** The cycle of procrastination, failure and self-criticism can contribute to depressive symptoms over time.
- **Emotional dysregulation:** Procrastination is often tied to struggles with managing emotions, such as fear of failure or perfectionism, which can exacerbate emotional instability.

Effective Strategies to Help Children Manage Stress Caused by Procrastination

Encourage Time Management

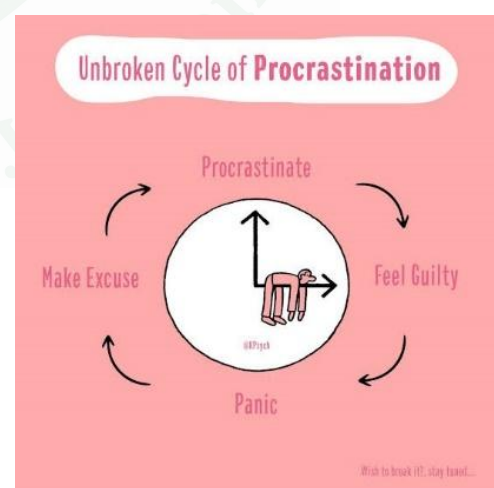
- Break tasks into smaller chunks with clear deadlines.
- Use planners or visual schedules to help children organise their time effectively.
- Plan regular brain breaks to maintain focus and reduce frustration.

Teach Emotional Regulation

- Help children identify and challenge negative thoughts, such as fear of failure or perfectionism.
- Practice mindfulness or deep breathing exercises to reduce anxiety and promote focus.

Promote Healthy Habits

- Ensure children get enough sleep (9-12 hours for younger kids, 8-10 hours for teens) and engage in regular physical activity, which are proven stress relievers.



- Encourage a balanced diet to maintain energy and mood stability.

Foster a Supportive Environment

- Create a calm, structured workspace free from distractions.
- Offer praise for effort, which helps to build confidence and reduce the fear of failure.

Address Procrastination Triggers

- Help children start tasks by setting specific start times and providing guidance if they feel overwhelmed.
- Address underlying issues, such as anxiety or learning difficulties, through empathy and tailored interventions.
- Allow children to solve small problems independently to encourage mastery experiences and build resilience and critical thinking skills.

Parents should seek professional help if procrastination is chronic, causes distress, or disrupts the child's quality of life.

