

Helping **your** Teen Procrastinate Less

We all put off tasks once in a while. With so many other things pulling at teens' attention these days, it's no wonder that more boring or difficult tasks can be harder for them to start. For most teens, putting things off is usually not about being lazy. Instead, procrastination is a way to avoid facing the unpleasant emotions they would have to face by starting the task, like anxiety, frustration, boredom and self-doubt.



What's going on?

Teens may procrastinate because:

- They want to avoid the uncomfortable feelings they might have when doing the task
- They feel overwhelmed and don't know where to start
- They are struggling with [perfectionism](#). [Is Perfectionism Just Procrastination in Disguise?](#) (TED, video, 5:59) and [Ease Perfectionism: Managing Our Own High Expectations](#) (Headspace, video, 4:27)
- They have unrealistic expectations and are overwhelmed by the amount of energy it will take to do something "perfectly"

"Procrastination makes easy things hard and harder things harder."
– Mason Cooley



How you can help

Start the conversation.

- Share this [funny TEDtalk on procrastination](#).
- Play a podcast about conquering procrastination (for example, [Procrastination with Cristina Roman](#) on The Teen Life Coach podcast).
- Share how you are currently trying to stop procrastinating with a task. (You can ask them for advice!)
- Leave this EASE 8–12 student resource, [Getting Ahead of Procrastination](#), on your teen's desk or the kitchen counter.

Break tasks into small steps. Helping your teen break a task into small steps can make it feel more manageable for them and reduce their anxiety about getting started. For example, the first steps of a project might be brainstorming possible topics, then narrowing it down to two or three possibilities and doing some research. Also, you can help your teen create deadlines for each of the steps. Setting smaller goals, in the form of steps and deadlines, will help your teen feel some success early on.

Help them estimate time. If your teen has trouble estimating how much time it will take to complete a task, ask them to write down how long they *think* it will take to complete a step. Then have them time how long it *actually* takes them.

Suggest using the five-minute plan. If your teen can't seem to get started, suggest that they just work on it for five minutes. At the end of the five minutes, they can switch to something else if they want. Your teen will likely have enough momentum to keep going. You can also encourage your teen to use the [Pomodoro system](#). There are many free Pomodoro websites and phone apps your teen can use.

Expect roadblocks. Your teen might be able to start on a task but give up if something small or unexpected gets in their way, like forgetting their textbook at school. Encourage them to ask themselves these questions before they start on the task, as it can save time in the long run:

- How much time do I have to complete this task?
- Do I have all the materials I need to complete it?
- What possible roadblocks will make it harder for me to complete it on time?
- What time of day do I have the most focus for this type of task?

Make two lists. Help your teen make a quick list of reasons to get started or complete the task sooner (for example, "I'll be able to relax on Sunday"), and a list of what might happen if they wait until the last minute ("I'll feel panicked and won't sleep well"). Encourage them to keep the list where they can see it and refer to it often.

Change the environment. If your teen can't study or work at home, find a place where they can work, like a coffee shop, a library or a relative's quiet place.

Set up small rewards. Plan a fun activity or treat together (like watching a movie or making cookies) when a larger task is completed. Reward smaller steps on the way with smaller rewards. Encourage your teen to set up their own rewards as well; even something small can help, like a jellybean after each tricky math problem.

Acknowledge and praise. Notice when your teen makes a step in the right direction, even if it's a small step. Try not to remind them of, or focus on, mistakes. Instead, focus on what is going well.