

Procrastination Busters!

It's hard to believe that Allison Mahlstedt is a procrastinator. The energetic University of Maryland sophomore set Texas state swimming records throughout high school, and is a rising star on Maryland's top-ranked swim team.

But when it comes to tests, term papers and telephone bills, Allison isn't so speedy. Last year, she let a few things slide and suddenly found herself working as hard as she could, but still unable to catch up.

"I didn't like how that felt," said Allison, who asked for ADDitude's help with her procrastination problem. We scheduled two sessions for Allison with Sandy Maynard, ADDitude's Coach on Call.

Sandy's first observation about Allison: boredom is bad. "The more she has to do, the more she gets done," Sandy told us. "For Allison, it's important to find a balance between doing the activities that keep her energized and motivated, and becoming overwhelmed by them." The same goes for many others with AD/HD.

How to achieve that goal? Get organized. Sandy helped Allison set up a study area that would help keep her materials in place and her deadlines in mind. The three key components:

- **A file cabinet** for school and personal use with files that are color-coded to the subject in question. (Green for money matters, pink for health and nutrition etc.)
- **A basket system** to help keep subject material together. Baskets make it easy to stash and retrieve articles, research, notes and other material for each course. Putting things away also keeps them from distracting Allison when she's trying to focus on something else.
- **A bulletin board** by her desk provides space for Allison to post visual reminders: deadlines for papers, tests to study for, friends' birthdays, swim practice and everything else on her plate. "Visual reminders are more powerful than a to-do list stuck in her planner," says Sandy. "She always forgot to look at it."

Sandy also helped Allison organize her books according to the days she used them. This system helped Allison remember to bring the right texts to class even when she was in her usual rush.

Chunk It Down

Break down large projects into small tasks, and tackle one at a time. Keep motivated by setting mini-deadlines and providing yourself with rewards for jobs done well and on time. (Don't go for that cup of java until the letter is typed, addressed, stamped and in the mailbox!) Plan rewards at each step of the project.

Make a Choice That Supports Your Efforts

Procrastination is choosing to delay one thing by choosing to do something else. When you choose to do one thing, you automatically let other choices go. If you make no choice, then you have nothing.

Use a Timer, Watch or Alarm Clock

Use these devices to keep you on schedule. Set time limits on tasks to avoid hyperfocusing so much on one job that the others don't get done. Divide work into short periods with frequent breaks. Reward yourself by doing stretches every two or three minutes.

Plan Ahead

Leave yourself plenty of time for repeating a task, getting lost, or whatever else may occur unexpectedly. Write down your plans and structure activities in rational order, so that one task logically follows the next. Doing so will help you group related activities and save time. Example: Drop off the dry cleaning on the way to the library, instead of making two separate trips the same day.

Delegate

Ask spouses, friends and co-workers for help with things you're not good at, and focus on what you do best. Remember that what you don't like doing (such as paying bills or mowing the lawn) someone else may actually enjoy. Don't feel guilty. Remember how good it feels to do something nice for your friends and family. Then, return the favor..