

## **Procrastination: Getting Unstuck with CBT**

Imagine you have been putting something off — your taxes, a term paper, organizing your closet, getting to the gym. It never “feels” like quite the right time. Before you know it you are way behind and getting it done seems increasingly out of reach! How does one ever get un-stuck and overcome procrastination?

The roadblock of procrastination is familiar to all of us. Scientists call this emotion avoidance. The first sign of emotion avoidance appears when we anticipate that a task will be difficult. This is followed by some form of discomfort, a negative emotion like anxiety or guilt. There is an urge to escape the uncomfortable feelings and we begin to drift toward a more pleasant replacement activity. Positive feelings drive the thought that “later will be a better time” and we postpone. Via thoughts, feelings and behavior we have now successfully stepped into a negative pattern of avoidance that underlies much of depression and anxiety.

When participating in avoidance behavior, one underlying emotion can be the feeling of being overwhelmed. In order to address being overwhelmed and the task in front of us, knowing where to start is the key to being able to start.

One approach is SMART goals. SMART goals help you break down your goal into achievable steps. You identify a starting place then move through the steps until the project is done. As you check off each step, a feeling of accomplishment helps you keep going. The SMART acronym is easy to follow: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound.

**SPECIFIC:** State exactly what your first and next steps should accomplish.

**MEASURABLE:** Ensure that each step can be measured and you will know when it is done.

**ACHIEVABLE:** Each step should be hard enough that it is a challenge to get done, but not so hard so that you won't accomplish it.

**RELEVANT:** Each step must be relevant to the over-arching goal.

**TIME BOUND:** This parameter should be used to designate how many times and when during the week you will work on your goal. Set a guideline for each step's end dates.

By using SMART goals to begin and step through an avoided project, you provide yourself with a structure that is do-able and achievable. Once engaged in these SMART goals, a growing sense of accomplishment will help move you through all of the steps in the project as well as increase your desire to do more.