

How to Thrive with Adult ADD / ADHD

by

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Class 2: Getting Started

The Real Reasons We Don't Get Started

Problems in getting started tend to fall into three general areas:

- Procrastination
- Distraction
- Paralysis

Observe yourself to determine your patterns. Clearly identifying your problem areas will help determine your most successful solutions.

TIP: *Keep a journal or notebook handy to write down your observations. Or record your thoughts into a pocket-sized recorder, to play back later.*

Forget about “waiting for motivation.” If you've been putting off a tedious or difficult task, it's unlikely you'll ever suddenly experience a desire to begin it. Instead, develop a strategy to just GET IT DONE.

There is no “one size fits all” strategy. ADDers are as different from each other as any other individuals. There is no one strategy that will work for everyone. However, as a starting point, it is necessary to determine the nature of your own difficulty getting started.

Life-long habits take time to change.

Based on observation of your patterns, you'll make an educated guess at trying a solution. But it will probably take some trial and error -- and a period of time where you'll repeat new behavior -- before a new habit takes hold.

PROCRASTINATION

Procrastination means deliberately putting off an activity for a later time, because it's boring or unpleasant. In this sense, to practice procrastination, you would need to make a conscious decision to delay action. A typical procrastination thought would be "I don't want to deal with this now. I'll think about it tomorrow."

Poor Time Sense

You delay getting started because you don't realize how long it will take.

Develop an accurate "time sense" so you'll know how long things take to do.

(Future session will be devoted to learning this with the "Time Sense Exercise" tool.) Try to predict exactly how many minutes an activity will take, and compare it to the reality of how long it really took you. Record a variety of activities for at least two weeks. You'll need to get a sense of your patterns over time in order to improve your time sense.

- Use your new knowledge of how long things take to make realistic decisions. Work back from a deadline to plot on your calendar when you should start each step, to finish on time.

The Pleaser

You put off starting your own projects because you are busy helping other people.

Become conscious of your "pleaser" pattern. If you suspect you have a habit of putting everyone else's needs before your own, start keeping a diary of what you do in the time off the job, or that is above and beyond the call of duty.

Set aside time in your calendar to work on your own projects. Treat your own commitments to yourself as if they were at least as important as those you make to others.

You'll have a far better chance of succeeding in keeping your appointment with yourself if you schedule it in your a personal calendar.

Practice saying “no” at least once a day. Keep a “NO” List. Track your refusals by maintaining a “NO” list of whom you refused and the situation each day. You'll be able to look back on it, and gradually move to higher challenges

If possible, enlist a friend's help in your effort, to act as your “NO” Coach.

- Make a “YES” commitment to yourself to start your project, by entering it as an appointment in your calendar.

Stimulation of the Sprint

You require a deadline or crisis to get you into gear.

Break the activity out into small pieces. Plot out small time periods in which to perform each of the steps so that you'll easily meet your deadline without it becoming a huge, looming task.

Plan a more stimulating way to do each step. Use music, TV, phone-time, or other passive stimulation in the background to entertain yourself during boring tasks.

- You can clear clutter to music, do typing with TV, or filing while on phone calls where little input is required.

Try movement and rhythm to enhance your focus.

- Some examples are dancing in place while doing the dishes, sorting laundry or papers; setting a memorization task to rhyme to the words of a popular song; listening to language tapes while working out on the treadmill.

CAUTION: Multi-tasking is fine with tasks you can do by rote, but can be a problem with ones that require thought and concentration.

DISTRACTION

***Distraction* problems refer to difficulties focus on the task.** If you relate to one of the following areas, your solution may lie in **dealing with the way you focus and make decisions in the moment**, considering the distracting factors in your life.

Competing Priorities

Too many things are grabbing your attention at once, keeping you from starting as you intended.

Analyze whether any of the competing priorities can be put off or eliminated. Before you jump in to everything that comes your way, stop and consider various deadlines, to determine what must be done first.

Determine how some steps could be delegated to someone else. Consider hiring someone free-lance, bartering or exchanging favors.

- Take a “**Do, Dump or Delegate**” approach to deciding how to deal with competing priorities. You probably don’t have to do everything yourself.

Things Come Up

Although it seems you should have the time to work on your goal, little things come up to keep you from it.

Become conscious of what comes up. Make a list of everything that came up for the last few weeks, during the time you thought you had available to start your project.

Determine your pattern of time spent on each type of distraction.

- Get real. Doing the ***Time Sense Exercise*** for a reality check may surprise you!
- Be precise. Break down large categories into smaller ones to be very clear about the type of interruptions you have.

Anticipate the unexpected. Examining your past patterns will allow you to make some pretty good guesses as to what kinds of “things” are likely to come up in the future.

- Evaluate the importance of each type of distraction.
- Set boundaries. Make a deliberate choice of how you’ll deal with the interruption in advance.

Focus Challenges

You intend to get started, but find your mind drifting off on tangents instead.

Use timing devices to maintain focus.

- An old-fashioned kitchen timer, set for 15 or 30-minute intervals, can serve as a reminder to keep you on task. Or use the recommended “Invisible Clock” timer (see it at http://www.thrivewithadd.com/products/useful_resources109).
- Alternatives are setting your cell phone or PDA to ring at a certain time, or using a pre-set vibrating watch or pager.

PARALYSIS

Paralysis means your mind feels paralyzed or helpless, not knowing *how* to begin.

Or you may simply feel stuck in first gear. This tends to happen when you feel overwhelmed or anxious, or if you have trouble transitioning out of what you’re doing.

The State of Overwhelm

Your mind goes into overwhelm mode when you’re faced with a complex task, or you feel there’s more to do than you have time for.

Break it down and consider what comes first. When you’re feeling overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of what must be done, break it down, one step at a time. (The *mind-map technique* for breaking things down will be illustrated in a future session.)

- Prioritizing by urgency or importance. If possible, try to get the most urgent or important aspects attended to first.
- Prioritizing by sequence. Instead of agonizing over where to start, think of any one piece of the whole. Then ask yourself “what must come first,” and keep going backwards until you can’t think of anything that has to come before it.
- Create a series of target dates or deadlines. Mark a calendar with dates by which you want to complete each step.
- Make a daily TO DO list for the steps you’ll need to take on each day, in order to meet the targets. Be conservative and realistic! .

Do, Dump or Delegate. Consider whether some of what’s keeping you overwhelmed can actually be “dumped,” or delegated to someone else.

- Avoid the “delegate-dump”. If you delegate a task, you may still need to remain in charge of it.

Start with an easy step. Pick the *simplest* part to get you started and get into the flow of the work. Once you’ve started, your mind will be clearer and more willing to address the rest.

Fear of the Outcome

Fear of the outcome can be likened to performance anxiety, creating a frozen paralysis that keeps you from starting.

Avoid black/white thinking. Assuming the worst possible outcome before beginning is just as damaging as only considering the best case. Both are extremes, and not necessarily the real picture.

- Deal with reality rather than assumptions

Let go of the final result. Avoid dwelling on the final outcome while you’re still engaged in performing the steps. If you concentrate on getting the steps done, you’ll reach the best outcome.

Ask for help if you need it. If fear of not doing it right is holding you back from starting, don't be afraid of asking for advice or assistance from an experienced person.

Trouble with Transitions

You may have difficulty “shifting gear” from one activity or state to another. This can make getting started on a task particularly difficult.

Identify your needed “rituals.” “Ritual” here refers to an activity that you want to do habitually, and that gives you serenity, energy or pleasure. Performing this activity -- intentionally, and without guilt -- can be just what you need to get you started on the thing you're putting off.

CAUTION: Don't pick an activity that you enjoy too much as your ritual, or it will defeat the purpose of helping you transition to something else. For example, if surfing the Internet tends to get you so involved that you lose track of time, Internet surfing is NOT a good ritual to help you transition. (*Creating your ideal rituals will be discussed in a future session.*)

Make sure you schedule your ritual into your day. Once you've identified a ritual activity as important, you'll want to purposely develop the habit of performing it.

Carry over parts of the ritual to ease the transition. Your ritual may involve your senses of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch or movement. If possible, carry these over into the activity to get you started.

Work with your own biological rhythms. When your work or life schedule requires you to go against your own biological rhythm, you may find yourself particularly paralyzed in getting started.

- Consider when you are most creative or productive. Think about what you're best at, for different times of day or night, taking into account physical work, routine work, creative or analytical work, working with others, work requiring patience and detail.

- Plan your schedule around the best time for your “getting started” project. Commit to start on the project you’ve been having trouble with, at a time of day when you are likely to work and focus on it most successfully.

CREATING ACCOUNTABILITY

Many people find it easier to get started in environments with built-in accountability and structure, such as an organization. If you do well in structured settings, but have trouble getting started on your own, you might do best to try to create more structure for yourself.

Designing Your Own Structure

Structuring your project should involve a “blueprint” that identifies steps, dates, and other people who may be needed.

Set milestones for accomplishment.

Marking down the steps and assigning “milestones” can have a powerful effect in creating the structure you need to start.

Make commitments involving other people.

Make advance commitments for later steps, and tell others about it. Bring other people on board to help where you’re likely to get bogged down.

Create a reward structure.

Build rewards into your structure, so that you feel satisfaction at completing each step. The rewards can be as simple as the satisfaction you might feel at checking off each task, or treating yourself to something you want.

Coaching and Goals-Oriented Groups

Enlisting others to help you get started and hold the focus can be highly effective.

You can help ensure your success by building your own support team to jump-start *your* project and keep you on task.

Personal & Business Coaching for Adult ADD / ADHD

- Coaching by phone. Most coaches work with a national clientele over the phone. This means that you're not limited by geography .
- Coaching with Bonnie Mincu of "Thrive with ADD" **Members of this class can purchase one focused coaching session at half price, \$100 for 60 minutes***.
(*Contact Bonnie Mincu at bonnie@bonniemincu.com before the promotion deadline stated on the www.thrivewithADD.com web page or promotional emails for this Teleseminar Series).
- Coaching is not covered by health insurance, although it may be tax-deductible if involving certain work or career issues.

Coaching Groups

Goals-oriented groups (versus support groups) If your goal is to start and stay on track with a particular project, you'll want a group that is designed for that purpose. "Support groups" provide the benefit of a supportive community, but are often more therapeutic than goals-directed in nature. They may not be what you need to get through your project or reach a specific goal.

PRACTICE

These suggested assignments are optional. Try to build on the techniques you practiced from last week, especially the Intention Log!

- **Use your Intention Log to determine your "getting started" difficulties.** See what patterns emerge. Note your primary reasons you don't get started, and whether they fall mainly under Procrastination, Distraction or Overwhelm. Consider if you had previously been erroneously labeling everything "procrastination."
- **Choose a solution for each difficulty you had, even in hindsight.** For each problem you had getting started in the last week or so, think of what solution would have helped.

As you move forward in your self-awareness, consider the solution as soon as you realize you're having trouble, to break through and actually get started.