

ADHD PROCRASTINATION GUIDE



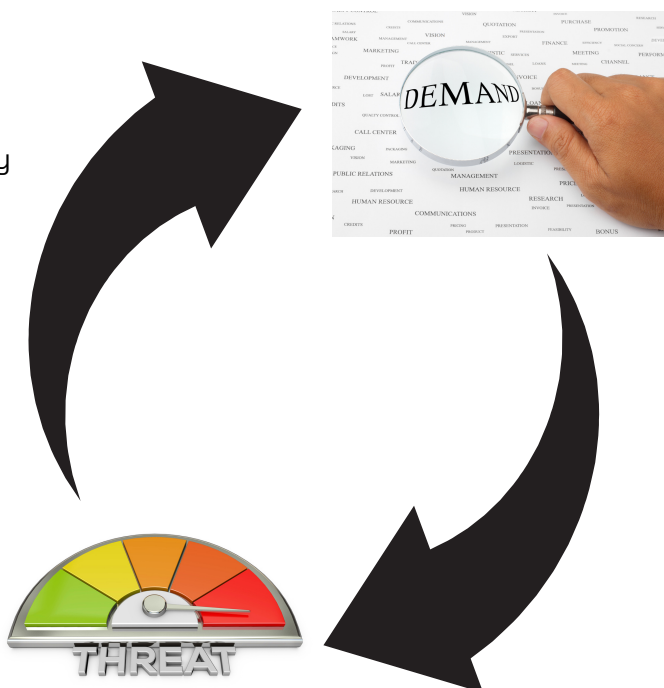
Procrastination is the delay or complete avoidance of starting or completing a task. Everyone procrastinates sometimes. There are many reasons for procrastination including: feeling too tired to do the task, fear of not being to do the task well, not clear how to do the task, would rather be doing something else. All these reasons have a level of threat associated with them. When you add in ADHD then the very fact that you have to do a task in the first place is a demand, so this will increase our sense of threat. When the threat system is active the chance of avoidance (flight response) increases. This will also increase the chance of distractibility. We may feel agitated and tell ourselves "it's too much" or too boring and not do it.

The threat-demand cycle

This is the idea that every demand presents as a threat, then when on threat alert everything seems like a demand. This cycle can be perpetual for someone with ADHD. Identifying tasks that feel demanding is very useful as they are often the things we will avoid.

Things I find demanding forms

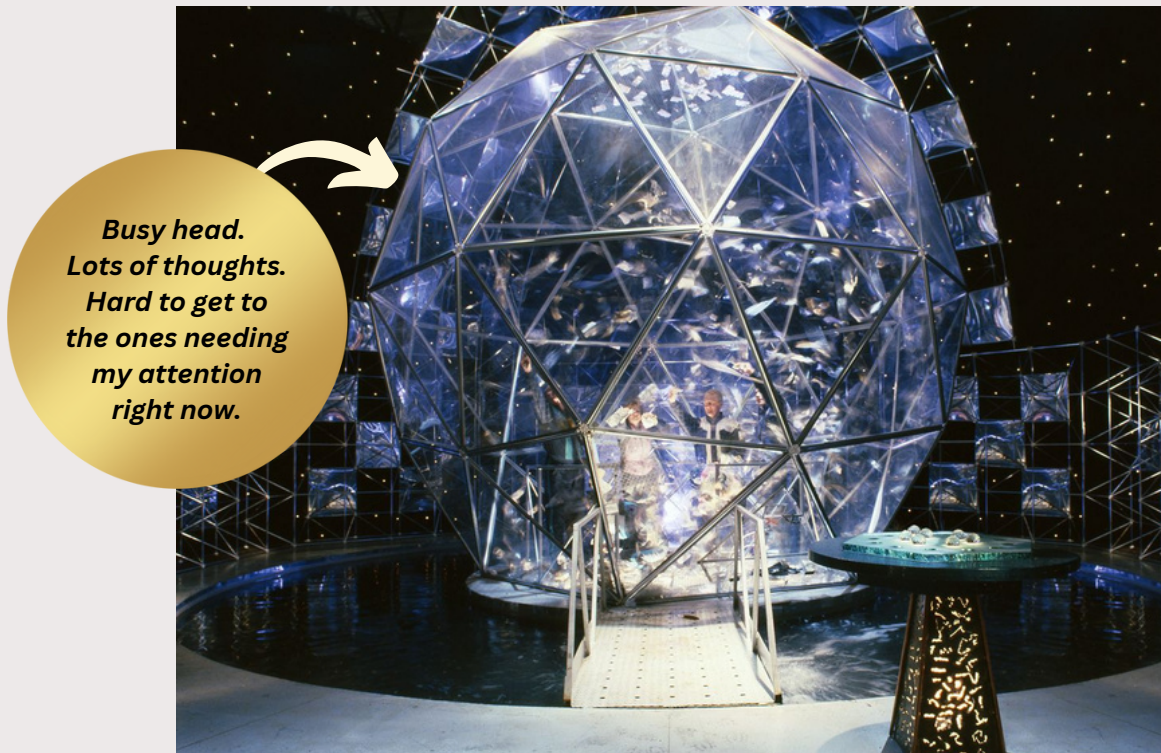
- time limited tasks*
- agreeing to do a task*
- posting things*
- remembering birthdays*
- tech*
- tasks requiring organisation*
- laundry*
- boring repetitive tasks*
- (housework and washing hair)*



Remember...

- Problems are normal
- Any task or demand will feel more threatening with ADHD due to memory problems
- Write a list of your common 'problems' or tasks you avoid
- Use feelings & thoughts as cues rather than seeing them as threatening

Crystal dome as a metaphor for ADHD avoidance

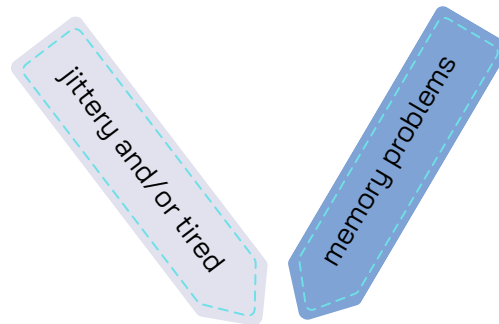


Thoughts are like the tickets flying around the dome. There are lots of **silver** ones (any thought, particularly distracting ones) and only a few **gold** ones (problems and tasks that require our attention). It's hard to grab the gold because of the cloud of silver, so you give up (**AVOIDANCE**). Bringing attention back to the present is like turning the fan down, so the silvers start to settle down and you can grab the gold tickets and take action!

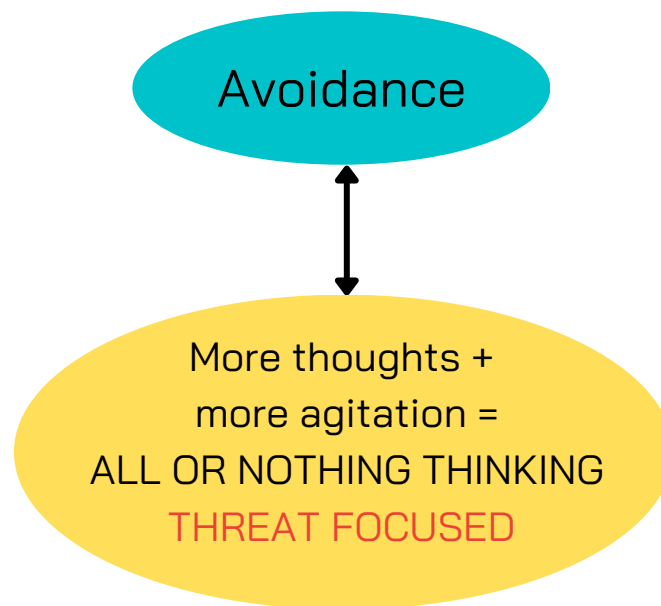
In addition to distracting thoughts there may also be worries. Hypothetical worries are future orientated and tend to be in the form of 'what ifs...?' This uncertainty increases the level of perceived threat of a task. Common worries in ADHD include: what if I get distracted and can't finish it? What if I make careless mistakes and I don't do a good enough job? What if I get too tired and run out of energy?

WHY IS APPROACHING TASKS CHALLENGING?

The physical symptoms of ADHD (agitation and/or fatigue) make us overestimate the level of threat of a problem and question our ability to solve it in that particular moment. This leads to avoidance.



To complicate things further, there are short-term memory problems that also play a role in procrastination. This means that any intervention has to account for this.



To try and break the ALL or NOTHING thinking and behaviour that leads to avoidance we need to approach the 'problem' with a different mindset. Rather than viewing the **THREAT** as all or nothing we use a continuum with threat on one end. The other end is the opposite of threat - **OPPORTUNITY** - and we want to consider all the potential opportunities that approaching the avoided action could afford.

Threat-opportunity continuum



USING THE THREAT-OPPORTUNITY CONTINUUM

Below is an example of how you can use the threat-opportunity continuum

Problem - I need to ring the GP surgery for my repeat prescription

Consider all the **THREAT** thoughts that are interfering with doing this task first. They are normally hypothetical worries so can frame them as 'what ifs...?'

100% |-----| 100%

THREAT

- what if...
- no-one answers
- I can't get it today
- I have to see a GP
- the receptionist is angry
- they can't sort it out
- ...and many more

Ask the person to rate the level of threat of these thoughts

OPPORTUNITY



Problem - I need to ring the GP surgery for my repeat prescription

Now consider all the **OPPORTUNITIES** that doing this task would afford. Once completed compare the two ends and **RE-RATE** level of threat of the task.

100% |-----| 100%

THREAT

- what if...
- no-one answers
- I can't get it today
- I have to see a GP
- the receptionist is angry
- they can't sort it out
- ...and many more

OPPORTUNITY

- I will get my medication
- I won't miss any doses
- I will feel better
- I can stop worrying about it
- Can cross it off my list
- I will be able to get on



Considering the potential benefits of approaching the task should help break the avoidance

PROBLEM SOLVING TECHNIQUE

1

Identifying problems

- Write a list of common 'problems' (attending to home admin, making phone calls, keeping up with children's school requests...)
- Write a clear problem definition

My washing machine is broken

2

Goal setting

- Define the goal(s)

To clean my clothes

To have a functioning washing machine

3

Potential solutions

- Write a list of **ALL** the **possible** solutions you can generate. Be creative and include crazy ideas as this opens the pathway to lateral thinking (therefore less threat-focused)
- Try and generate at least 10 potential solutions



4

Choose a solution

Consider pros & cons of each
Choose one and give it a go
If this doesn't work.....

5

Try another solution

Choose another option
from the list

Have a go!

Remember that there are always more options to try

DEALING WITH DISTRACTIBILITY

Everyone gets distracted but it is how we respond to it. People without ADHD may be able to get back on task more quickly after being distracted. This can be more challenging for someone with ADHD. It can lead to a complete shut down in order to move on to the next thing or to continue engaging with the distraction. The mental effort to switch tasks that require focus is demanding. The good news is that we can overcome these challenges by adopting some strategies to manage distractibility.

Principles:

- recognise your common distractions
- manage your environment
- gauge attention span for each task
- set timer for chunks of task time
- when distracted write it down

Begin with your list of commonly avoided tasks. For each one estimate how much time you think you could remain focused without getting distracted. This will be the 'chunk' of time we will allocate to that activity in one go. There is a worksheet at the back of the guide for this.



Manage your environment

Notice what distracts you in the environment where you need to focus. Minimise these distractions before starting the task. For example, a messy room may lead to thoughts of tidying it up or a sense of chaos which can be a distraction in itself. If looking out a window encourages avoidance then move your desk.



Distraction delay

This technique encourages you to split a task into chunks. This reduces the opportunity for distractions. We want to delay the distraction by making the attentional focus time more manageable. If you get distracted during the chunk then write a brief note on paper of what the thought was then come back to the task. During the break between timed chunks you can refer to the list and see if anything really needs your attention. If not then set the timer for the next chunk of task time until it is completed.



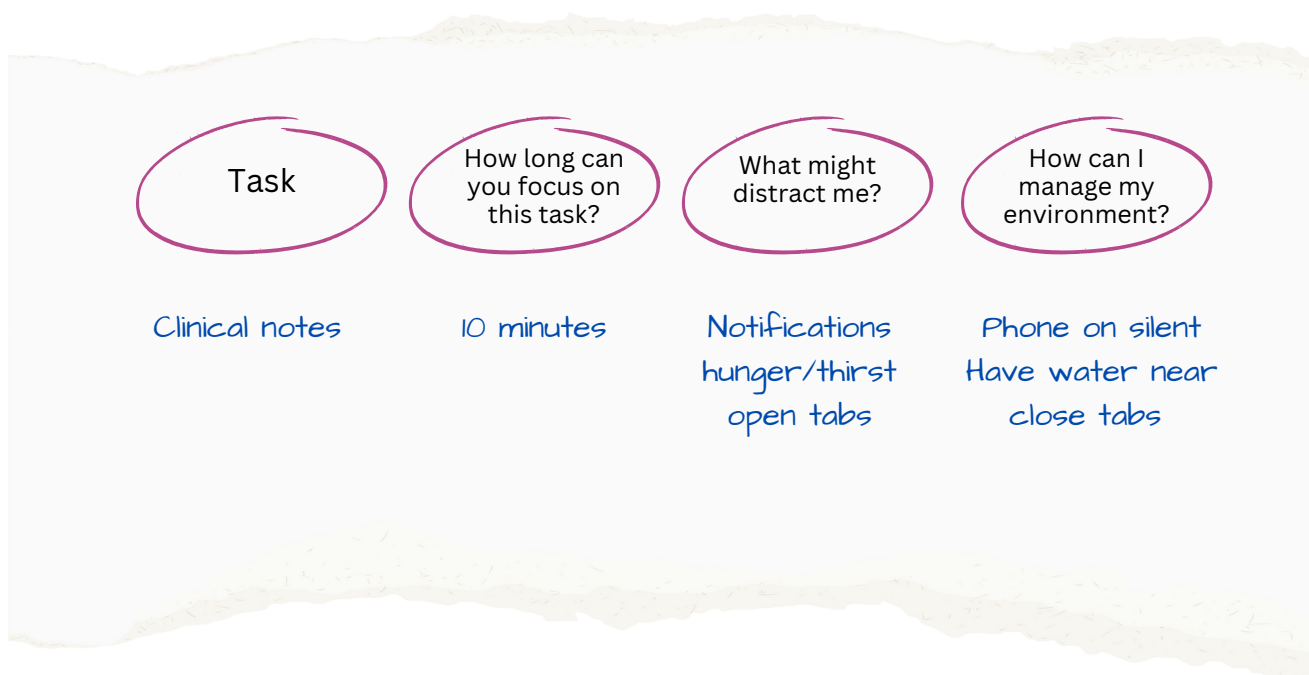
When a distracting thought comes to mind write it down

UNDERSTANDING YOUR DISTRACTIBILITY



It is useful to monitor how much attention you can give each task so that you can learn to manage your distractibility. For long or uninteresting tasks you are likely to become distracted more easily. By monitoring each task we can gauge a realistic 'chunk' of time to pay attention to it before allowing ourselves a break or opportunity to engage with the distraction before resuming the activity for the next chunk of time.

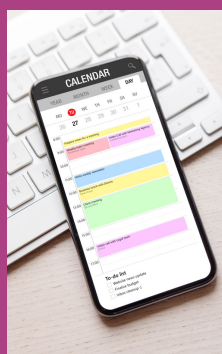
The example below shows how you can recognise potential distractions and make changes to the environment to minimise their impact. So clinical notes will be done for 10 minutes at a time with a drink close by. Between the 10 minute spurts distractions can be briefly engaged with until ready for the next 10 minute chunk.



Set a timer if it helps to keep on track with the designated chunk of time. Remember to use a note pad to jot down any distracting thoughts rather than acting on them during the task focus time. Look through the list at the break but try and get back on task as soon as you can.

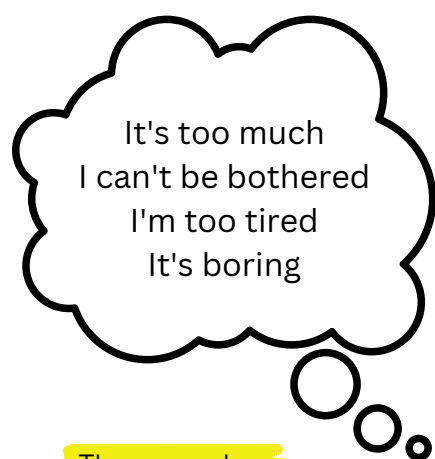
PLANNING ACTIVITIES & TASKS

We know that ADHD affects the ability to organise and plan things so having a reliable calendar system is an important first step. A task system or 'to do' list is the other fundamental system we want to develop. When it comes to procrastination we can use the calendar and task systems to plan times for the avoided task. Remember that we need to allocate realistic time slots for the task. For example, if you can only focus on completing forms for 5 minutes at a time and you have a tax return to do, you could allocate 30 minutes on the calendar which can be broken into 4 'chunks' of task time with brief intervals between.



Use your calendar to plan the avoided activities and tasks

Thoughts that might interfere



These can be challenged

what you can tell yourself instead

I can break it down
I will get it out the way
It won't take long
I will feel better when it's done
I can do something more interesting after



TASK MONITORING FORM

Task

**How long can
you focus on
this task?**

**What might
distract me?**

**How can I
manage my
environment?**