



Episode Seven

**Tomorrow Will Do: Procrastination
With Elizabeth Gillies and Louise Wiles**

Welcome to Student Transitions – A Time to Thrive

This podcast series is for you if you are:

- A student leaving full-time education and moving into the world of work
- A student moving to university or some form of higher education
- An educator, parent or counsellor supporting students as they take the next steps in their journey from school/college/sixth form into the world of further education or work.

For many students this represents the first big life transition. It can be an exciting and challenging time.

This podcast series provides strategies that develop self-awareness, understanding and the ability to thrive through times of transition.

This is the full transcript.

You can also access the show notes, resources and worksheets mentioned in the podcast by registering [HERE](#).

About Your Hosts

Elizabeth Gillies

Elizabeth is an Education Psychologist based in London who has worked in schools as a psychologist at the individual, group and systems level for over 30 years.

She has been fortunate to live, work and raise her family in America, Japan, and Australia so, unsurprisingly, she is interested in the challenges and opportunities of transitions.

Elizabeth is a CBT (Cognitive Behaviour Therapy) and ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) specialist. She works in schools, on-line and, near her home base in South London, incorporating walking with talking therapy in green spaces.



At the crunch points at the beginning and end of the school year, Elizabeth runs workshops for young people, teachers, and parents to help them understand common patterns of transition and how to use this knowledge to help themselves during this time and future changes.

Together with a great group of professionals in London, Elizabeth is growing a multi professional support service called Special Networks and can be found [HERE](#)

Elizabeth is a member of FIGT (Families in Global Transition) and with Louise and another FIGT member, is a co-chair of the FIGT UK affiliate. Link to FIGT. Connect via LinkedIn [HERE](#)

About Louise Wiles

Louise Wiles is a well-being, change and transition consultant, trainer and coach and the parent of two teens.

Alarmed by the recent explosion of well-being challenges amongst children and teens, especially during exam years and through times of change and transition. Louise believes we should be better preparing young people for life beyond school and university so that they can thrive through the natural highs and lows of life.

Louise combines her professional background in organisational psychology (MSc) and coaching, with her expertise as a wellbeing, positive change and strengths practitioner and her personal experience of life on the move, to develop training courses and coaching programmes that help her clients prepare for, and thrive, through the challenge of change and transition.



You can connect with Louise on LinkedIn [HERE](#)

Website [HERE](#) and contact Louise [HERE](#)

Louise is also the author of ***Thriving Abroad: The Definitive Guide to Professional and Personal Relocation Success***

Transcript

Elizabeth Gillies 00:07

Okay, Hi again. Welcome back. This is Elizabeth.

Louise Wiles 00:11

And this is Louise lovely to be back.

Elizabeth Gillies 00:14

And today we're going to be talking about something which might be close to a lot of people's hearts. It's procrastination. And Louise and I, we were just talking before we came on, I hope we weren't procrastinating. But we were just talking about, well, what is procrastination. And it's often about when you've got an intention to do something. And you put it off, and you delay, and you might delay by doing certain things, but you put it off, and you often do something less important with the kind of thought is, in your mind is, I have got to do that, but I'll just do something else. So, there's a, there's a kind of gap between your intention to do something that you have to do and then doing it. So, a kind of simple notion of procrastination. And it's not about you being lazy. It's not about poor management skills. This is often, you know, viewed in kind of literature as an emotion focused coping strategy, where there is a level of discomfort around, and there's a distaste for the discomfort, you don't like it and then you can dodge what you're supposed to be doing. So, there's a lot of D's here. So, there's that, you know, distaste for the discomfort, you know, dodging it, and then often you become really dissatisfied with yourself. So, I kind of like those, thinking about it as this is a D thing, you know, just dodging these things, maybe thoughts or feelings that you don't like?

Louise Wiles 01:59

Yeah, absolutely. And I think as you're dodging things and not doing it, then the task kind of multiplies in your mind, and it becomes a mountain, rather than perhaps the hill it was first was, or the little slope, and it becomes more and more difficult in your mind. You tell yourself stories, you build a narrative around it that makes it more than it was or is at the beginning. And I just wonder, as you're listening, whether there's something that you're procrastinating about right now that perhaps you can bring to mind as we talk through this, and have this conversation, and you can apply what we're saying to it and see whether some of the thoughts and ideas we talk about in this session will help you.

Elizabeth Gillies 02:48

It's, you know, when I was looking at some statistics around, you know, who procrastinates. Basically, I think most people procrastinate, they'll be putting something off. And we can talk about why we do that. But there is maybe a group of about 20% of people who are chronic procrastinators, who just do it all the time. And I read this other really interesting statistic, that it is much higher in, kind of, school age and university aged people, 75 to 95%. So, it's fairly common, and fairly typical. And, you can think that why that is, you know, it might be you're going into new settings where at University where, you know, you're being asked to work in a different way from at school, when you've got a lot of stuff to do, and some of it you want to do some of the things that really interests you, you want to do or maybe not. But there's you know, there's a pressure on work and getting your work done. So, procrastination is fairly typical.

Louise Wiles 03:55

Yeah, yeah. And I kind of have a bit of a theory about why that might be. So remember, we were talking in the previous podcast about the S curve and how, as a student, you're moving from one S curve where you felt quite accomplished, hopefully in your previous school, Sixth Form College, wherever you were, you had been there for a couple of years, you understood the environment, you understood the expectations that there were about you, you had expectations for yourself as well, and you were perhaps more comfortable with those. And then what's happened is you've moved to a new environment that is totally new, in every respect, you're having to make new friends, you're having to settle and work out how you're going to live your life in this new environment. But also, you have this demand from a studying and an academic perspective. If that's where you are, or if you're in a new work situation, you have demands from your work in terms of your work performance. And that's very different, the demands are very different from those before. So, of course, you're going to be questioning your ability, you're going to be developing new skills, and you're at the bottom or near the bottom of a new S curve. And that's just normal. And I think that perhaps contributes. And perhaps that begins to explain why students have the higher percentage of procrastination because I certainly remember when I was a student and doing my first assignment. Having Yeah, a real kind of fear in a way around, kind of perhaps being found out, that I didn't have the ability to write in the way that I needed to now write, I was doing a history course, so in my course, but of course, you're going to be developing new skills, this is a new way of learning, more independent learning and I think that's brings me on to, we were talking a bit about Perfectionism before and how that might contribute to some procrastination as well. Yeah, we want to do the best possible job. But perhaps we're not quite sure what the best possible job is at the moment, because we haven't got those standards clear in our mind. So then, that means that we stop ourselves and put it off for tomorrow, because it just seems too much of a big task for today. What are your thoughts on that Elizabeth?

Elizabeth Gillies 06:20

Yeah, I think that's, you know, these kind of thoughts that we have sometimes end up in procrastination. So, they could be thoughts like, 'I don't really want this, this isn't an appealing job for me to do, I don't really want to do it.; Or they might not know, 'how am I going to start with this?' 'How am I going to begin, I'm afraid to fail, what if I do it and I don't work out.' You know, 'it's too big a task, it's too difficult a task.' So, these kind of thoughts that go through our mind. And we have to notice them because they're the kind of things that lead to procrastination. And, and the other thing that I wanted to say is that when we notice those thoughts, about things being difficult and hard, and maybe even have some physical sensations about it too, that you know in your body, that all my heart's racing about even thinking about doing this. When we go off to do other tasks that we're, you know, we're not needing to do or that is that we might call it our procrastination favourites. What happens at that point, is those thoughts and feelings that high anxiety or overwhelm is reduced. And we get short term relief. And it's only short term because we have to come back to it at some point. So that's why we keep, we get, we get maintained and stuck in that procrastination cycle, because we can give ourselves some temporary relief. And even if it's only short term, that can be really reinforcing. So, we would go off and do something. Mine is I would go and clean something or I'll go and make myself a cup of tea. Or I might have a look at my phone and do a couple of texts. So, you have to really kind of know a little bit

about what's the thing that's giving you some temporary relief and know that that's your procrastination favourite. I don't know, Louise, do you have any?

Louise Wiles 08:32

I have many. Yeah, yes. I'm a bit like you. I'll clean, laundry seems, because I work from home, laundry seems to be one of my favourites. Coffee - yes, a lot of coffee, a lot of tea. And, yeah, phone, emails, I do go down rabbit holes with my emails. Oh, I must look at that email. And then an hour later, I've gone off in all directions. So yes, I can recognise that totally in myself, it's natural. Definitely. It's something we all do. And I guess that dopamine hit from going and doing something that we enjoy. Yeah, there's a physiological reason for us going off and doing something else, because, focusing on the task that we're feeling a bit uncomfortable about doesn't have such a positive physiological impact, initially. Obviously, ultimately, it does because we finish it and then that will feel really good, but in the initial stages, no, we can go and find that dopamine hit elsewhere. And that's very nice, thank you.

Elizabeth Gillies 09:57

Yeah, and so this might be point for you to be thinking about - What are the things that I do to dodge that task? What are the things that can give me a bit of the short-term relief? and know that it's only short term. So that's going to be one of the kind of, starting to think about what ways or how you're going get through this kind of trying to dodge something. So, one of them would be: write down your list of procrastination favourites. And if that has anything to do with your phone, think about how you're organising, you know, where you're working, you know, if they are distractions to you try and remove as many as you can. So that you've got a place where you can just kind of do your work. And that will be quite a straightforward simple thing to do. What are the other things we were talking about Louise that are ways to get on with your work rather than procrastinate?

Louise Wiles 11:00

Well, so I was just thinking as you were talking there, so you have, let's take a student, you have an assignment, and you've been procrastinating over it, and it seems like a really big task. And to get it all written and handed in it, yeah, it is a big piece of work. I think really, the important point about it is that you're going to do it in bits, you're not going to do it all in one sitting. So, I would suggest that as a start point, why not sit down and chunk this task down? Divide it down into, so perhaps you need to do some research? What is that research? And what do you need to look at? Where? and then once you've done the research, what's the next step, you know, how are you going to begin to bring it all together, you're not going to sit down and write a 2000 word, essay in one go and write it perfectly. That's pretty much guaranteed for most people. I know I wrote a book a few years ago, and I would sit down and chunk it down into sections and chapters and then into sections within those chapters. And I'd sit down and write. And what I found was initially it would be really tough, the first 5-10 minutes, but then I would get into it, and I would, you know, write a good amount. It might not always have been the best. But it was done. And then I'd go away, come back, review it, perhaps eliminate half of it, change half of it, that's fine, but I'd made some progress. And so, I think that's the really important thing, finding small wins, things that you can measure what you've gained each day towards that big assignment task that you need to do, it doesn't have to be all done in one go, it can be done in little chunks, and then celebrate each little chunk as it gets done. And then over time, it will add up to the entire project.

Elizabeth Gillies 13:18

I really liked what you said there about, you know, setting yourself, just do five minutes, so just set your task and sometimes just say, I'm just going to do this for five minutes. And be thinking a little bit about well, am I still gonna go on after the five minutes or not? Because, you know, one of the things that can I think gets in the way of you of people doing work, is that you say 'I'm not motivated to do it. You know, I don't feel motivated.' But actually, motivation comes when you're doing the task, often not before. When you're in flow, as people call it, and you're engaged in it, and you feel you're making progress. That's where the motivation will come and start. Not before you start. So, giving yourself a short time to do let's just do five minutes and of course, that kind of 'Nike' strapline "just do it." Just know that sitting with that discomfort is actually all right, that there is going to be discomfort there because it is a bit of a challenging thing you're going to do. It's not something that you're going to be whooping and enjoying doing. But to know that you're just going to say, 'I'm just going to sit with this and do it.' And then what you might find is, is that when you get into it and you're doing it, you'll start to feel 'yeh, I can do it,' so there's a little bit of mindset will change once you're involved in

Louise Wiles 14:54

Yeah, absolutely. I think as you get into it, you find the meaning in the task as well. And I think that that's one really helpful way of looking at it, you know? What is the purpose behind doing assignment? Okay, the big purpose is you're contributing to a degree, hopefully that has meaning for you. But within this one piece of work that you're being asked to do, what interests you? What questions do you have about this topic? You could start by writing those down, you know, what actually fascinates you about it? What do you want to know more about? Why do you want to know more about it? And that then gives you a reason, both of getting into that first bit of work, that will help you get through that, that difficult stage, because getting into flow is all about getting into the subject. And the more, and the deeper you go, the more interested you become and then suddenly, it takes on a life of its own. In my experience, and you can sit there for hours and be fascinated by it. But it does take work, yes it doesn't happen initially, you're not always going to think, oh, wow, this is the most fascinating subject ever, and I'm gonna be really interested in this, you kind of have to work at it a bit. It reminds me of the work by a lady called Angela Duckworth and her book, GRIT. And she talks about, you know, how do we create success in what we're doing? And one of the big factors is, perseverance, you know, we do have to discipline ourselves to persevere with things, and particularly at the start of a project. And so yeah, finding what's interesting about it, writing some questions for yourself about it beyond the broad question for the assignment, perhaps break it down into sections and ask questions about each section, and then start researching, reading, thinking. And the other thing about it all is, you're not going to be working totally on it all the time. But the interesting thing is, once you've got into it, your brain will be working on it a lot of the time, even though you don't know it is, so you'll go away and think I'm not working on my project today. But the next time you come back, you'll find 'Oh, that's really interesting. that's a new thought I hadn't had.' And so suddenly it takes on a life of its own as well. So, finding ways to feel enthusiastic about it, I think is probably what I'm saying. And that enthusiasm will then help with that tough start, and the motivation for continuing.

Elizabeth Gillies 17:26

I know one of the things that is really helpful for me. And of course, we're giving you some suggestions, you might think, 'Oh, that would work for me, but that might not,' so it's a kind of a choice, some things

that we're saying think about this, think about that. But one of the things that really works for me is, I imagine myself when I've done what I needed to do. It's a bit like athletes you know, crossing the line or jumping the jump that you know, whatever height they want. So, I imagine how I'm going to be thinking and feeling when I've got it done, when I've handed my thing, when I've sent something off, and the other stuff that I can get on with and not feel guilty about, when it's done. So, I know that works for me and it might not work for you but it's one of those things that you could ask, so what would I be thinking about? I'm so glad, I'm relieved it's finished I've sent it off, I've done it done a good job, I did it as best I could, you know it was hard for me and off it went. So, going through that a little bit is often another suggestion of changing your kind of thinking from I can't do it it's too difficult, to how am I going to feel like when it's all done?

Louise Wiles 18:55

And I have another question How am I going to celebrate when it's all done? Because yeah offer yourself a little prize, something you love to do that you do or something you will buy, Okay, not too much, if you're a student perhaps, but you know how would you celebrate when you complete it? What would be a meaningful celebration for you and write that down too.

Elizabeth Gillies 19:21

Nice yeah rewards are good aren't they? There's a saying from I think it comes from Mark Twain I need to double check it but it's about, if you've got a frog to eat, eat it in the morning. So basically, if you've got something difficult to do, do it early on in the day, and then your mind is not bothered about it, you can get on and do it, and if you've got two frogs to eat, eat the big one first. And it's a bit like you know, when we've got lots of tasks to do, often people start with the easy one, but there is some research around that says, doing the difficult one first, can then make all the other stuff get on with - I mean, when you're doing the easy stuff that hard bit is always going to be sitting there staring at you. So, try it, that could be another option for you. And the other one, I'm going to say, particularly for students, there was a little bit of research that I read, and I really liked this about procrastination. And it links back to another podcast that we did on self-compassion. And so, with a bunch of students the experiment was, they taught one bunch of students do be compassionate to themselves if they procrastinated. And the other group they didn't do anything, they just talked to them or something. And the group that were taught self-compassion, like, 'this was hard for me to get down to my work today, tomorrow's another day.' 'You know, I procrastinated a lot today, you know, this is hard for me, you know, it's not something I always want to do.' So being able to kind of be non-judgmental, because we're usually, when we procrastinate, are very judgmental of ourselves – 'That was so stupid, I should have just gone and done it,' you know. So going through a little bit of self-compassion when you know you've procrastinated, could be a very helpful thing for you. Because the students that they taught the self-compassion to, they were less likely to procrastinate the next day. So nice kind of linking up a previous thing that we talked about and, and this today?

Louise Wiles 21:42

Fantastic. So a great example of the value of self-compassion. Why it's worth nurturing that. Yeah, fantastic. And, and I suppose I would also add another thing is if you're going to eat your big frog first thing in the day, which, yeah, that makes sense unless you've got a lecture or something in which case you'll eat it afterwards, perhaps. But another thing is, motivation, a part of what drives us, and motivates

us, is a physiological thing. It's all related to dopamine, other things as well. But dopamine is an important hormone in relation to motivation. And there's research that suggests that if you get up in the morning, and you go and spend some time outside, hopefully in sunlight, preferably in the sunlight, I think it is, but of course, that's not always possible in the UK, but outside getting some fresh air, that can really help boost your dopamine levels, which then also help you with your motivation for tasks and whatever it is you're then getting on to do for the day. And, it sort of shapes your perception of life and your emotions as well. So, you sort of have a more positive mindset and that's really important when you're embarking on tasks that are challenging. So, anything you can do from a well-being perspective so eating while as well. And where dopamine is concerned, there are things that we should eat more tyrosine, which is found in foods like red meats, nuts, cheeses, fermented cheeses, that's hard cheeses, so there's thinking about your nutrition as well, that's important. And, you know, thinking also about not spending hours at nighttime looking at a screen with bright lights flashing, because that really does affect, once again, the dopamine levels in our brain, you know when we're at nighttime, we need to be in the dark if you like, sleeping and not, well ok if you go to a nightclub, and that's a one off or every, every few days, every few weeks, fine, but not every single night, that will affect your dopamine levels, it will affect your sleep, and therefore how you're feeling about yourself and your abilities the next day. So, there's a well-being perspective to all of this as well.

Elizabeth Gillies 24:05

Yeah, I agree. It's all linked up, isn't it? It's all linked up to our mind and body. They're not separate. They're all together. The only other kind of thing I think I wanted to say was, share a little bit about me when I was writing something. And I would often be talking out loud about it. And unbeknownst to me, some people that were listening to me, realised more than I did that I was viewing this task as difficult and hard and, you know, maybe out-with my reach to do, and then someone said to me – 'Why instead of thinking it's hard, why don't you just imagine it's easy?' So, they did that thing about challenging some of the beliefs I had about doing the piece of work. And actually, I did take that and think, right, I'm going to imagine, this is something I can do, that it's going to be not easy but more straightforward than I'm imagining it to be. And it was another strategy that I use a lot. So, I kind of when I'm kind of feeling in the mood for procrastination or wanting to put things off, I go, okay, Elizabeth, I can give myself a nice bit of self talk. 'Like, just imagine this is something you can do.' And so, kind of be aware. And I think that's why it's important to kind of notice and name some of the things that going on for you, name this procrastination, as it is, what are the thoughts and what are the feelings that go on for you. And then once you can do that, that's part of moving on and making some other choices about what you can do instead.

Louise Wiles 26:04

Fantastic. I think that's a really nice note to finish this podcast today on. So, I hope it has given you some ideas and some thoughts about what might be causing your procrastination and some ideas about what you can do to eliminate procrastination, or at least reduce it. We all live with it to some elements, I think that's fair to say, to different degrees. And I think sometimes it relates to different topics, projects that we're working on. That's why it's important to think about our 'why' for what we're doing. That really helps to, but good luck in overcoming your procrastination and just know that you're just normal if you are procrastinating.

Resources:

Episode 10 of PsychCrunch, a podcast from the British Psychological Society's Research Digest

<https://psychcrunch.libsyn.com/episode-10>

WAHL Show. Episode 78 – Procrastination and Health with Dr Tim Pychyl

www.spreaker.com/user/mikewahl/procrastination2-mixdown

New Voices: is it time for active procrastination?

www.bps.org.uk/psychologist/new-voices-it-time-active-procrastination

You can look at the 24 Character Strengths found at www.viacharacter.org

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