



FASD-CAN

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
Care Action Network

FASD-CAN AOTEAROA INFORMATION SHEET

FASD and Procrastination

What is procrastination?

Procrastination is the repeated delay or avoidance of tasks, even when we know this may cause stress or negative consequences. It is common for people with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and is not a sign of laziness or lack of motivation.

“Procrastination is not about being lazy or unwilling to work or do something.”

Instead, procrastination is strongly linked to brain-based differences that affect planning, time management, emotional regulation, and task initiation.

Why is procrastination common in FASD?

People with FASD often experience challenges with executive functioning, including:

- Planning and organising
- Prioritising tasks
- Managing time
- Starting tasks
- Staying focused
- Following tasks through to completion

When these skills are affected, tasks can feel overwhelming. This often triggers emotional responses such as anxiety, fear of failure, or shame, which increase avoidance and make it harder to re-engage.

A lived-experience reflection highlights this cycle:

“When Monday came and went without the task being completed, I immediately felt guilty ... it was the overwhelming sense of failure attached to it. That’s where the emotional block started.”

The link between FASD, ADHD, and procrastination

There is a strong overlap between FASD and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Research shows very high rates of co-occurring diagnoses, with ADHD being the most common.

Both FASD and ADHD involve difficulties with executive functioning, which is why procrastination is a shared challenge. Because of this overlap, research and strategies developed for ADHD can often be helpful for people with FASD.

Procrastination and mental health

Procrastination is closely linked with mental health challenges, including:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Low self-esteem
- Perfectionism
- Fear of failure

While procrastination is not a formal symptom of depression, it is often associated with it. Avoiding tasks may reduce discomfort in the short term, but over time it usually increases stress, guilt, and negative self-talk, reinforcing the cycle of procrastination.

Why early support matters

Procrastination patterns can become more entrenched over time, particularly if they are not understood or supported early. It’s best to address issues as early as possible. It’s much easier to tackle when younger than when people get older and habits become ingrained. However, meaningful progress is still possible at any age with realistic strategies and appropriate support.



Strategies that can help

There is no single solution to procrastination, but the following approaches can reduce its impact.

- **Break tasks down**
 - Divide large tasks into small, manageable steps
 - Focus on just **one step at a time**
 - Use written or visual to-do lists
 - Keep a list of completed tasks to build motivation
- **Use time supports**
 - Time-block tasks into specific periods
 - Use realistic deadlines
 - Set timers to limit how long you work on a task
 - Prioritise tasks rather than trying to do everything at once
- **Reduce distractions**
 - Create a quiet, uncluttered workspace
 - Turn off phone and social-media notifications
 - Identify personal distraction triggers and plan around them
- **Use support and accountability**
 - Identify a trusted support person
 - Use an accountability partner to check in regularly
 - Celebrate small wins and progress
 - Use rewards to support motivation
- **Professional and therapeutic support**
 - **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)** and **Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)** may help with emotional regulation and avoidance
 - Support groups can reduce isolation and build understanding
 - Medication may help some people manage ADHD symptoms, but currently there is **no specific medication for FASD**

The importance of self-compassion

A key message throughout this resource is the need for kindness toward oneself.

“Being kind to yourself... involves treating your inner critic with empathy and understanding, rather than harsh judgment.”

Self-compassion:

- Reduces shame and emotional distress
- Breaks the cycle of avoidance
- Supports motivation
- Helps people recognise that procrastination is not a personal failure

“Procrastination is a common human experience and not a sign of personal failure.”

By understanding *why* procrastination happens, rather than blaming oneself, people are more able to take practical steps forward.

Key messages to remember

- Procrastination is **brain-based**, not a character flaw
- It is strongly linked to executive functioning, emotions, and mental health
- FASD and ADHD often co-occur, increasing vulnerability to procrastination
- Practical strategies, realistic supports, and accountability help
- **Self-compassion is essential**
- There is no quick fix, but progress is possible

“There is no easy fix to procrastination... but with understanding, support, and kindness toward yourself, progress and success are possible.”

For more detailed information on this topic see our expanded website resource.



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August 2025