

GETTING ORGANIZED

Managing the daily events of life is a major concern in recovery. Addictive lifestyles interfere with being organized, and people who experience symptoms like those of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) often struggle with the same things. There can be many reasons we forget to do things or don't complete tasks. We may get distracted, get tired, lose focus or interest, jump from task to task, procrastinate, or lack confidence. Finishing any task successfully involves four steps: (1) determining what you need to do, (2) recognizing cues that focus is slipping, (3) using tools and techniques to help stay focused, and (4) checking progress and rewarding yourself. By doing this, you have a better chance of finishing what you start, which will help your self-confidence and make it easier to start the next task. This exercise will help you identify barriers to getting organized and finishing tasks, and provide coping strategies for you to practice.

1. For the next week, please monitor the following items and write what you learn here.

a. What tasks do you have difficulty completing?

b. Where do the breakdowns seem to occur (i.e., time of day, after a certain length of time, etc.)? Please be specific.

c. What gets in the way of getting organized or completing things (i.e., not enough time, boredom, too many distractions)? Please be specific.

d. What tasks can you usually complete, whether or not they're difficult?

e. What has helped you so far in getting organized or completing what you set out to do (e.g., frequent reminders, no distractions, notes to yourself)?

2. Please choose one task you have difficulty completing. It's helpful to pick one that you have to do often so you can have many opportunities to practice (e.g., laundry, shopping, homework). Write it here.

Start documenting every time you successfully complete this task and how you succeed. If you have found a method that worked for this task, you can use it for others.

3. Here are four additional suggested strategies.
- a. *Chunking*: Break the activity into smaller segments, either shorter time segments (e.g., 15-minute intervals) or smaller steps (e.g., get to the bank, get quarters, sort clothes versus do laundry today). This makes it easier to pay attention. Please describe how you can use this strategy for your activity.
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- b. *Visual cues*: Use concrete, visible reminders of deadlines. You can do this by writing lists, using a calendar, or using a planner to set daily goals. Don't over-commit yourself—that increases stress and fatigue, which make ADD symptoms worse and could prevent you from finishing what you started. Please describe how you can use this strategy for your activity.
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- c. *Set yourself up for success*: You can do this by starting with tasks you know you can complete. Doing those tasks first will increase your motivation to follow through on more difficult tasks. Or you may want to work on tougher tasks first while you're focused and fresh—whichever works best for you. Please describe how you can use this strategy for your activity.
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- d. *Build structure*: Develop a written daily and weekly routine and stick to it. Creating a routine which includes daily tasks, meals, sleep/wake, medications, accomplishments for the day (e.g., pay bills, do laundry), and time for relaxation and fun is helpful in managing time and improves your chances of accomplishing the things you need to do. When our lives get busy and there are more demands on our time, adding new things to our existing schedules helps us stay organized and not neglect these necessary daily tasks. Please describe how you can use this strategy for your activity.
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4. Set a starting date to begin trying out each of these strategy suggestions: _____
For each one, evaluate your success, struggles, and lessons learned after you've practiced for two weeks. Please record the results here for each strategy.

Strategy A (chunking):

Strategy B (visual cues):

Strategy C (set yourself up for success):

Strategy D (build structure):

5. How will you reward yourself for success?

Be sure to bring this handout back with you to your next session with your therapist, and be prepared to discuss your thoughts and feelings about this exercise.