

Counseling Center Behavioral Strategies

Audio	Video
<p>[Joshua] Hello everyone. My name is Joshua Hollis. I am a counselor at the University Counseling Center here at LSU Health Sciences Center in Shreveport. And today I would like to speak to second year medical students and other students who are preparing to take the step one exam. I would like to offer some behavioral tips that could perhaps help you out if you're having trouble.</p> <p>If you're not having trouble, please disregard this video and go about your day. But I know it can be really difficult to discipline yourself during this time, so I'd like to offer some evidence based practical advice. The first thing I'd like to talk about is forming an implementation intention for each day. Now, this is going to sound overly simplistic, but we have a lot of research that indicates if you actually write out what you want to do, when you want to do it and where you want to do it, you are much more likely to actually follow through with the plan.</p> <p>So you can do this the night before - just writing out a simple statement. I will study for four hours starting at 8:00 a.m. tomorrow morning in my dining room. Starting in the morning is also helpful. Research indicates that we have a finite amount of self-control and it diminishes as the day goes on. So starting out in the morning, you're more likely to have success in being able to make yourself do a difficult task. So I encourage you to start early as well.</p> <p>Beyond that, when people come to me for counseling and they're having difficulty with self-discipline, I typically talk about ways that they can reduce behavioral friction in their life, and this simply means finding ways to make the desirable behaviors easier for you, and ways to make undesirable behaviors more difficult for you.</p> <p>And that can be very simple, but very helpful.</p>	<p>Man with close cropped hair, and short, neat beard and mustache is wearing a dark t-shirt, seated in a room with a fabric drape on one wall and a guitar on behind him. (Joshua) He addresses the camera directly.</p>

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<p>When you're trying to establish good behavior patterns. An example might be preparing your study materials the night before and having your lunch ready the night before and out in the place you're going to study, making it obvious and making it easy to get to, an example of making an undesirable behavior more difficult might be hiding objects that lead you to distractions, such as video game controllers, your cell phone, things of that nature, just making it so you don't even see them during the day. Another thing to consider is rewarding yourself when you meet your study goals. So let's say you had a plan to sit down at eight and study until 12 and then have lunch. Well, if you meet your goal of studying from 8 to 12, it could be helpful to give yourself a reward, like listening to your favorite song, chewing on a piece of gum you like.</p> <p>Browsing social media, though I would be careful with this one. It could be helpful for you to shift into a reward mindset rather than a self punishment mindset. I know often people are prone to beating themselves up when they don't do well and not offering themselves any positivity when they do well. So I would encourage you to do what dog trainers do. Dog trainers used to just hit their dogs with sticks in order to get them to do what they wanted them to do. But if you talk to good dog trainers these days, they know that positivity works a lot better and you have happier dogs in the meantime. So see if you can be positive with yourself during this time if possible.</p> <p>Another thing I'd like to talk about is procrastination, and I think it's helpful to explore some cognitive distortions that might be present when you're procrastinating. A common one is believing that actually sitting down to perform the difficult task will be terrible. And I know nothing I say today is going to make studying for the step exam fun. But there are certainly worse things in life than sitting down to study, probably in a climate controlled environment. So just notice how terrible you're making it in your head. Perhaps it isn't quite as bad as you predict it to be. Another distortion we're often engaged in when we're procrastinating is thinking that avoiding the difficult task is going to be very pleasant and wonderful. Typically, when we're avoiding something we need to do, it's actually creating anxiety, and we're not actually enjoying it at all anyway.</p>	Joshua still on camera

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<p>So these are to cognitive distortions to pay attention to when you're procrastinating. I think it can be helpful throughout this period to find ways to reframe what you're going through. There are numerous ways to do this, infinite ways to do this. Some common things that I talk about with my clients or helping them see that even though this is difficult and it will be unpleasant at times, this is a step toward fulfilling your dream of becoming a physician.</p> <p>This is something that you've chosen to do because you found it to be important. Another thing to consider is that this is an incredible challenge, and you can look back at other challenges in your life and see how they made you stronger and more resilient in the long run. Perhaps if you're very positive in your thinking, you can convince yourself that you're fortunate to be challenged because without being challenged, you could potentially place a false ceiling on what you're capable of.</p> <p>Another reframing strategy is thinking about how it could be worse. You can think of a task that would be worse than sitting down to studying briefly. Not dwelling on it, but thinking about what it would be like to dig ditches in the 100 degree heat. This doesn't necessarily make your negative feelings go away, but it can dampen an emotional response that you're having.</p> <p>And these different reframes work for different people. So, if you haven't tried them before, perhaps you, can take a look at these. So beyond that, I hope some of this information was helpful to you. Definitely want to wish you all good luck and know that we are rooting for you. And we are at the University Counseling Center, we're here to provide extra support if you need, so please reach out if you need help. Thanks.</p>	Joshua on camera