

HEALTH

mind matters



MINU BUDHIA

**Q** I'm 29, single, and a working woman doing well, both personally and professionally. However, I'm facing a daily challenge — procrastination. I can't concentrate on anything. I enrol in online courses but never finish them. I miss painting as a hobby but when I start painting (if at all) I can't focus for more than five minutes. I even skip everyday chores and spend time lying in bed, surfing the Internet, etc. I make to-do lists and mostly fail to follow them. I only do things that are an absolute must (that too at the last moment). I'm not a lazy person and I do everything with 100 per cent effort when I do anything. I just can't find the will power to get started or stay consistent. Please help.

I understand and believe you when you say you are not lazy as procrastination itself is not a problem but a red flag for other psychological issues like stress, anxiety, depression, ADHD, etc. It is a natural response to put off something that causes us stress, but delaying it worries us more and begins a vicious cycle of constant worry and panic. Over time this leads to feelings of guilt, shame, incompetence and unworthiness, making the situation worse.

While most people procrastinate sometime or the other, yours seems to be a case of chronic procrastination, where an occasional solution has become your go-to solution and is affecting every aspect of your life — personal, professional, emotional and otherwise. While low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, and imposter syndrome can fuel procrastination, it has almost nothing to do with laziness.

If you are an anxious person by nature, someone who worries about every little detail, you could be focussing on what could go wrong and thereby freeze instead of moving forward.

If you are a perfectionist or someone who likes to control their environment, you could be focussing on getting every detail

perfect to ensure you can control the response of others to your work and thereby end up missing deadlines.

If you are someone who is suffering from long-term undiagnosed depression, you could have lost all motivation to better your life, relationships or career. Even getting out of bed in the morning may be causing fatigue and avoiding the issue could seem like the easy way out rather than facing them.

If you are someone who has been living with undiagnosed ADHD, your difficulties with concentration, commitment to a task, and distractibility can all be explained.

So how can you manage this? Here are a few tips:

The first step is to congratulate yourself for reaching out to get the help you need. It is not easy to identify an issue and find the will to look for a solution. I would also encourage you to connect with a counsellor who can help you identify the root causes of your procrastination and offer customised guidance and guidelines to improve your emotional health.

The second step is to forgive

yourself. You are only human. Like you would forgive a friend who has unintentionally hurt you, grant yourself the same kindness and compassion.

Thirdly, imagine a positive "What if?" We mostly think of all the things that can go wrong, but for a change think of all the things that can go right. What if the presentation is super and you get a raise? What if you take the exam and get a distinction grade? What if you go on the date and the person turns out to be amazing? What if you try a new hobby and discover a hidden talent?

Lastly, re-imagine the way you approach time. Break any task — whether it's getting ready for a party or making a PPT — into small bite-sized tasks that will not take you more than five to 15 minutes. After completing every 15 minutes, reward yourself with something non-distracting, and after you complete the task, treat yourself to something you really love and look forward to.

Have faith in yourself — I'm sure you will overcome this issue and have a fulfilling and successful life ahead of you.

**Q** When and how should we break the news to our adopted child? What is the correct age? What should we do if he/she gets to know from someone other than us?

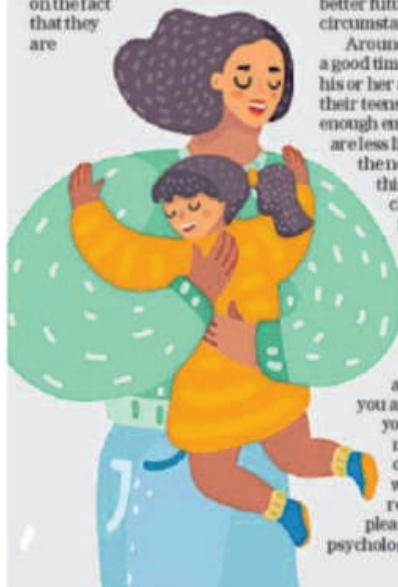
Make adoption a part of the conversation at home right from the start. When telling stories about families, tell your child how there are different types of families. If any family members or friends have adopted children and they openly talk about it, have your child spend time with their children. Talk about celebrities who have adopted children. Stress on the fact that they are

family, that they were chosen to be part of the family, and that they are loved for who they are.

Most parents are scared that their child will feel hurt, or stop loving them, or want to search for their birth parents. It is quite natural for a child to want to learn about their biological background. If you do have any information, share it when it is age appropriate. They may also have questions about why you chose adoption. It may be difficult to talk about, but please do. Getting angry is a very natural reaction so don't chastise them for their feelings. Also please do not guilt trip your child about how they should be grateful for a better future or better circumstances or a better life.

Around six-eight years of age is a good time to broach the topic of his or her adoption. Do not wait for their teens as teenagers have enough emotional turbulence and are less likely to respond well to the news. The longer you hide this vital news from your child, the more he/she will feel that adoption is something to be ashamed of, or a secret.

In case your child does find out from someone else, do not deny it. Give your child space to process this, and reassure him/her that you are there for them. And if you feel the conversation may be too hard to have on your own, or are worried about an extreme reaction from your child, please consult a counsellor or psychologist to help you with this.



**Q** I am a 65-year-old widow living alone for the last 15 years as my only child is settled abroad with her family. I always feel guilty, as if I am not doing the correct thing. As I was a girl and not fair like my mother, I was treated like a second-class citizen in my own home. The same thing happened with my husband. He was very bright but I was average, so I was made to believe whatever I was doing was wrong. I have developed a tendency to please everyone and get hurt if I am ignored. How do I come out of this?

I am sorry to hear you were made to feel less than and not enough based on the opinions of others. This sort of judgement, especially when it comes from our loved ones, can emotionally scar us for life and leave us vulnerable to seeking validation for our existence.

However, it is never too late to rediscover your self-worth, improve your self-esteem, and boost your self-confidence.

In fact, this is an excellent time in your life to concentrate on yourself and find out what are the things you truly want to do. There is absolutely no need to feel guilty or ashamed about wanting to do things your way, especially since you did not have that opportunity in your early life. To live life to the fullest, and on your terms from now on, you need to concentrate on falling in love with yourself. Here are some of the things you can try on this journey:

**Acceptance:** You need to first accept yourself, just as you are. What you look like, your intellect, your dressing sense, your food preferences — make a list of the way you like to live your everyday life and practise it without feeling

guilty. Make sure that every day you start wearing one item of clothing/accessory you love, eat one meal that is your favourite, and



do one leisure time activity that you enjoy. All of these need to be of your personal choice — not your child's, late spouse's, or anyone else's.

**Emotional Detox:** You need to

let go of the opinions of others and realise that what they thought was just that — the opinion of a few individuals, and not actual fact.

Holding a grudge about how they treated you will only hinder your way forward, so find a way to forgive them. For those who have passed away, you can write them a letter and then tear and throw it away to release negative feelings. Or you can sit in front of their picture and have a conversation with their image, speaking out loud all the things you couldn't say over the years. Expressing these buried feelings will help to set you free.

**Live The Present:** While you cannot change your past, focus on making your present a reality that you will truly enjoy. Focus on the next 24 hours and what small things you can do to feel more fulfilled and

happy in life. If you ever had a passion project, start that and see how you can incorporate it with making an impact in the lives of others. For example, if you like reading, go to an orphanage or an old age home and read to them. You can even do this online through your phone using Facebook or WhatsApp.

**Choose Happiness:** At the end of the day, true happiness comes from within. Speak with your supportive friends and family daily. Have a regular weekly or monthly Seniors' Circle session to discuss similar issues. Encourage each other to share the positives in your current life and talk about individual, simple happiness tips you can adopt in your daily life. You can also find a gratitude buddy with whom you'll share three things you're grateful for every day.

All the best for your self-care and self-love journey!





**Q** I come from a small town and gave my 100 per cent focus to my studies with the sole intention to live a proper and happy social life after I go outside for studies. But because of the lockdown, I haven't even seen my college and my second year is about to start. I missed all the fun and life of being a fresher and the exposure I have been craving for. This is harming my mental health and I cry all night. I don't have a lot of friends and my cousins ignore me. I have been left alone and I feel sad, lonely and disheartened. Please help.

I congratulate you on your academic dedication during your school years and can understand your disappointment about your feeling of missing out on being a fresher and stepping into a new world. Shopping for college, meeting new people, learning from new teachers, fresher's parties and more — it is all about new beginnings as an adult and you feel robbed of a rightful experience.

High school and college students have faced an especially emotionally turbulent time since the lockdown. Not only did they miss out on essential in-person social interaction, but also missed out on a number of life events like

farewells and graduations, which help us to move on in life.

You need to understand and accept that you are part of an extraordinary batch of students living and studying in an extraordinary time. It is okay to feel sad and mourn this loss of experience and like you, your entire batch — not just in your college, but in your country — are facing similar emotions, so you are not alone. As things get better, you have the second and third year of college to look forward to.

Till then, take the effort to communicate with your classmates online and if your local laws and regulations permit, small groups of you can meet up at coffee shops or malls (while following all Covid

safety protocols) to get to know each other. All of you are going through a shared experience and you're bound to make one or two friends.

When it comes to feeling lonely and sad, you have to start with loving your own company. You can be alone but not lonely. Take this time to find out who you really are, what you really like, and what you want to do in life. Get to know yourself better and become your own best friend first — this will help you to make other friends later. And if you feel very alone or overwhelmed with anxiety, explore getting help from a mental health professional. Call a helpline or a mental health clinic to speak with a counsellor or a psychologist who can guide you based on a detailed understanding of your situation. I wish you all the very best for a bright and happy future!



**Q** I have been masturbating since I was in school. I do this excessively and because of it I suffer from a lot of medical conditions. I don't earn enough money to treat myself and I don't want to tell my parents as it will bring them shame. I just want the pain, guilt and shame that I feel every single day to stop. I really have no desire to live like this. I have been thinking of committing suicide, but can't muster up the courage to do it. Please help.

The first thing that I need you to understand is that you matter, your life matters. However troubled you may feel, it's no reason to end your life. Second, in our society there is a lot of stigma surrounding the topic of sex and sex education, there are many misconceptions surrounding the topic of masturbation. By terming something biological and natural as 'dirty', 'unspeakable', and 'shameful', elders put a stop to what should be an open conversation. As they themselves have not received any education, they are understandably uncomfortable talking to their children. This also results in a lot of wrong information being passed down to pre-teens and teens.

You have mentioned that you suffer from medical conditions. If

these are self-diagnosed, please visit your family doctor first. If that is not an option, if you have a trusted family member, speak with them, or ask them to accompany you for a doctor's visit. If you are worried about your physical health, you must discuss your issues frankly with a doctor.

About your emotional and mental health, as long as your regular life, work, and relationships are not negatively affected, you should not worry. Social conditioning and stigma are a big influence in causing these feelings of shame and guilt. You are not alone. There are many others like you who feel what you are feeling.

Given the turmoil and agony you are in, I strongly suggest that you speak with a counsellor/psychologist so you can receive continued and personalised guidance. If you feel suicidal, please contact a mental health/ suicide helpline immediately. Sometimes it is necessary to have someone hold our hand during our struggles, and there is no shame in taking help to get through a tough phase. I really hope you stay strong, seek help and wish you the very best in life.

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