

Overcoming the 'Fear of Failure'

Facing Fears and Moving Forward

Have you ever been so afraid of failing at something that you decided not to try it at all? Or has a fear of failure meant that, subconsciously, you undermined your own efforts to avoid the possibility of a larger failure?

Many of us have probably experienced this at one time or another. The fear of failing can be immobilizing - it can cause us to do nothing, and therefore resist moving forward. But when we allow fear to stop our forward progress, we are likely to miss some great opportunities along the way, particularly if you let it stop you competing the way you know you should be able to.

What does fear of failure mean? What causes fear of failure? How do you overcome a fear of failure to enjoy true success in competition, and in life?

Causes of Fear of Failure

To find the causes of fear of failure, we first need to understand what 'failure' actually means.

We all have different definitions of failure, simply because we all have different benchmarks, values, and belief systems. A failure to one person might simply be a great learning experience for someone else.

Many of us are afraid of failing, at least some of the time. But fear of failure (also called 'atychiphobia') is when we allow that fear to stop us doing the things that can move us forward to achieve our goals.

Fear of failure can be linked to many causes. Having a bad experience at some point in your life can cause you to be afraid of trying to repeat whatever it was again. For example, say that several years ago you had an important competition, and you did very poorly. The experience might have been so terrible that you developed a fear of failure about competitions in general and you carry that fear subconsciously, even now when you know you have improved all your skills far beyond what you were doing then.

Signs of Fear of Failure

You might experience some of these symptoms if you have a fear of failure:

- A reluctance to try new skills or to even do some of those skills that you could do before.
- Self-sabotage - for example, procrastination, excessive anxiety, or a failure to chase your goals.
- Low self-esteem or a lack of self-confidence - commonly using negative statements such as 'I'll never be good enough to beat them,' or 'I'm not good enough to get on that team.'
- Perfectionism - A willingness to try only those skills that you know you can do perfectly and successfully.

'Failure' - A Matter of Perspective

It's almost impossible to go through life without experiencing some kind of failure. People who do so live so cautiously that they go nowhere. Put simply, they're not really living at all.

The wonderful thing about failure is that it's entirely up to us to decide how to look at it.

We can choose to see failure as 'the end of the world,' or as proof of just how inadequate we are. Or, we can look at failure as the incredible learning experience that it often is. Every time we fail at something, we should look for a lesson to learn. These lessons are very important; they are how we grow, and how we keep from making that same mistake again. **Failures stop us only if we let them.**

Most of us will stumble and fall in life. Doors will get slammed in our faces, and we might make some bad decisions. Think of the opportunities you will miss if you let your failures stop you.

Failure can also teach us things about ourselves that we would never have learned otherwise. For instance, failure can help you discover how strong a person you are. Failing at something can help you discover your truest friends, or help you find unexpected motivation to succeed.

Often, valuable insights come only after a failure. Accepting and learning from those insights is key to succeeding in life.

Overcoming a Fear of Failure

It's important to realize that in everything we do, there's always a chance that we might fail. Facing that chance, and embracing it, is not only courageous - it also gives us a fuller, more rewarding life.

However, here are a few ways to reduce the fear of failing:

- **Analyze all potential outcomes** - Many people experience fear of failure because they fear the unknown. Remove that fear by considering all of the potential outcomes of your decision.
- **Learn to think more positively** - Positive thinking is an incredibly powerful way to build self-confidence and neutralize self-sabotage.
- **Look at the worse-case scenario** - In some cases, the worst case scenario may be genuinely disastrous, and it may be perfectly rational to fear failure. In other cases, however, this worst case may actually not be that bad, and recognizing this can help.
- **Have a contingency plan** - If you are afraid of failing at something, having a 'Plan B' in place can help you feel more confident about moving forward.

Using Goal Setting

If you have a fear of failure, you might be uncomfortable setting goals. However, goals help us define where we want to go in life. Without goals, we have no sure destination. Check our 'Setting Goals' help sheet.

Many experts recommend visualisation as a powerful tool for goal setting. Imagining how life will be after you've reached your goal is a great motivator to keep you moving forward. Check our 'Visualisation' help sheet.

Start by setting a few small goals. These should be goals that are slightly, but not overwhelmingly, challenging. Think of these goals as 'early wins' that are designed to help boost your confidence.

Try to make your goals tiny steps on the route to much bigger goals. Don't focus on the end picture, for example, getting on the State or National Team. Just focus on the next step, learning to do a specific skill well, making a good routine, reducing the execution errors. That is all, the rest will follow!

Taking one small step at a time will help build your confidence, keep you moving forward, and prevent you from getting overwhelmed with visions of your final goal.

Key Points

Many of us sometimes experience a fear of failure, but we must not let that fear stop us from moving forward.

Fear of failure can have several causes. It is important to realize that we always have a choice: we can choose to be afraid, or we can choose not to be.

Start by setting small goals that will help build your confidence and practice thinking positively. By moving forward slowly but steadily, you will begin to overcome your fear of failure.