

# Task Prioritization

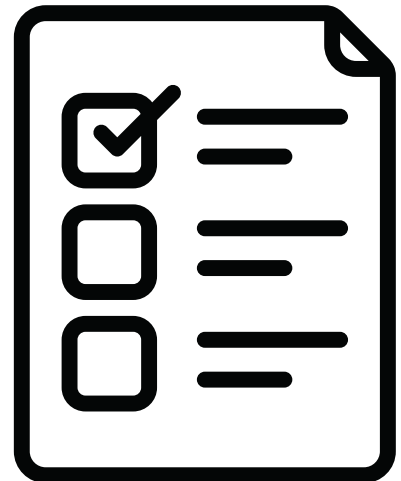
Today, we will explore task prioritization.

First, let's define task prioritization.

*Task prioritization is a way of organizing tasks based on their **importance** and **urgency**. The goal is to improve time management and decrease stress by focusing on completing tasks that need immediate attention.*

Why is this hard for adhders?

- Executive functioning differences can impact planning, organization, and prioritization required to meet neurotypical expectations.
- Attention differences make it hard to stick with the one task you might prioritize
- The interest-based nervous system of adders causes prioritization to look different. Part of this is “now not now” thinking.
- Task paralysis can get in the way of figuring out how to prioritize.



# Task Prioritization

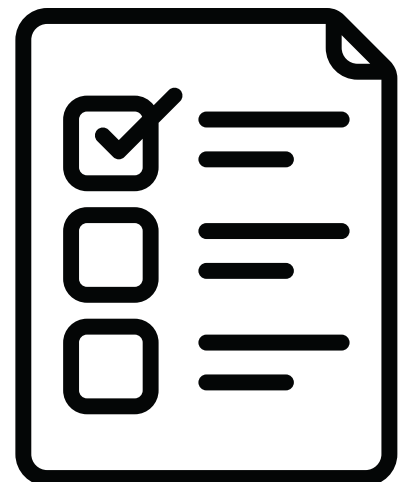
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# Prioritizing Tasks

We will explore these issues in this module.

Everyone has a different way of prioritizing tasks. Your brain operates uniquely and will likely prioritize things that are emotionally charged, exciting, fun, interesting, urgent, or within your immediate purview as the things that get your attention. Therefore, these might be the ways you prioritize!

It is important to recognize that in certain environments, the way you prioritize and pay attention is valuable. In the past, your way of seeing may have been perfectly suited for certain tasks. One theory, the **hunter-farmer theory**, posits that ADHD was crucial to survival.

It was a period when the capacity to immediately react and adapt to tasks was indeed a formidable strength.

Let's watch this video as a reminder of the ideas we need to remember. <https://youtu.be/aWxmEv7fOFY?si=ZXeC86ZZj75Bzgb2>.



# Prioritizing Tasks

## Understanding 'Now and Not Now' Thinking

For people with ADHD, the way they see time and decide what to do is often different. This is called "now and not now" thinking. Maybe you can relate to this too!

There are two categories: tasks that need to be done right away ("now") and everything else that can wait or doesn't feel urgent ("not now").

This approach to managing time and prioritizing tasks focuses on completing tasks that are immediately important and visible in the present moment. This may result from "time blindness," where only things that are seen in the current environment are addressed. Future tasks may not receive as much attention, as they are considered "not now" and are not prioritized, potentially leading to neglect and crises.

Do you recognize "now not now" in you?



# Prioritizing Tasks

This "now and not now" mindset can be a tremendous asset in several modern job sectors and past scenarios.

Can you think of ways in which this kind of thinking would be beneficial in modern-day life?

Can you think of jobs where this thinking would be helpful?

Jobs like emergency room doctors or paramedics, stockbrokers, and other jobs that run on adrenaline can often be good for adhd people.

Any position where you might need to respond rapidly or prioritize based on what is directly in front of you can be one where this kind of thinking can be highly prized.

Thus, the "now and not now" thinking style has historically been and continues to be a beneficial trait in many spheres of life.

Now, not thinking can get in the way of prioritizing tasks in a busy world that is not built for your neurotype.



# Prioritizing Tasks

Prioritizing tasks today often involves weighing factors according to different criteria. To use the hunter-farmer analogy, a hunter would not perform well as a farmer. Patience, sequencing, deliberation, weighing options, and making decisions may not be your strong points. Individuals who struggle with adhering to set routines and procedures are often like hunters stuck in the roles of farmers.

## Attention differences

ADHD can cause distractions from the environment, which can derail task prioritization and focus. This could be a residual effect of our hunter-gatherer past when attention to the environment was critical for survival.

To combat this, it is essential to make the environment free from distractions when focusing on a task. Otherwise, completing tasks will be difficult. There are many ways to achieve this, such as removing technology, using "do not disturb" signs, and utilizing focus modes when writing. The Pomodoro technique is also a helpful suggestion.



# Prioritizing Tasks

## The Interest Based Nervous System

Do you remember William Dodson's Interest-Based Nervous System? We introduced this idea in Unit 11 - The Strengths Unit.

Dodson discussed how ADHD brains are motivated to do things based on the following characteristics of the Interest-Based Nervous System:

- 🎯 1. Novelty: Difficulty engaging with tasks that lack newness
- ⌚ 2. Urgency: Need for immediate action to maintain interest
- 🏆 3. Challenge: Seeking tasks that offer a sense of competition
- 💖 4. Interest: A personal connection or fascination with the task

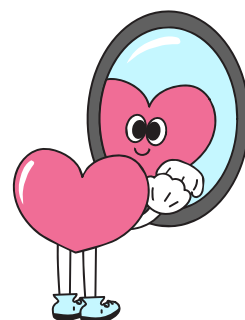
**In contrast, the Importance-Based Nervous System prioritizes tasks by importance, weighing potential consequences, including time proximity. It is different from the approach of most ADHDers.**

**If necessary, you can use this insight to help you understand how to prioritize tasks in a more neurotypical way. This is an example of self-awareness.**

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### USE SELF COMPASSION

Ideally, you should not have to work against your brain and neurotype. It is important not to use the tools we discuss as weapons against yourself.



# Prioritizing Tasks

Recognize that managing your stress signals and understanding your emotional responses are not indications of failure or inadequacy.

Remember self-compassion, self-accommodation, self-care, self-advocacy, and self-awareness.

You don't need to be "fixed". However, you might need to strengthen some of your skills, or use self awareness to help yourself with prioritizing to live a life in line with your values.

Review previous units and videos on self-care and task planning to refresh and reinforce the skills you have acquired.

The ongoing process of learning and re-learning can serve as a foundation for growth and more trust in your self.





# Prioritizing Tasks

## Task Paralysis

Task paralysis can happen when you become overwhelmed by too many demands and difficulty figuring out how to prioritize them.

Recognize that feeling overwhelmed often signals an overload of responsibilities and the imposition of unrealistic self-expectations.

It's important to understand that there isn't a tool that can fix overwhelm. This feeling of overwhelm stems from living in a world that imposes unrealistic expectations on people, particularly on women and especially on neurodiverse women. It indicates that you are being taxed beyond your limits. You are not broken; your body is simply responding the way it is supposed to. It is shutting down because you are overwhelmed beyond your capacity.

When your brain and body are in danger of shutting down, what do you think you should do?

Remember the lessons learned from the units on stress, emotions, and self-accommodations. While managing your executive functions is vital, it's equally important to reject pressures to conform to the so-called 'gold standard.'



# Prioritizing Tasks

## Task Paralysis

Task paralysis can happen when you become overwhelmed by too many demands and have difficulty figuring out how to prioritize them.

Please be aware that feeling overwhelmed often signals an overload of responsibilities and the imposition of unrealistic self-expectations.

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**What do you think you should do when your brain and body are in danger of shutting down?**

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# Prioritizing Tasks

Task Paralysis

## Movement

Recognize that it's perfectly okay to have moments of struggle, and that working on these issues can be very challenging.

### Navigating Task Paralysis: Three Ways to Help Yourself

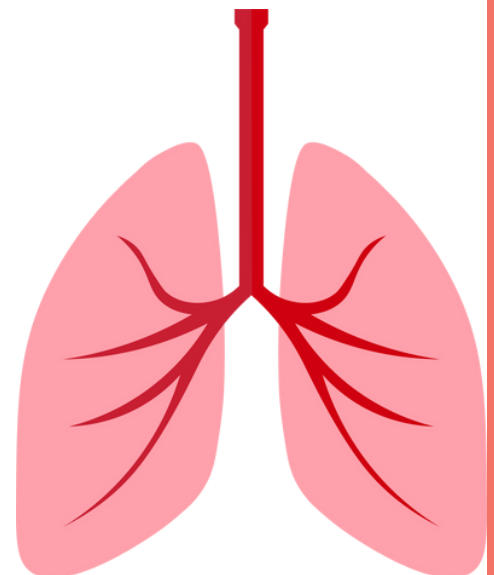
When you are in task paralysis your brain has gotten the message that you are in DANGER, You have to give yourself the message that you are safe.

### Diaphragmatic Breathing

During times of overwhelm, the brain can become flooded with stress signals, leading to a freeze response. Diaphragmatic breathing is a useful tool to help regulate the nervous system and calm the mind during these moments. By engaging the diaphragm, this technique encourages deep, rhythmic breaths, which can improve oxygen delivery to the brain and reduce feelings of stress and anxiety.

This will send the message that you ARE SAFE.

**breathe**



# Prioritizing Tasks

## Task Paralysis Movement

### Quick Guide to Diaphragmatic Breathing

1. Position: Find a comfortable place to sit or lie down.
2. Hand Placement: Put one hand on your chest and the other on your abdomen.
3. Inhale: Breathe slowly through your nose and expand your abdomen.
4. Pause: Hold your breath for 2-3 seconds.
5. Exhale: Breathe OUT gradually through your mouth and contract your abdomen.
6. Repeat: Keep doing this for 3-5 minutes while focusing on your breath and abdominal movement.

#### Tips:

Imagine a balloon inflating and deflating in your abdomen to help you focus.

If needed, seek professional guidance or use apps/videos.

Remember, the goal is to breathe deeply from your diaphragm, not shallowly from your chest. Watch a video here.

<https://youtu.be/kgTL5G1iblo?si=zWrJmscZ3GGBIkPR>

# Prioritizing Tasks

## Task Paralysis **Movement**

Exercise or move your body in some way to get yourself out of stuck mode!  
Why?

1. Activation of the Sympathetic Nervous System During a freeze response, the body's sympathetic nervous system is activated, preparing for fight or flight. Exercise helps utilize this activation constructively, allowing the body to dissipate stress hormones.
2. Engagement of the Parasympathetic Nervous System Post-exercise, the parasympathetic system, or "rest and digest" system, helps the body return to a calm, balanced state, aiding recovery from a frozen state.
3. Release of Endorphins Exercise triggers the release of endorphins, natural mood lifters that can alleviate feelings of being stuck or frozen by inducing positive sensations in the body.

# Prioritizing Tasks

## Task Paralysis

### **Movement**

Exercise or move your body in some way to get yourself out of stuck mode!

Why?

4. **Diversion and Grounding** Physical activity serves as a diversion, shifting focus from stressors to the task at hand and facilitating grounding techniques that help individuals reconnect with the present moment, aiding in breaking a freeze response.

5. **Enhancing Brain Functionality** Regular exercise improves brain functionality, particularly in areas governing executive functions, aiding in task navigation and potentially breaking the freeze response cycle by reducing anxiety and depression symptoms.

6. **Breath and Rhythm:** The rhythmic and focused breathing involved in exercise can be soothing, potentially activating the parasympathetic system and promoting relaxation and recovery.

7. **Body Awareness Exercise** fosters body awareness, helping individuals reconnect with physical sensations and break the dissociative aspect of a freeze response.

# Prioritizing Tasks

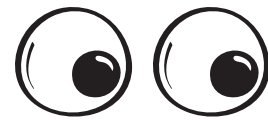
## Task Paralysis

### Grounding

Grounding techniques are designed to help you connect with the present moment by focusing on your physical surroundings or sensations. One thing to try is the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique, which focuses on the senses to bring awareness to the present moment.

Here's how it works:

1. Name five things you can see in her surroundings.



2. Name 4 things you can feel or touch (e.g., the chair she's sitting on, her feet on the ground).



3. Name three things you can hear (e.g., the sound of the wind and people talking in the background).



4. Name two things you can smell (e.g., the scent of coffee or fresh air).



5. Name one thing you can taste (e.g., the taste of a mint or gum).



There are many strategies you can find to try grounding. You can try this a few times and check in with how you feel.



# Prioritizing Tasks

## Helping your to prioritize

Now, let's move on to some ideas to help you prioritize

The best rule to always remember when we are talking about your executive functioning is you **need to externalize your thoughts**.

Here is a video by Russell Barkley explaining why.

[https://www.tiktok.com/@ladyksfreshlocalshrimp/video/7222018984571489582?lang=en&q=hunter farmer adhd&t=1693859108214](https://www.tiktok.com/@ladyksfreshlocalshrimp/video/7222018984571489582?lang=en&q=hunter+farmer+adhd&t=1693859108214)

In this next sections we will briefly review our 3 step system for task and calendar management.





# Prioritizing Tasks

Externalize your list of things to do because your working memory can't hold it.

## Review

Suggestions for a 3-Step System:

### 1. Task List:

List weekly responsibilities, including work, childcare, and daily routines.

2. Note tasks and projects, including pending ones with deadlines and things to do.

3. Break big tasks into smaller steps and big projects into manageable baby steps.

4. Prioritize tasks based on values, deadlines, or importance.



# Prioritizing Tasks

4. Choose one task from the list daily.

## **Doing Weekly Planning**

Insert all upcoming week's **responsibilities, things that are urgent, and appointments** into the calendar.

Dedicate 30 minutes on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday for weekly planning.

## **Doing Daily Planning**

Take 10 minutes every evening or morning to review your daily plan. Identify the main things important to you for the day, including self-care, special interests, and things related to your values and strengths( as well as things you have to do and **rest.**

Ensure that the schedule is not over-scheduled.

Consider strategies we learned related to procrastination with strategies we learned.

Rearrange tasks if necessary.



To further prioritize tasks, you can also use the Eisenhower Matrix.

## Prioritizing Tasks

Understanding and Utilizing the Eisenhower Matrix a neurotypical tool.

One often taught strategy to help neurotypicals prioritize is **The Eisenhower Matrix**.

You can find a picture of the matrix on the next page

This strategy might help you prioritize tasks by categorizing them into four groups based on **urgency** and **importance**. Less important and urgent tasks can be delegated or given less time.

Here is a brief description of each quadrant:

**Quadrant 1 (Urgent and Important): Urgent and important tasks.** You need to deal with these critical activities personally and immediately. However, **spending too much time in this quadrant can lead to stress and burnout.**

**Quadrant 2 (Important but Not Urgent):** Important but not urgent tasks. These activities help you achieve your personal and professional long-term goals. Coaches say adhd people should aim to spend more time in this quadrant to have better control over their time and to work towards their goals proactively.

# Prioritizing Tasks

Quadrant 3 (Urgent but Not Important): Urgent but unimportant tasks.

These are the activities that you can either ask yourself if you can accommodate yourself in some way or delegate to someone else. If not managed properly, these tasks can take away the time you could otherwise spend on important tasks.

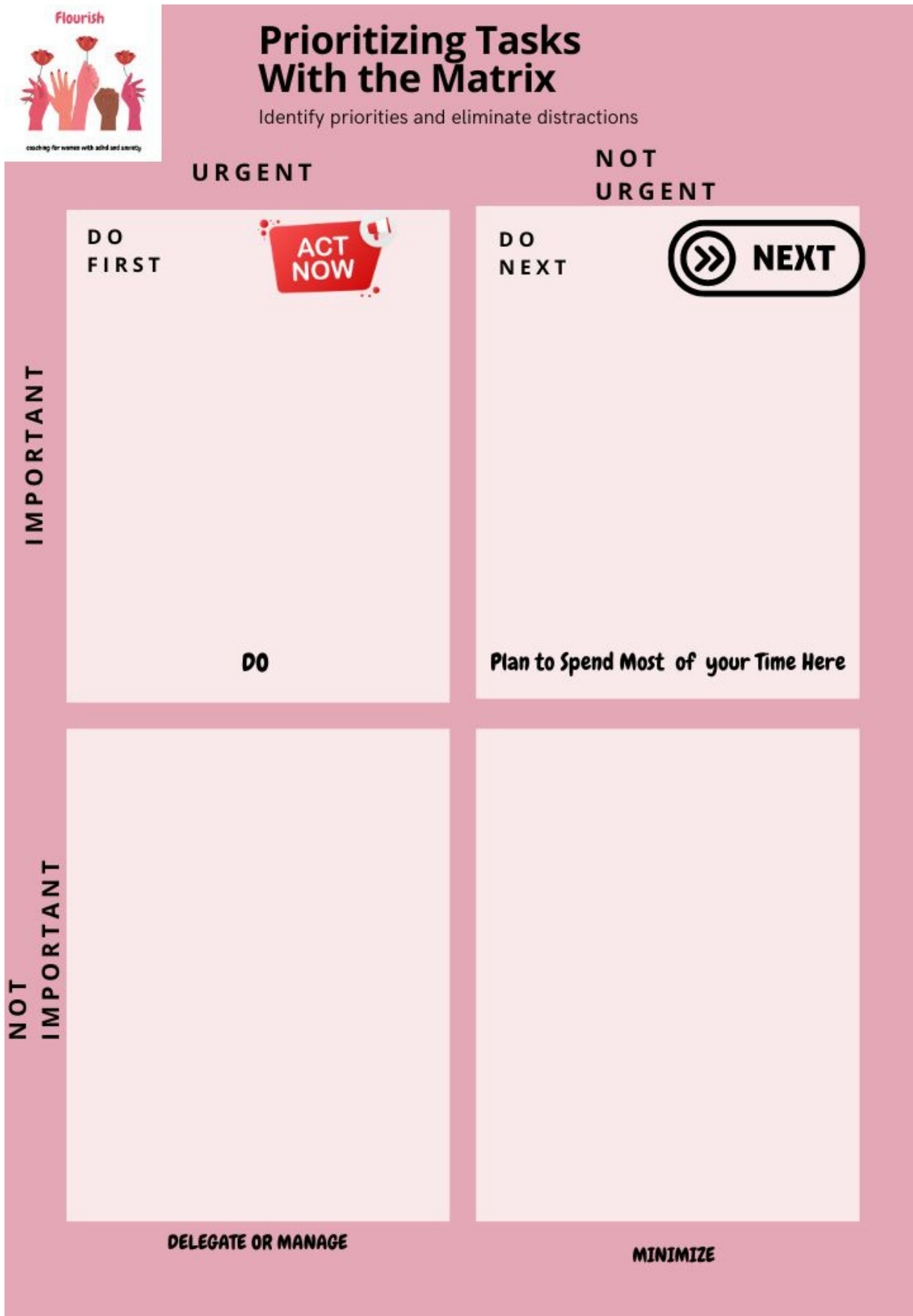
Quadrant 4 (Neither Urgent nor Important): Tasks that are neither urgent nor important. You may be able to eliminate these activities as they don't contribute to your goals or have any significant impact.

## **Determining What's Important and Urgent: How Do You Know?**

To effectively use the Eisenhower Matrix, it's essential to understand how to categorize tasks based on their importance and urgency. Here are some guidelines:

- **Important Tasks:** These are tasks that contribute directly to achieving your long-term goals and values. They could be personal or professional goals and often significantly impact your life and future.
- **Urgent Tasks:** These are tasks that require immediate attention. They are often associated with meeting deadlines, responding to emergencies, or fulfilling last-minute requests. These tasks often have immediate consequences if not completed.

# The Eisenhower Matrix



# Prioritizing Tasks

## Incorporating Tasks into Your Calendar

- Tasks with Deadlines: Ensure that tasks with deadlines are marked in your calendar, with sufficient time to complete them.  
( triple the time you think it will take.
- Tasks with Consequences: Identify tasks that will have significant consequences if not completed and allocate time to complete these tasks before they become urgent.
- Tasks You Care About Make sure to allocate time for tasks that you care about and that contribute to your long-term goals and values. For example, special interests.



# Prioritizing Tasks

## Using the Eisenhower Matrix Effectively

To use the Eisenhower Matrix effectively, you should aim to spend more time in Quadrant 2, which contains tasks that are important but not urgent. This allows for proactive planning and working towards goals without the pressure of urgency. It helps in reducing the time spent in Quadrant 1, which contains urgent and important tasks, thereby reducing stress and burnout.

If an official planning system like we outlined does NOT work for you be more flexible. Try these ideas on a daily basis. Keep a dump list that you look at each day and scan your list for urgent dates and priorities and also try to focus on things that would fall into quadrant 2.

Can you think of more flexible ways to tweak your planning system to help yourself with issues of prioritization that feel good to you?

# Prioritizing Tasks

## How to Prioritize Better So You Aren't Stressed: More Tips

### 1. Display Your Top Three Values

Keep a visual reminder of your core values in various spaces around your home. This could encompass aspects such as:

- **Safety:** Ensuring a secure and stable environment for yourself and your loved ones.
- **Financial Stability:** Focusing on maintaining your job and meeting your financial responsibilities.
- **Family Focus:** Allocating time and energy to nurture your relationship with your children.
- **Creativity:** Carving out space to engage in creative endeavors that ignite your passion and interest.

Using these values as a compass can guide your weekly goal-setting and decision-making processes. When you are prioritizing, use your values as part of the compass.

# VALUES



# Prioritizing Tasks

## How to Prioritize Better So You Aren't Stressed: More Tips

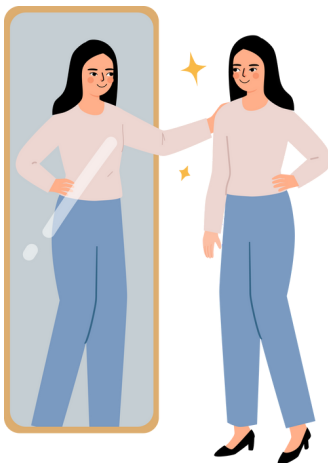
### 2. Establish Self-Awareness Goals and self-compassion :)

Continue to work on awareness of your stress patterns as well as procrastination.

Are you avoiding tasks that you should prioritize because you don't have information?

Are you forgetting to plan?

Are you failing to prioritize things like self-care which will later contribute to stress and have a domino effect?



Self  
Care



# Prioritizing Tasks

## How to Prioritize Better So You Aren't Stressed: More Tips

### 3. Self-Advocacy: Seek Help

Don't hesitate to ask for help when confusion arises. Consulting with your boss, partner, or a trusted friend can offer you a different perspective on prioritizing tasks. Remember, you're navigating a world built on norms, and their insights can be a valuable resource.



### 4. Utilize Your Planning System

Consistently use your planning system to manage your tasks and meet your deadlines. Integrating this system into your routine can gradually enhance your planning and task management skills.



### 5. Embrace the 'Brain Dump' Technique

Keep practicing the 'brain dump' technique where you jot down all the tasks and ideas cluttering your mind onto paper. This technique helps in organizing thoughts and prioritizing tasks more effectively. Remember, the key to success is taking slow, steady, and small steps to incorporate this habit into your routine.

# Prioritizing Tasks

## Group Activity

### Eisenhower Matrix Worksheet Activity 🌈

#### Instructions:

1. Below, you will find a list of 20 tasks. Your job is to categorize them into the Eisenhower Matrix based on their urgency and importance.

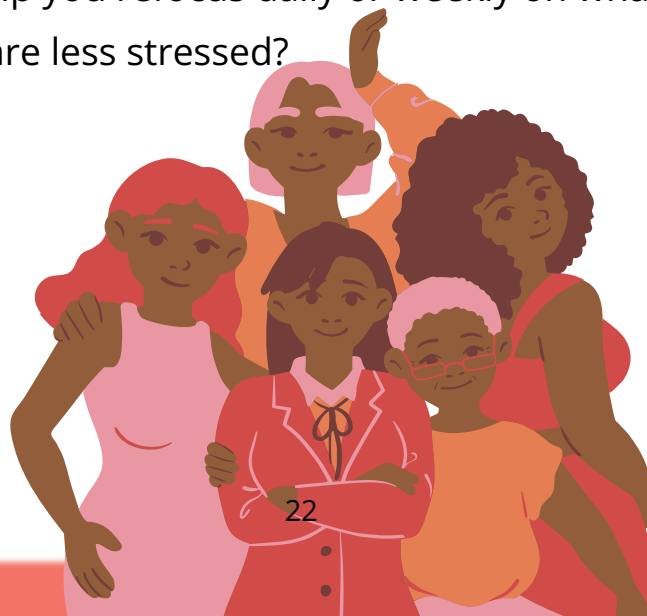
2. Remember to consider the nature of each task and how it aligns with your personal and professional goals.

3. Feel free to use your personal experiences and preferences to guide your decisions.

4. Discuss as a group how the quadrants may or may not have relevance for helping you shift the way you prioritize to adjust to some of the expectations placed on you.

5. Does it have any relevance?

6. How can you use the idea of the dump list and the interest-based nervous system to help you refocus daily or weekly on what your priorities are so you are less stressed?



# Prioritizing Tasks

## Group Activity

The Eisenhower Matrix:

Quadrant Descriptions:

1. Quadrant 1 (Urgent and Important): Tasks that require immediate attention and contribute to your long-term goals and values. Tip: Try to manage these tasks effectively to avoid stress and burnout. 🔥
2. Quadrant 2 (Important but Not Urgent): Important tasks that don't require immediate attention. These tasks help you achieve your long-term goals. Tip: Aim to spend more time here to work towards your goals proactively without the pressure of urgency. 🌱
3. Quadrant 3 (Urgent but Not Important): Tasks that require immediate attention but don't significantly contribute to your long-term goals. Tip: Consider delegating or managing these tasks or accommodating yourself to free up time for more important activities. ⌚
4. Quadrant 4 (Neither Urgent nor Important): Tasks that neither contribute to your goals nor require immediate attention. Tip: Try to minimize time spent here to focus on more productive activities. ❌

## Prioritizing Tasks Group Activity

1. Buy groceries for the week (Due 2/28/2024).
2. Catch up on your favorite show.
3. Pick up school uniforms that your child needs for school, which starts on 2/27/2024.
4. Schedule a haircut appointment.
5. Get dog's rabies shot due on 3/13/2024.
6. Pay the electricity bill (Due 3/2/2024).
7. Take a 15-minute walk daily for self-care.
8. Set a playdate for the kids (Scheduled for 3/7/2024).
9. Vacuum the living room every other day.
10. Water the indoor plants.
11. Start answering emails every day because it's been 3 weeks.
12. Sort and recycle the junk mail.
13. Fill the car with gas.
14. Organize the entire house according to Marie Kondo's book.
15. Read for 20 minutes before bed as a relaxation routine.
16. Try to make a healthy dinner every night from scratch.
17. Set aside 10 minutes for morning meditation.
18. Wash the dishes every night.
19. Make a doctor's appointment for the annual check-up.
20. Spend 45 minutes playing a game with the kids daily to be a good mom.
21. Take out the trash every night.
22. Write a to-do list and look at the calendar for the next day every evening.
23. Make the beds every morning.
24. Set aside time weekly to learn something new or pursue a hobby.
25. Plan a simple weekend family activity.
26. Start running 5 miles a day because I haven't exercised in a long time.
27. Do the teenagers' laundry.



# Prioritizing Tasks With the Matrix

Identify priorities and eliminate distractions

**URGENT**

**NOT  
URGENT**

**DO  
FIRST**



**DO  
NEXT**



**IMPORTANT**

**DO**

**Plan to Spend Most of your Time Here**

**NOT  
IMPORTANT**

**DELEGATE OR MANAGE**

25

**MINIMIZE**



# Prioritizing Tasks With the Matrix

Identify priorities and eliminate distractions

URGENT

NOT  
URGENT

DO  
FIRST



Child in crisis  
Some Emails or Calls  
Deadlines  
Emergencies

Sometimes these things can be minimized by managing other quadrants

DO

DO  
NEXT



The Group  
Exercise  
Meal Planning

Activities that bring you closer to your goals but are easy to neglect. For adhd people their nervous system may not be wired for these kinds of activities.

Plan to Spend Most of your Time Here

IMPORTANT

NOT  
IMPORTANT

Interruptions  
Distractions  
Calls

Time Suckers  
Delegate  
Accomodate

Unfriendly for your brain  
Emotionally disregulating  
Take up your time

This can also be things you committed to that aren't in line with your values

These things can take you down the rabbit hole and can be signs that you are stressed

They often need to be managed. because they can make you feel worse

DELEGATE OR MANAGE

MINIMIZE