

Breaking Procrastination Patterns

"Procrastination is not laziness. It is protection." Before we try to "fix" procrastination, we get curious about it. Your brain does not delay what feels safe and rewarding. It delays what feels threatening, overwhelming, identity-threatening, or unclear. We will: 1. Identify your procrastination pattern. 2. Understand the neuroscience behind it 3. Use motivational interviewing to strengthen change 4. Create micro-goals that build flow instead of force

Step 1: Identify Your Type of Procrastination

Read each type and circle the one(s) that resonates most.

1. The Perfectionist Procrastinator

Belief: "If I can't do it perfectly, I shouldn't start."

Neuroscience: Perfectionism activates the threat response system. The amygdala perceives risk of failure → cortisol rises → avoidance feels safer than imperfection.

Why it happens:- Fear of judgment- Identity tied to achievement- Early conditioning around performance.

Reflection: What am I afraid would happen if this weren't perfect?- Who taught me that good = perfect?

2. The Overwhelmed Procrastinator

Belief: "This is too much. I don't know where to begin."

Neuroscience: When tasks feel too large, the prefrontal cortex (planning center) goes offline, and the brain shifts to survival mode. Overwhelm reduces executive function.

Why it happens:- Task too vague- No clear starting point- Nervous system dysregulation.

Reflection:- What feels unclear?- If this were 10x smaller, what would it look like?

3. The Identity Protector

Belief: "If I don't try fully, I can't fail."

Neuroscience: Your brain protects your sense of self. Avoidance preserves identity from perceived threat.

Why it happens:- Fear of exposure- Imposter syndrome- Past failure trauma

Reflection:- What identity feels at risk?- What would success require me to become?

4. The Dopamine Seeker

Belief: "I'll just check one more thing first..."

Neuroscience: Scrolling, small tasks, and novelty release quick dopamine hits. Big meaningful goals offer delayed dopamine, which requires effort.

Why it happens:- Brain trained on instant reward- Stress fatigue- Avoiding discomfort

Reflection:- What immediate reward am I choosing?- What long-term reward am I postponing?

5. The People-Pleasing Procrastinator

Belief: "I'll do theirs first."

Neuroscience: Belonging activates reward pathways. Saying yes regulates anxiety temporarily.

Why it happens:- Fear of disappointing others- Validation-seeking- Lack of boundaries

Reflection:- Whose priorities am I living?- What would choosing myself cost me?

Step 2: Motivational Interviewing – Strengthening Change

Importance:- On a scale of 1–10:

How important is it for you to break this pattern? Why not a lower number?

Confidence:- On a scale of 1–10:

How confident are you that you could change this?- What would move you up one point?

Values Connection:

How does procrastination conflict with who you want to be? What future opens if you shift this pattern?

Step 3: The Neuroscience Plan

To break procrastination, we must:

1. Reduce threat
2. Clarify next step
3. Create fast wins
4. Engage identity
5. Regulate the nervous system

Step 4: Regulate First (2–3 Minutes)

- Take 1 physiological sigh (double inhale, long exhale)
- Put one hand on chest, one on abdomen
- Say: “I am safe to begin imperfectly.”

This re-engages the prefrontal cortex.

Step 5: Create a Doable + Stretch Plan

Step A: Make It Micro

- Under 10 minutes
- Almost too easy

- Specific

Write your micro-task here:_____

Step B: Add the Stretch Layer

Choose one stretch version that pushes you slightly beyond comfort.

Stretch Action:_____

Step 6: Implementation Strategy (Flow-Based)

- Clear distractions (phone out of room)
- Set a 20-minute timer
- Work on ONE defined task
- Stop at 80% complete

Stopping before exhaustion trains your brain to want to return.

Step 7: Identity Integration

Complete this sentence: "I am becoming someone who _____."

One action today that proves this is true is:_____

Step 8: Measure Gains, Not Gaps

- What did I start that I previously avoided?
- What discomfort did I tolerate?
- What evidence do I now have that I can act?

Final Integration Exercise

Visualize yourself 90 days from now having broken this pattern.

- How do you move?
- What energy do you carry?
- What decisions come easier?

Take one deep breath and anchor that identity.

Coaching Debrief Questions

- What surprised you?
- Which procrastination type feels most protective?
- What does this part need from you instead of judgment?
- What will you commit to for the next 7 days?