



Put Off Procrastinating!!

Module 7

Putting It Altogether, Doing It & Keeping Going

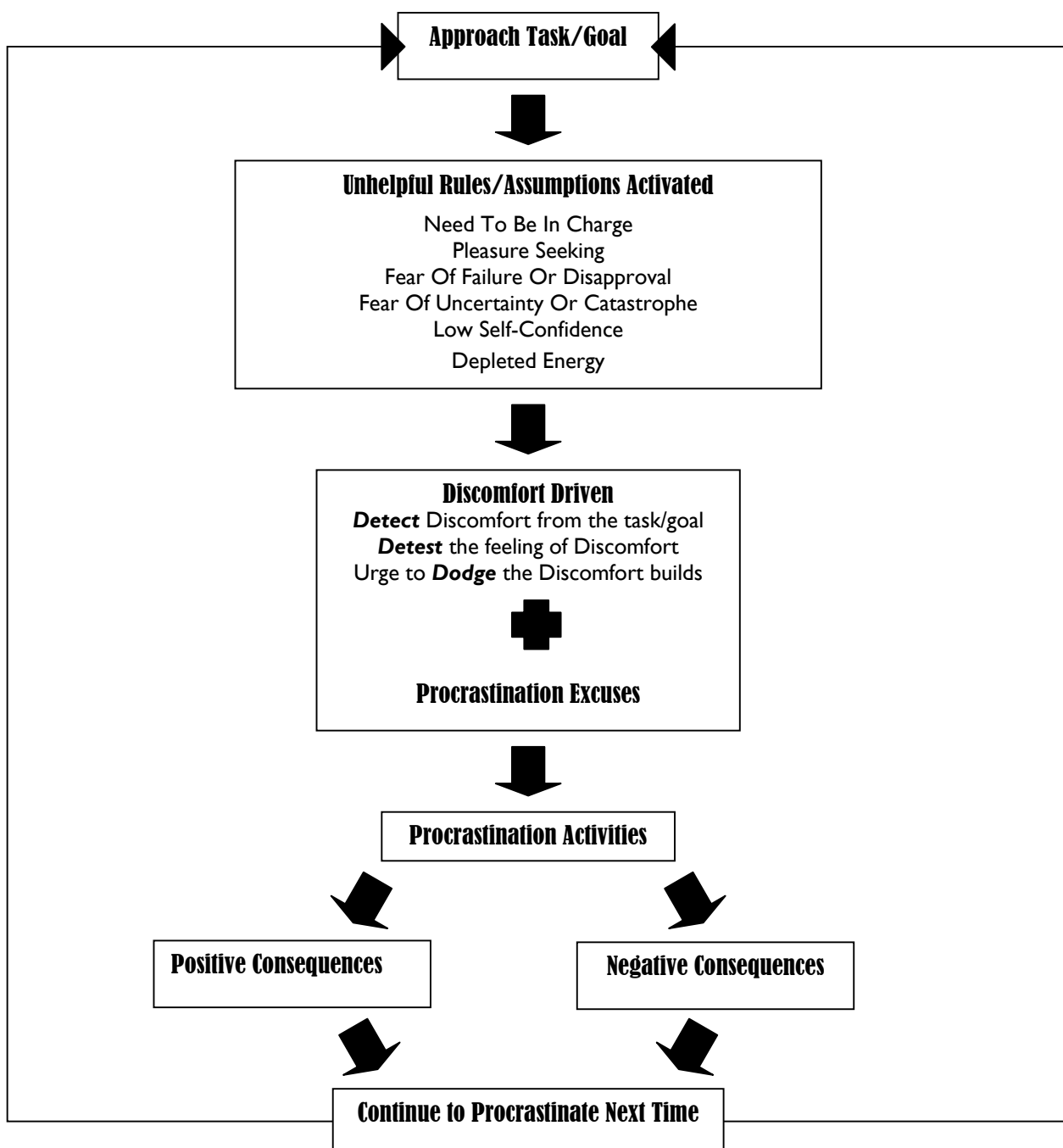
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Introduction

We are at the end of our journey to conquering procrastination. It is now time to take stock and see how far we have come. It is time to put together all you have learned so you have a clear 'road map' of how to continue this journey and how to keep on track. Remember, as we have kept saying, procrastination is a habit, and like anything, it will take time, practice and persistence to kick the habit. So let's look at what you need to keep doing.

The Procrastination Cycle Revisited

Remember the procrastination cycle introduced in Module 3? Below is a simplified version to refresh your memory.



We have learnt that procrastination is driven by our unhelpful rules and assumptions about what we expect of ourselves and the world, which lead us to feel some sort of discomfort about doing a task or goal we are faced with. If we can't tolerate this discomfort, we will be likely to use procrastination as our way of avoiding or stopping the discomfort. In addition, if we can come up with convincing excuses and justifications for our procrastination, we will be all the more likely to travel the path of procrastination. When we procrastinate, we find substitute activities for the tasks and goals we need to be doing, which tend to be pleasurable or distracting to us. In turn, the consequences that arise from our procrastination, whether they be positive or negative, make us more likely to turn to procrastination next time we are faced with a similar task or goal.

The 'Doing' Cycle

The Procrastination Cycle shows us that procrastination can be like a vicious negative spiral that we get stuck in. The good thing about a cycle, is that usually we can reverse it from a negative cycle to a more positive cycle. It is like spinning a wheel. The wheel may be moving in one direction and can have quite a bit of momentum behind it. But, by making some changes in how we spin the wheel, we can usually get it to spin in the opposite direction. Now initially when we try to change the direction of the wheel, it can be a real effort and the change may not be smooth at first. However, with some persistence it starts to get easier and the wheel eventually gathers momentum in this new direction. Your procrastination habit can be a bit like trying to change the direction of the spinning wheel. Initially you are stuck in a negative procrastination cycle, so it will take some effort and persistence to reverse the cycle to a more positive 'doing' cycle. But, once you change the cycle, it will gather its own momentum in a positive direction.

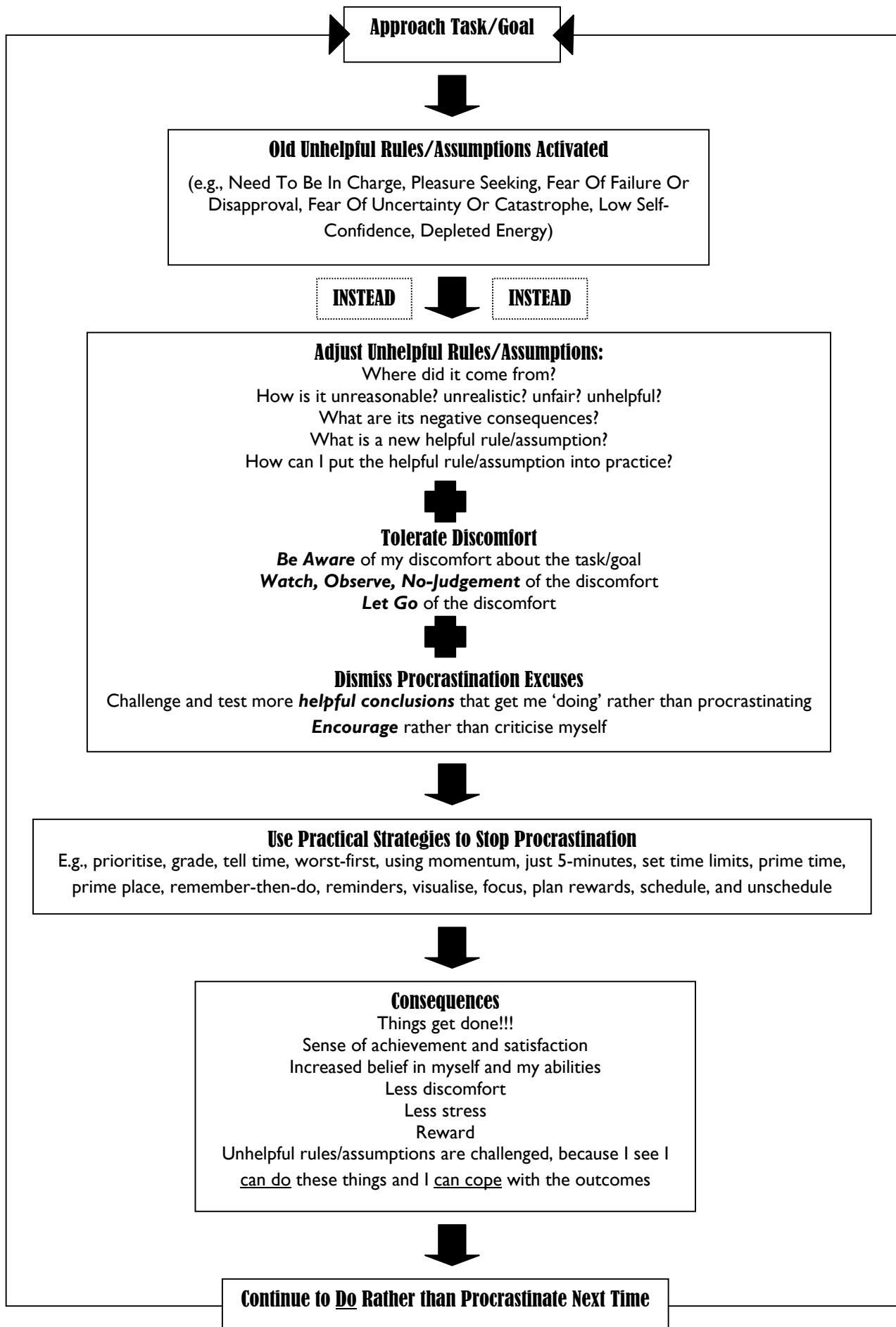
So let's reflect on what we have learned about how to change the procrastination cycle, and look at a cycle of 'doing' rather than 'procrastinating'. The 'Doing' Cycle on Page 4 draws together all the things you have learned in the 'Put Off Procrastinating' Modules.

Notice from the cycle that we would still expect our old unhelpful rules and assumptions to be activated when faced with certain tasks or goals. Our unhelpful rules and assumptions have generally been around for a long time, so we can't expect them to disappear overnight. The key thing is that instead of being led by these unhelpful rules and assumptions, we choose to do things differently at this point, which puts us on the path to 'doing' rather than procrastinating. Over time these unhelpful rules and assumptions may relax, and may not be as easily activated.

So when our old unhelpful rules and assumptions are activated we **instead**:

- **Adjust our unhelpful rules and assumptions** by challenging them, devising new helpful rules and assumptions, and putting these into practice;
- **Practice tolerating discomfort** using mindfulness techniques (i.e., being aware, watching and observing without judgement, and letting go) and gradually increasing our time sitting with discomfort;
- **Dismiss our procrastination excuses** by challenging and testing any unhelpful conclusions we hold about being better off postponing a task or goal to another time, and instead developing more helpful conclusions that it is best for us to make a start on things now;
- **Use motivational self-talk** rather than self-criticism to encourage ourselves to do the task;
- **Put into action practical strategies to stop procrastination**, such as prioritise, grade, tell time, worst-first, using momentum, just 5-minutes, set time limits, prime time, prime place, remember-then-do, reminders, visualise, focus, plan rewards, schedule and unschedule.

Doing each of these things should then lead use to follow through with the task or goal, which will carry with it certain consequences which make us more likely to keep doing, rather than return to our old ways of procrastinating. These consequences might include getting things done, achievement, satisfaction, belief in ourself and our abilities, ultimately less discomfort and stress, and some sort of reward for our accomplishments. The key thing is that by doing rather than procrastinating, our unhelpful rules and assumptions are challenged, because we see we can do these things and can cope whatever the outcome.



Action Planning

Based on the 'Doing' Cycle, it can be helpful for us to draw up a clear plan of action for what it is we need to do when the urge to procrastinate arises. Below are the 6 steps to get on top of your procrastination, any time you feel it is getting the better of you. Notice steps 2 and 3 are optional, because as we have kept saying, you don't necessarily have to tackle the harder underlying reasons for your procrastination (i.e., unhelpful rules and assumptions and intolerance of discomfort), to be able to overcome procrastination.

Step 1. Being Aware & Non-Blaming (see Module 3)

The first step is to stop and recognise your urge to procrastinate. That is be aware and reflect on how the procrastination cycle is playing out in your life right now with the task or goal that faces you. However, when you do recognise that you are procrastinating or you are having the urge to procrastinate, do so in a non-judgemental and non-blaming way. Don't beat yourself up for it, but instead recognise that procrastination has arrived and that you are going to make a choice to do things differently.

Step 2 (Optional). Adjust Unhelpful Rules & Assumptions (see Module 6)

If you can recognise the unhelpful rule or assumption of yours that is being activated by your task or goal, you can make attempts to adjust this. You can do this by challenging the rule or assumption, questioning where it came from?, how is it unreasonable/unrealistic/unfair/unhelpful?, and identifying its negative consequences? Then you can think of a new more helpful rule or assumption, and what you would need to do to put it into practice in this situation.

Step 3 (Optional). Practice Tolerating Discomfort (see Module 6)

If you can recognise the discomfort that is arising within you about doing the task or goal, you can practice tolerating it mindfully by just being aware and observing or watching the discomfort without judgement, making space for it and hence letting it go when its ready. You could imagine riding the wave of your discomfort or delaying procrastination to give yourself time to practice sitting with the discomfort.

Step 4. Dismiss Procrastination Excuses & Encourage (see Module 4)

Look for the excuses you are making to justify your procrastination. Notice your old unhelpful conclusions, such as not needing to do the task now because of some circumstance. Dispute if this conclusion really is true, by asking what is the evidence or reasons?, am I really going to be better off?, is it really true I can't get started?, what will the consequences be? Also, is there a way to test if your conclusion is true, rather than assuming it is? And finally settle on a conclusion that is more helpful to you, something more along the line that you can make some small start now! Drop any self-criticisms and instead talk to yourself as if you were motivating and encouraging a friend.

Step 5. Carry Out Practical Strategies (see Module 5)

Decide on the practical strategies most relevant to the task or goal at hand and apply these practical strategies. Remember, to gain clarity as to exactly what needs to be done, write a list of tasks and goals, then prioritise these, then grade each, and then accurately estimate how much time each step of each task or goal will take. There are numerous ways you can approach any given step of a task, such as worst-first, using momentum, just 5-minutes, set time limits, prime time, prime place, remember-then-do, reminders, visualise, focus, and plan rewards. To know when you have the time to attempt a step of the task, you can use a schedule or an unschedule.

Step 6. Reflect & Revise Plan

Now step back and reflect on how you are doing. Examine how things are going. Appreciate what is working well and the positive consequences of doing rather than procrastinating. Also recognise what areas may need some improvement. If something does need to be revised, revisit steps 1-5, and try again.



On Page 6 is an example Procrastination Action Plan, which takes you through the 6 steps using the procrastination example discussed earlier in Module 3. On Page 7 is a blank sheet so you can work through your own task or goal in the same way.

Procrastination Action Plan

Task or Goal: Write the 'Put off Procrastinating' Modules

Step 1. Being Aware & Non-Blaming

Ahh...the urge to procrastinate is here...no need to beat myself up about it, that won't do any good...I choose not to let this get the better of me, but to focus on what I can do about it.

Step 2 (Optional). Adjust Unhelpful Rules & Assumptions

Unhelpful rule/assumption 1: *I can't tolerate boredom, I need pleasure and interest.*

*This comes from having a lot of freedom growing up, and so no one made me persist with things that weren't of interest to me. This is unreasonable because to get anywhere in life, you are going to have to do things that are boring at times, and not everything is going to be pleasurable and interesting. A more helpful rule/assumption is: **I can do things that are boring and pleasure can be a reward.** To put this new helpful rule/assumption into practice would mean using the task at hand to practice tolerating boredom.*

Unhelpful rule/assumption 2: *I can't do a good job when I am unmotivated.*

*This comes from not doing well at things I didn't put effort into growing up. This is unreasonable because often in life you aren't going to be motivated to do something, so to wait to do things only when you feel motivated, will mean that nothing ever gets done. A more helpful rule/assumption is: **I can make progress on things even when I am unmotivated.** To put this new helpful rule/assumption into practice would mean starting one small part of the task at hand, and then seeing how well I really do and if my motivation improves.*

Step 3 (Optional). Practice Tolerating Discomfort

Discomfort Intolerant: *"I hate feeling frustrated, bored, and exhausted!"*

Discomfort Tolerant: *Just be aware of the frustration, boredom and exhaustion I am experiencing right now. Just watch and observe these feelings and sensations. Ahh there is the feeling of frustration... there is the sensation of exhaustion... there is the feeling of boredom. The thought "I hate this feeling" is just a thought, I don't need to listen to the thought, just note it. Breathe into the frustration, boredom and exhaustion wherever I feel it in my body (e.g., stomach, hands, jaw)...make space for it...allow it to be...then allow it to go with each exhalation when it is ready. Stay with it, practice tolerating it, imagine it as a wave, knowing it is only temporary and will subside.*

Step 4. Dismiss Procrastination Excuses & Encourage

Old Unhelpful Conclusion: *"I will just do my other paperwork first, because it doesn't take much time and is easier to do. Getting those other things out of the way will free me up to think clearer and write better."*

New Helpful Conclusion: *"This other paperwork is easier, but it is not as important. It is unlikely that doing these other things first will make me write any better. My writing capabilities won't really change between now and later. I know I can do it now".*

Step 5. Carry Out Practical Strategies

Grade the task of writing the 'Put Off Procrastinating' Modules, estimating the time each step will take. Do an 'unschedule', so I can see my current routine and where I have available time to work on the task. When available time pops up, work on the first step and mark off every 30 minutes I am able to work on the task. Plan small rewards and pleasure after I have completed each step. If I get stuck, visualise completing the task or do a focusing exercise using my breathing. If I am really struggling to get started, tell myself I just have to work on it 5 minutes, and then see if I can do more.

Step 6. Reflect & Revise

It is working pretty well. I am getting more done than before which feels great! I have noticed that I tend to get more written in the morning than later in the day, so maybe I need to do up a schedule where I allocate specific time in the morning to the task.

Procrastination Action Plan**Task or Goal:****Step 1. Being Aware & Non-Blaming****Step 2 (Optional). Adjust Unhelpful Rules & Assumptions****Step 3 (Optional). Practice Tolerating Discomfort****Step 4. Dismiss Procrastination Excuses & Encourage****Step 5. Carry Out Practical Strategies****Step 6. Reflect & Revise**

Maintaining Your Gains

Congratulations for making it to the end! Now, at the end of the day the important thing is to **keep going!** Expect that changing your procrastination habit will take time, practice, persistence and patience. Expect that you will have good days and bad. Expect you will have days you feel like a 'doer', and days you feel like you have slipped back into 'procrastinationville'. The old saying of "two steps forward, one step back" is very true. If you expect setbacks when you sign up for the journey of changing your procrastination, then when you face a bump in the road, you will be less likely to blame yourself and give up. As such, you will be better able to use the action plan just covered to help you get over that bump and keep moving full steam ahead!



Don't give up! If you are struggling, find someone who can support you through making these changes. Revisit the earlier 'Put Off Procrastinating' Modules, particularly the 'Do I Want To Change?' section of Module 3. This will remind you of your commitment and motivation to overcoming procrastination, as well as help you work through any roadblocks that are making it tough to change your procrastination.

Another way to help you maintain your gains, is to recognise the changes you have made and your achievements. If we ignore these things we tend to think we haven't changed at all or that change hasn't been worth it, and we will be less likely to keep going. Take time now to write down and appreciate what changes you have made so far by working through the 'Put Off Procrastinating' Modules. Also, recognise the positive benefits that have come from changing, that is, how your life is better? Keep coming back to this and adding in more changes or benefits that arise, as you continue on your journey of transforming yourself from 'procrastinator' to 'doer'.

| What Positive Changes Have I Made? | How Is My Life Better? |
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Module Summary

- To reverse the negative cycle of procrastination you need to:
 - Be aware of your procrastination and be non-blaming towards yourself;
 - Adjust your unhelpful rules and assumptions;
 - Tolerate your discomfort;
 - Dismiss your procrastination excuses;
 - Be motivational towards yourself rather than critical;
 - Put into action practical strategies to stop procrastinating; and
 - Reflect on the changes you have made and revise anything that isn't working.
- Changing your procrastination habit takes time, practice, persistence and patience. Expect setbacks, use your action plan, get support, and recognise your achievements – doing this will help you stay on the path of becoming a 'doer' rather than 'procrastinator'.



The End...

About The Modules

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BACKGROUND

The concepts and strategies in these modules have been developed from evidence based psychological practice, primarily Cognitive-Behaviour Therapy (CBT). CBT for procrastination is based on the approach that procrastination is a result of problematic cognitions (thoughts) and behaviours.

REFERENCES

These are some of the professional references used to create the modules in this information package.

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