



Motivation and Procrastination – Supporting Year 11

April 2026



KING EDWARD VI
SCHOOL LICHFIELD

What to expect

This presentation will focus on:

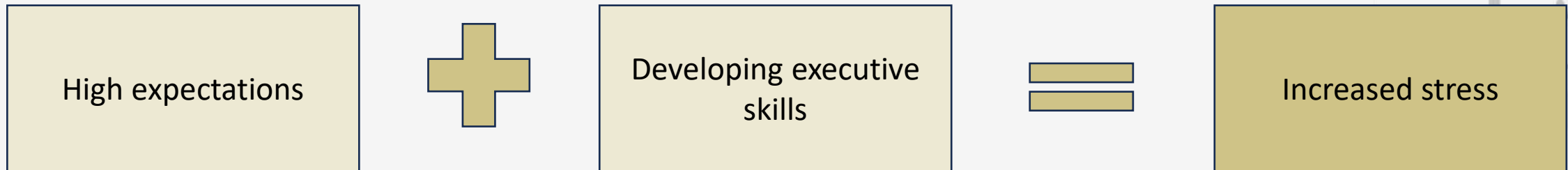
- GCSE pressure
- Procrastination
- Motivation
- How can parents help



The reality of Year 11

For many students, GCSEs are their first experience of sustained academic pressure with long-term consequences.

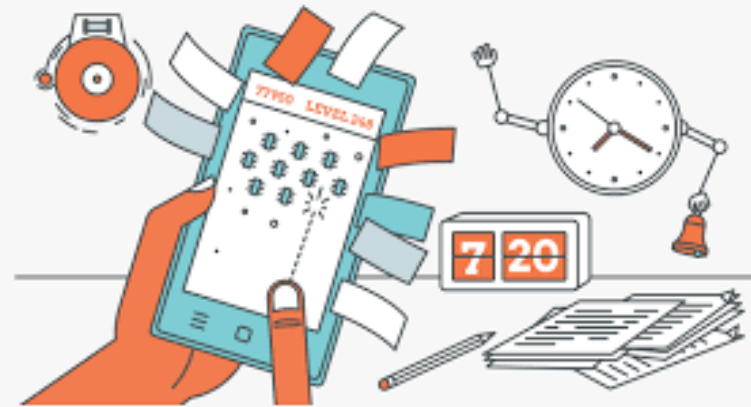
At the same time, they are navigating adolescence — a period of rapid emotional, neurological, and social development.



What procrastination really is

Procrastination is:

- A voluntary delay of an intended task despite knowing there may be negative consequences.
- Usually driven by emotional discomfort.



It is an emotional regulation strategy, not a time management problem. If a task triggers stress, self-doubt, boredom, fear of failure, or overwhelm, the brain looks for relief. Avoidance provides that relief — temporarily



What is actually happening?

Teenagers are more vulnerable because their prefrontal cortex does not develop fully until their mid twenties. This means that their brains are:

- More sensitive to stress
- More responsive to immediate reward
- Less efficient at long-term planning

At the same time, the emotional system is highly active during adolescence.

So when we combine high academic pressure with a developing planning system, procrastination becomes much more likely.”



The Procrastination Cycle

1. Task appears-
"I need to revise"

2. Emotional discomfort-
*Stress, overwhelm,
boredom, fear of
failure*

3. Avoidance-
*Phone, gaming,
tidying room, social
media, tv, snacks*

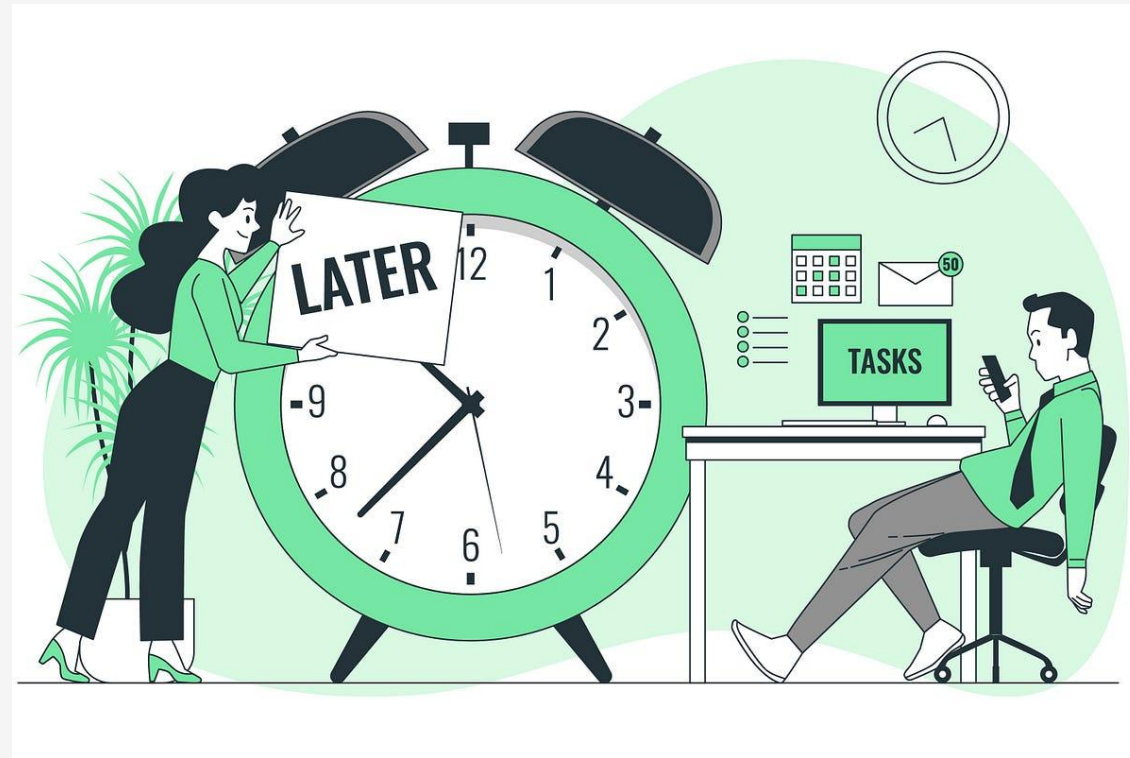
4. Temporary relief
(dopamine high)-
*Anxiety/ worry drops
for a short time*

5. Guilt and pressure
increases-
*Deadline gets closer,
stress increases*



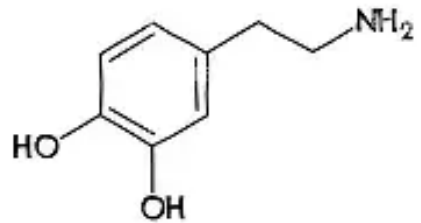
When is procrastination most likely to occur?

- The task feels overwhelming
- The task feels vague
- The student feels behind
- The outcome feels high stakes
- Confidence is low
- Perfectionism is high
- Fatigue is high



Dopamine

Dopamine



Dopamine (the reward chemical) plays a part here too...

Revision

- Effort now
- Reward months later

Phone/ social media

- Instant dopamine
- Immediate reward



Why Motivation drops on Year 11

Waiting to “feel motivated”



Fear of failure



Too many subjects



Delayed rewards



Overwhelm is the real issue

How do we approach this?

- 9–10 subjects
- Don't know where to start
- Feel behind
- Freeze response

What Parents Can Say Instead?

Instead of...

“Have you revised?”
“Why are you on your phone?”

Try..

“What’s the smallest thing you could start with?”
“Which subject feels manageable tonight?”
“Do you want help breaking it down?”



Solutions

The 20-Minute Rule

- 20 minutes
- One clear task
- Phone in another room
 - Reset after

Three hours feels impossible. Twenty minutes feels manageable. Set a timer. One task only. Phone in another room. After twenty minutes, they can reset. Starting is the hardest part — once they begin, momentum builds.

Make Tasks Specific

Not: “Revise Biology”

Instead:

- 5 flashcards
- 3 exam questions
- 1 topic summary

Vague tasks increase avoidance. ‘Revise Biology’ is too big. Specific tasks are actionable. The more specific the task, the less room there is for overwhelm.

Environment Matters More Than Willpower

- Phone out of room
 - Clear desk
- Water/snack ready
- Calm home environment
- Change of environment (library/ coffee shop)

We often expect teenagers to rely on willpower. But willpower is unreliable. Environment is more powerful. A phone in another room makes revision easier. A calm atmosphere reduces emotional pressure.



What makes procrastination worse?

1. Constant reminders

Frequent checking or repeated prompts about revision.

2. Comparisons

Comparing students to siblings, friends, or classmates.

3. Catastrophic language

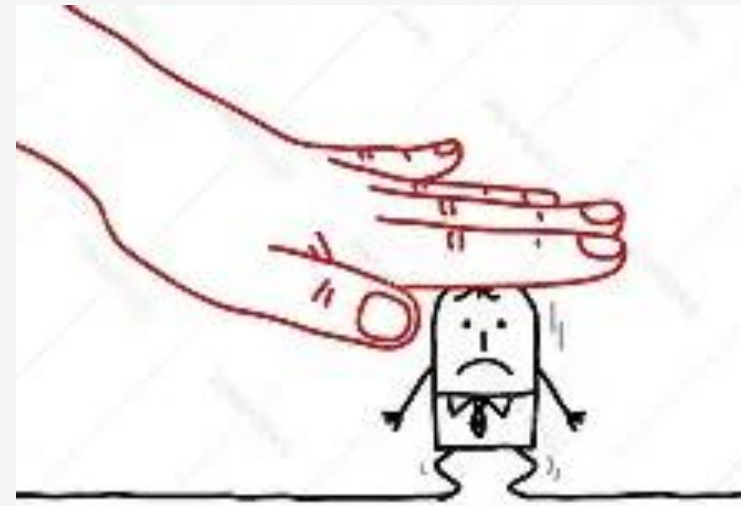
Statements about “ruining their future”.

4. Micromanaging revision

Monitoring every hour or controlling every task.

5. Lectures instead of solutions

Long conversations about effort, attitude, or responsibility.



What actually helps

Research and experience suggest that students respond best to:

1. Calm, Supportive Check-ins- “How are you feeling about your revision tonight?”
2. Help Break Work into Smaller Steps- Encourage smaller, manageable tasks. For example, instead of ‘revise science,’ the focus might be ‘review one topic’ or ‘complete three practice questions.’
3. Encourage Effort Rather Than Perfection- Recognising progress, even small progress, helps build confidence. For example, saying ‘It’s good that you started that topic tonight’ can reinforce positive habits.”
4. Create a Predictable Revision Routine- Routine can be very helpful during exam preparation. Having a consistent time or structure for revision reduces the need for daily decision-making.
5. Maintain Perspective and Emotional Support- Students often take emotional cues from the adults around them. When parents remain calm and supportive, it can help students manage their own stress more effectively.

