



Newsletter of Stonebriar Counseling Associates

▣ What is Procrastination?

Procrastination is a strange phenomenon that can lead to feelings of guilt, inadequacy, depression and self-doubt. Rather than make life more pleasant it almost always adds stress, disorganization, and frequent failure. The process has been described as: (1) wanting to achieve some outcome, usually something the procrastinator and others value and respect--"I've got to start." (2) delaying and briefly thinking of real and imagined advantages of starting to change later--"I'll do it tomorrow when I don't have much to do." (3) delaying more and becoming self-critical--"I should have started sooner." They may hide or pretend to be busy; they may even lie about having other obligations. (4) delaying still more, until finally the task has to be done, usually hastily--"Just get it done any old way"--or you just don't have time--"I can't do this!" (5) berating oneself--"There is something wrong with me"--and believing they will never procrastinate again and/or discount the importance of the task--"It doesn't matter." (6) repeating the process almost immediately on other important tasks, as if it were an addiction or compulsion. The best course of action would be to simply do the unpleasant task as soon as possible while we have enough time to do the job right and get it over with so as to not prolong undue agony. But still, so many of us put it off. Why? Consider the following reasons.

▣ Why Do We Procrastinate?

There are many possible reasons: (1) we may feel good about setting goals and telling others that we are going to "change," (2) and so we shorten the time we actually have to work on the task, (3) but much of the time the unpleasant task is avoided altogether. Research has shown that 70% of New Year's resolutions are abandoned by February 1. In recent years, many counselors have come to understand the act of procrastinating by identifying the *emotions* associated with the behavior. In other words, procrastination is an attempt to cope with our emotional reactions. What are these emotions? One is the fear of failure or success that includes a feeling of panic when we set impossible goals. Anger is another possible emotion (this includes rebellion against control). When we dislike the work that needs to be done depression can slow us down (and failure due to procrastination can be depressing).

▣ Types of Procrastinators

It may help to understand procrastination in terms of *two distinct kinds* of procrastinators: one tense and the other relaxed. Those who are tense often feel an intense pressure to succeed while a fear of failure at the same time. **The relaxed type** may feel negatively toward his/her work and disregard it, forget about it, and resort to having fun or

engage in some other distracting activity. This denial-based type of procrastinator avoids as much stress as possible by dismissing his/her work or disregarding more challenging tasks *and* concentrate on thoughts that may push him/her away from the task at hand. The basic belief system centers on thinking the gain is not worth the pain if one's long-range goals require too much hard unpleasant work. This relaxed procrastinator irrationally convinces him/herself: "I have to have something going on--I can't stand being bored" or "If I don't like to do something, I shouldn't have to do it." So, they procrastinate by finding something fun to do and then rationalize their behavior. **The tense-afraid type** of procrastinator feels overwhelmed by pressures, unrealistic about time, uncertain about goals, dissatisfied with accomplishments, indecisive, blames others or circumstances for his/her failures, and lacks confidence. Underlying their fears is failing, lacking ability, and falling short of overly demanding goals. This type believes that his/her worth is determined by what he/she does, which reflects his/her level of ability. The fear of being judged escalates into being over-stressed and over-worked until he/she escapes the pressure temporarily by trying to relax but any enjoyment gives rise to guilt and more apprehension--just the opposite of Philippians 4:6-7! The key symptom to the anxiety-based procrastinator is the *fear of failure*. Please note that if one is self-critical and feels inferior,

they will seek avoidance especially competitive activities. Not trying is a form of failure but not as painful as actually trying and failing. Secondly, if you set very high or impossible goals--like a perfectionist, you are likely to feel overwhelmed. Perhaps that is why perfectionistic procrastinators often have low confidence in their ability. By procrastinating, such a person avoids, for the moment, the dreaded expected failure (and guarantees doing poorly in the long run). Another form of the anxiety-based procrastinator is the *need to feel in control and/or to resist control by someone else* ("You can't make me do it."). Such a person holds the irrational beliefs that "everyone must treat me kindly and do what I want them to do, and, if not, I am entitled to get mad at them (including refusing to do what parents, teachers, and bosses want me to do)." Naturally, everyone is asked to do things they don't want to do; some accept that reality, others don't. But, how is procrastination defeated in each of these forms?

How to Overcome Procrastination

If we begin with the premise that the act of procrastination is not the "problem" but rather an attempted "cure" for fears, self-doubts, and dislike of work, then most procrastinators will have to focus on the real underlying problems-fears, attitudes and irrational ideas-in order to be a successful over-comer. Therefore, the first step in working with someone who is a procrastinator is to ask, "Is he/she a relaxed or a tense procrastinator?" Tense procrastinators suffer from

strong, sometimes mean, internal criticism, while relaxed procrastinators have defeated their self-critic by denying reality. From this point, each procrastinator must deal with his/her own unique emotions, thoughts, and unconscious motives. On page 5, are some triggers to be aware of for both relaxed and tense procrastinators. Please note that most people have to overcome procrastination gradually. Perhaps breaking big jobs down into manageable tasks ("I'll just work five minutes") and focus on "getting started," the individual may soon realize that they don't mind working longer than five minutes. This is called the "five minute plan." The key is to learn the habit of getting started on a task early in the thought process. I also find it helpful to have the client keep a journal in which they record in detail their thoughts and feelings associated with whatever task they are working on. This helps them see how their fears, excuses, and habits divert their attention. Once we baseline the information we sit down together and devise strategies to take on scary tasks and do them promptly. In all honesty, many procrastinators will try to resist these methods. A truly dedicated "relaxed" procrastinator will need more internal motivation, or perhaps insight into their self-esteem. Behaviorally, the role of negative reinforcement in procrastination is easy to see, i.e. some behavior or thought enables a person to escape some unpleasant but necessary work. Each procrastinator develops his/her own unique combination of escape mechanisms, such as emotions (fears, resentment), social needs, and thoughts

(irrational ideas). With a relaxed, fun-loving procrastinator, we need to help him/her see how pleasure seeking may, in the long run, lead to unhappiness. They may fool themselves into believing there is nothing wrong with having fun now and put off the task. Procrastination is a well-learned habit that quickly shifts attention away from the work that needs to be done so that one automatically feels good about avoiding the work--until later. It happens without much awareness. Consequently, encourage the individual to take responsibility- see what is happening moment by moment. Eventually, the procrastinator can face the facts, namely, that in most situations a take-it-easy, live-for-today, let's-have-fun philosophy will usually not get him/her what he/she wants out of life. If the work pressure is already too great, exhorting the tense procrastinator to "try harder," "get yourself organized," "this is a tough job, so don't put it off," is counter-productive. Such typical advice only increases the pressure and unpleasant feelings about the task to be done. This kind of procrastinator has to reduce the unpleasantness of the task and then he/she will get it done.

Overcoming procrastination is a labor of love that articulates a plan of action coupled with godly patience and perseverance. As we work with people who suffer from this debilitating behavior let us remember the words of Paul who wrote: "...one thing I do forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead...the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:13,14). May we be in the business of helping people turn procrastination into motivation!

Descriptions Of A Procrastinator

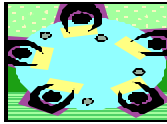
- **Poor Time Management.** Procrastination means not managing time wisely. You may be uncertain of your priorities, goals and objectives. You may also be overwhelmed with the task.
- **Difficulty Concentrating.** When you sit at your desk you find yourself daydreaming, staring into space instead of doing the task. Your environment is distracting and noisy. You keep running back and forth for equipment such as pencils, erasers, dictionary, etc. You probably notice that all of the examples that you have just read promote time wasting and frustration.
- **Fear and Anxiety.** You may be overwhelmed with the task and afraid of getting a failing grade or closing a deal at work. As a result, you spend a great deal of time worrying rather than completing the project.
- **Negative Beliefs** such as; "I cannot succeed in anything" and "I lack the necessary skills to perform the task" may allow you to stop yourself from getting work done.
- **Personal problems.** For example, financial difficulties, problems with your boyfriend/girlfriend, husband/wife, etc.
- **Finding the Task Boring.**
- **Unrealistic Expectations and Perfectionism.** You may believe that you **MUST** purchase new cleaning items every time before you can begin to clean the house. You may think that you haven't done the best you possibly could do, so it's not good enough to start cleaning.
- **Fear of Failure.** The procrastinator should *reduce his/her fear of failing* by (a) seeing that his/her worth is not totally determined by an assignment at work or by a term paper grade, (b) having alternate plans B and C for succeeding, in case plan A doesn't work, and (c) using self-talk, such as "If I fail, it won't be awful; I can handle it." By changing these thoughts and habits, they can begin to reduce the dread of work and take responsibility for directing their life ("I can enjoy hard, responsible work. It is part of a good life").
- *Recognize self-defeating problems* such as fear and anxiety, difficulty concentrating, poor time management, indecisiveness and perfectionism.
- *Identify your own goals*, strengths and weaknesses, values and priorities.
- Compare your actions with the values you feel you have. Are your values consistent with your actions?
- *Discipline yourself* to use time wisely: Set priorities. (i.e. Study in small blocks instead of long time periods. For example, you will accomplish more if you study/work in 60 minute blocks and take frequent 10 minute breaks in between, than if you study/work for 2-3 hours straight, with no breaks. Reward yourself after you complete a task.)
- *Motivate yourself to study*: dwell on success, not on failure. Break large assignments into small tasks. Keep a reminder schedule and checklist.
- *Set realistic goals.*
- *Modify your environment*: Eliminate or minimize noise/ distraction. Ensure adequate lighting. Have necessary equipment at hand. Don't waste time going back and forth to get things.



Newsletter of Stonebriar Counseling Associates

From the desk of....

Bob Good



**Sexual Addiction Group Meeting
Tuesday Nights at 7:00 pm (SCA Office)**

To Procrastinate Or Not To Procrastinate

When it comes to understanding a common problem such as procrastination, we immediately think of putting something off or doing something important. Whatever it is that should be done we are not doing it - it stays in the back of our mind and silently drains us.

Most of us procrastinate. Some other signs of procrastination besides waiting until the last minute to do something is that of being reluctant to take risks or try something new, staying at home or in the same old job, getting sick when faced with an unpleasant job, avoiding confrontations or decisions, blaming others or the situation ("it's boring") for our unhappiness or to avoid doing something, making big plans but never carrying them out, and/or having such a busy social-recreational calendar that it is hard to get important work done.

This list of symptoms suggests that procrastination, which at first sounds like a simple behavior, is, in fact, quite complex. It involves emotions, skills, thoughts or attitudes, and factors we are unaware of. Furthermore, the causes and dynamics of putting off an important but unpleasant task vary from person to person and from task to task for the same person. For instance, someone may delay completing a work assignment but immediately fill out the necessary paperwork for their supervisor. Hopefully, understanding how and why someone procrastinates will be of help with their struggle.

Procrastination is only a habit and habits can be changed. The first thing to ask is whether procrastination is a sign that needs to change something fundamental in life (i.e. job, environment, relationships) or if it's masking fear, lack of self-confidence, self-esteem, etc. There are a number of ways to tackle procrastination and the following article will guide you to help people use different strategies for different situations.

Sincerely,

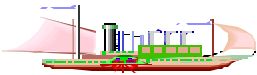
Bob



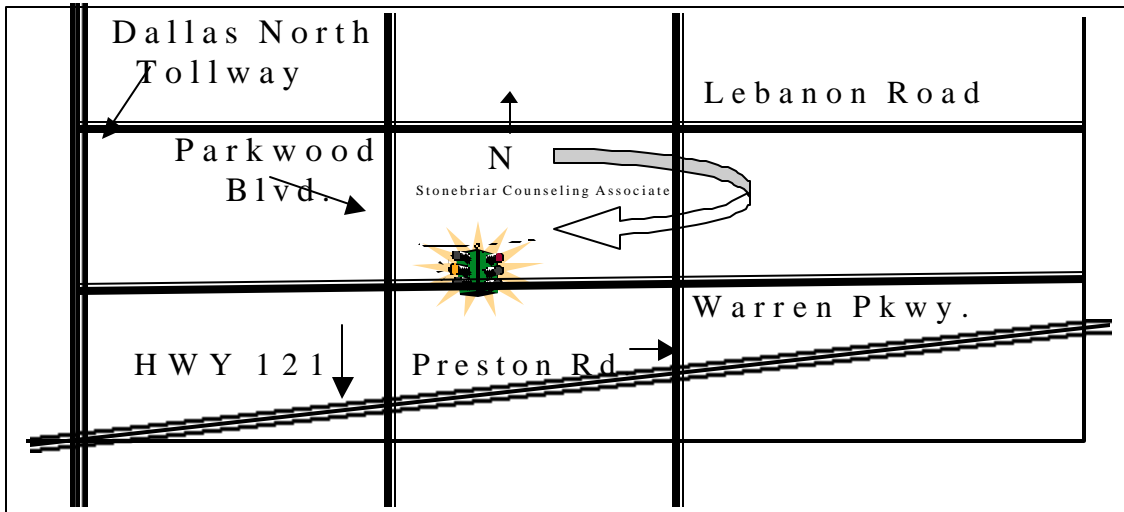
Happy New Year!!



Check out Our New Web Site:
[www. Stonebriarca.com](http://www.Stonebriarca.com)



Come Visit Our Location!!



Mission Statement

Stonebriar Counseling Associates (SCA) is purposefully passionate in providing quality psychotherapy from a Christian perspective that influences the treatment of psychological, emotional, and mental health issues.

To this end, SCA is committed to glorify God by:

- Believing that each person has the innate ability for personal growth and wholeness.
- Seeking a variety of approaches to help you learn new skills and find more choices so as to manage life's changes with a broader range of solutions for recognizing your strengths.
- Accepting all people with respect and love regardless of age, sex, race, religion, ethnicity or socio-economic status.
- Thoughtfully affirming and carefully following the morals of the Christian faith and the ethics of the professional governing boards.
- Providing research and development for new and innovative programs, seminars, and workshops in order to further the well-being and self-sufficiency of each client.





Bob Good, M.A., Th.M., LPC
3550 Parkwood Blvd., 301-C
Frisco, TX., 75034