

The 5-Minute Jump-Start — A Go-To Tool for Teens Who Procrastinate

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November 28,
2018



QUICK TIPS *for* THERAPISTS

November 28, 2018

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The two most common reasons teens procrastinate are: 1) lack of motivation, and 2) feeling anxious and overwhelmed. With lack of motivation, the teen will tell herself that she will start the task later, actually believing she will feel more like it then. If the cause of the procrastination is anxiety, the teen will tell himself that he needs to wait until he is more clear-minded and relaxed in order to do a good job.

Using the *5-Minute Jump-Start* can help both of these types of procrastinators, and it is a tool that you can do with a teen while they are in your office. You can ask them to bring in a project they have been putting off, or you can give them a task. I sometimes have them read a poem and then write an “essay” about it.

Here is how it works. Ask the teen how motivated they are, on a 1-3 scale, before they start the task. 1=low motivation and 3=high motivation. If anxiety is their issue, ask them how anxious they are, using the same scale. Next, have the teen set a five-minute alarm on their phone. Have them start the task and stop it when the timer goes off. Afterwards, have them re-rate their motivation and/or anxiety. In almost all cases this works like magic to increase motivation and decrease anxiety.

For homework, have them practice this tool as many times as possible during the week. Continue to model it in the next and future sessions. Setting a short horizon on the initial work session will make starting any task less anxiety-provoking for a teen, and once a task is

begun, inertia is broken. In my book, ***A Teen's Guide to Getting Stuff Done***, I say, "The most fuel is burned getting a plane off the ground. Once you are airborne with a task, you'll have momentum, and your destination will feel more doable."

Book Titles: *A Teen's Guide to Getting Stuff Done*

Jennifer Shannon, LMFT, is author of *The Shyness and Social Anxiety Workbook for Teens*, *The Anxiety Survival Guide for Teens*, and *Don't Feed the Monkey Mind*. She is in private practice in Santa Rosa, CA, and is a diplomate of the Academy of Cognitive Therapy.

