

## The Effect of Self-Talk on Procrastination

*Procrastination defined in terms of Eric Berne's 1966 concept of transactional analysis suggests that, as a time manager, you function in one of three modes: Child, Critic, or Adult and that the role in which you function at any one point in time affects the way you work and perceive problems. (Coltharp, Karen. Mount Saint Mary's College. Newburgh, New York)*

**THE CHILD:** The child is the part of you that wants to have fun and have it now. When the child in you gains control, you avoid those tasks that seem dull, boring, or too difficult. The child's primary activity is lack of constructive, purposeful activity. Conversing with friends, partying, and other leisure activities prevent the child from every getting to the business at hand.

**THE CRITIC:** The voice of the critic causes you to doubt your abilities, goals, and self. The critic foretells failure at every turn. When a task seems difficult for you, this internal voice insists you don't have the right background, experience, or intelligence to get the job done. With such encouragement, you find yourself procrastinating instead of meeting challenges head on.

Worry is the critic's chief activity. Instead of studying, the critic worries about studying. This includes such self-talk as "Can I learn this?" "What if I don't? If I don't, I may fail...What if I fail? What will I do then? What will other people think?"

**THE ADULT:** The adult in you provides the voice of reason and logic. This voice knows that some tasks are no fun but must be accomplished anyway. The adult side of you then musters the internal motivation to begin dull and distasteful tasks and see them through. To achieve this, the adult voice must outtalk the critic: "Yes, this is difficult, but I've been successful before," "I lack experience in this particular area, but I have similar experiences upon which I can draw," "I don't have the right background, but I can learn it," "Others have been successful and I can be too."

Problem solving is the adult's strength. When the adult studies the adult thinks, "What do I have to learn? What would be the best way to learn this? Am I learning it? If not, how can I rethink my understanding?" Sometimes what seems to be procrastination is actually the result of making an informed decision. The thing that makes the difference is the reason behind the decision. If your reason for postponing is sound and appropriate, it may be the best plan of action. *(For example, you may be considering dropping a course after the first month of class. You've regularly attended class and your grades are good. However, your finances require you to increase your work hours. You decide you cannot do justice to the course and increased work hours.)* What might be seen as procrastination is really an informed decision based on the reality of your situation.

Your adult voice can sometimes be overtaken by the fun-seeking child's voice or the voice of the critic when it is neither appropriate nor helpful. Either can lead you into procrastination and its resulting problems. So, when you think procrastination is a possibility, always take the time to ask yourself two questions: "Which voice am I hearing now?" and "Is that really the advice I want to follow?"

Source: *Study Methods and Reading Techniques*, Rhonda H. Atkinson and Debbie G. Longman. 1994. West Publishing Company.

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