

# ADHD is All About Time Management

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## Why don't people just do what they should?

And why does ADHD make this even harder?

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## Time Management

- Time management involves:
  - Planning and . . .
  - Completing tasks. . .
  - In relation to time.
- This involves the abilities to both *see time* and *feel the future*
  - Awareness and motivation—need both
- ADHD involves an exacerbation of universal struggles

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## Time Requires Attention

- Time management requires attention management
  - **Distracted**: a great plan gets lost when we get side-tracked—good intentions disappear
  - **Hyperfocus**: lose awareness of time passing—get distracted by current task and forget the rest
- Good attention regulation is dynamic
  - Moment by moment by moment. . .

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## Time Management Serves the Future

- Most tasks require some sort of time management unless they are very short and can be acted on immediately
  - Few goals can be pursued and completed in one moment
- Time management serves the future over the present—we manage time in the moment in order to pursue distant goals
  - Rather than simply responding to current stimuli

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## Stop, Then Respond

- We're constantly surrounded by stimuli that are interesting in the moment but perhaps not worthwhile in the long term
- Working towards future goals requires disconnecting from present stimuli and goals
  - Barkley talks about **response inhibition**: the ability to inhibit an immediate response so the executive functions can operate

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# ADHD is All About Time Management

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### It Gets Philosophical

- Time management involves internal (personal) rather than external (environmental) control over behavior
  - Do we make active choices about what to attend to and pursue?
  - Or are we hijacked by distractions?
- So, does ADHD impact free will?
  - And therefore does medication increase it?

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### Big Concept #1: Time Horizon

- Time horizon = how close in time something needs to be for someone to consider acting on it
  - Gets farther out until age 30
- Also somewhat influenced by interest and motivation
  - Highly desirable tasks or undesirable consequences activate earlier
  - May be artificially activated by another's pushing/presence

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### Future Myopia

- Barkley: ADHD causes future myopia—they don't see the future as clearly
  - Two times: now and not now
- People with ADHD have a shorter time horizon for their age
  - Planning into the future is difficult because future events don't hit their radar until the deadline comes closer into the now
  - Apathetic procrastination, then frantic scrambling

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### Big Concept #2: Temporal Discounting

- Temporal discounting: the further out a reward/punishment is, the less we feel it now
  - We feel the present more strongly than the future
- The siren song of the present tempts us to maximize the present at the cost of the future
  - This is the famous marshmallow experiment

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### Blame Time Horizon

- Due to their shorter time horizon and therefore greater temporal discounting, those with ADHD choose options with more immediate payoffs
  - They *really* feel the present more strongly than the future
  - And are therefore less motivated to sacrifice the present for the future (unfair fight)
  - Until the future is almost the present (how did that happen?!)

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ADHD is not a disorder of knowing what to do. It's a disorder of doing what you know.

Russell Barkley, PhD

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## ADHD = Too Much Present, Not Enough Future

One needs to disengage from the present to see beyond it

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## See Time by Externalizing It

Stretch that time horizon

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## Manage Attention and Temptations

- Manage attention well as a foundation for managing time well
- Create a good work environment
  - Think about signal to noise ratio
- Preemptively eliminate distractions so you're more likely to stay on track
  - Every ping on your attention burns up some willpower

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## Schedules: What When

- It's hard to do the right thing at the right time if you don't know what you're supposed to be doing now
- The more you use a schedule system, the better it works
  - It's an aid to achieving *your* goals
  - Even partial usage leads to tangible benefits
  - Schedules are not blood oaths
  - Add useful notes to the appointment

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## Put To-Dos on Your Schedule

- To-do list items can languish forever
  - "Is *now* the time to work on that?"
- So make tasks time-specific (and more likely to be completed) by putting them into your schedule
  - Especially helpful for tasks with time constraints
  - If bumped, then move it somewhere else
  - Also makes time more concrete as your schedule fills up
  - You will still need to generate the motivation. . .

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## Maximize Motivation by Feeling the Future

Roll back temporal discounting

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## The Problem with Life

- Life involves a constantly shifting balance between pursuing competing goals, making it difficult to choose in any one moment
  - Some tasks are much more appealing than others
- Unfortunately, many tasks involve long delays before natural consequences kick in
  - Late tax returns, unhealthy eating, not doing daily homework, etc.

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By the time you feel it, it's too late.

The slogan of ADHD time management

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## Feel the Future Now

- Bring the future into the present by making consequences more:
  - *Immediate*—e.g., teen can't play video games until HW is done
  - *Frequent*—e.g., more frequent progress check-ins with boss
  - *External*—e.g., tell a friend you have to buy dinner if you're late

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## Feel the Future Now, 2

- Bring the future into the present by making consequences more:
  - *Salient*—e.g., teen needs to pay you to drive if they miss the bus
  - *Consistent*—e.g., daily calorie totals in dieting app show totals for every meal
- Imposing artificial consequences is more effective than waiting for natural ones

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## Pause and Picture

- Compensate for temporal discounting by pausing to visualize how you will feel in the future if you do or don't act now
  - Picture it as vividly as possible
  - Compare and contrast acting and not acting
  - How will future-you feel about present-you?
- The more you can bring the future into the present, the more likely you will be motivated into action
  - And, no, you won't hate it less later

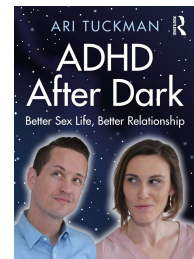
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