

Do You Feel Like You Have Failed Yourself?

What to Know

Another year is ending, and you might see posts on social media that ask, “What have you accomplished this year?” Perhaps you draw a blank. You may start to beat up on yourself or feel like your life is wasted. You may believe you are useless, or you feel like a failure. Most people occasionally feel this way – even people who seem busy and successful.

Maybe you believe achievement is the key to happiness. But achievement is never ending, because once you reach one goal, there is another one ahead. Some people actually become “addicted” to the cycle of achievement. But instead of recognizing this as a flawed system, you may become frozen, passive, and feel like life is passing you by. Perhaps others’ opinions contribute to your negative feelings about yourself. You may feel like a failure because you:

- have mistaken a flawed goal-obsessed system for a flaw in yourself.
- you are not meeting the expectations you set for yourself.
- do not believe you can create a good life.
- believe more in what others think than what you believe.
- constantly compare yourself to others.
- believe others accomplish more in life.
- believe you are less competent than others in your field.
- think you are unintelligent.
- spend a lot of time scrolling through social media.
- were rejected by someone.
- tried something new – and it did not work out.
- are stuck in negative thinking loops (rumination).

So, how can you stop feeling like a failure?

1. Change your perspective. You may be trapped in others’ perspectives and miss the fact that their points of view are unrealistic.

2. See life as a process, not a result. Focusing on results may not lead to satisfaction, so one way to shift your perspective is to enjoy the process. If you do not enjoy the process, you may want to revisit your goals! Be honest about what you enjoy and form your life choices around that. Explore activities that make you feel alive, clear-headed, and connected.

3. Minimize comparisons and “compare down.” Social media can make it hard to feel good about yourself when all you see is everyone else’s accomplishments. Yet you will rarely see others’ struggles or setbacks. When you notice yourself making comparisons, bring your awareness back to your successes. If you do compare, look at your past self to see how far you have come. Avoid judging others while you check in with how far you have come. This can boost your mood and confidence.

4. Remain present. The only place you have real power is in the here and now. Practice mindfulness, which is proven to increase self-esteem.

5. Seek support. Feeling like a failure may include guilt and shame, so you may hide what you are going through with others. Talking to loved ones might not be helpful. A good coach or counselor will have no judgment about what you are going through.

6. Challenge your thoughts. First, recognize that thoughts are not facts. Evaluate your thoughts to assess whether they are true. Challenge thoughts that are untrue, evaluate what “thinking trap” you are falling into, and evaluate the evidence. This will gradually break down the belief you are a failure. You might keep a thought diary to help you see what situations make you feel like a failure and plan how you will challenge the thought with proof of your success.

7. Notice the positive. When uncomfortable feelings arise, focus on what is good in your life and practice gratitude. Reflect on areas of your life where you are doing well and feeling fulfilled. Forcing yourself to only see the good in challenging times can be a form of toxic positivity, so balance time spent appreciating all the good in your life.

8. Engage in self-compassion. Avoid shutting down your feelings or shaming yourself. Holding a negative perception of yourself can lead to feeling defeated. Self-compassion is essential to turning the story around. Recite a script in your head when you feel like a failure. You might say, “I’m struggling with feeling like I’m a failure and that’s okay. I’m human, things have been hard, and I’m allowed to be unhappy sometimes. I’m working on it.”

9. Reframe your understanding of failure. Understand and accept that everyone experiences failure. What matters is how you learn from your experiences, how you bounce back, and if you choose to try again. Failure is something that happens, not a reflection of who you are as a person.

10. Risk failure. Failure is not the opposite of success – it is part of success. Gradually expose yourself to situations where you can succeed. Imagine what you would do if you knew you could not fail.

What to Do

Why do you think you feel like a failure? Be specific.

What would it feel like to live life regardless of what others think?

If suddenly everyone you believe has a bad opinion of you vanished, how would you feel?

If all those people thought you were amazing, how would you feel?

Would you feel pressured if everyone had high expectations of you? Explain.

What does blaming feeling like a failure on others offer you? Be honest.

Do you feel sorry for yourself and disempowered? Why? Explain.

What are your beliefs around failure? About success?

What valuable traits do you have, like being organized or reliable?

Write down times you have persevered in the face of obstacles. Keep this success list handy when you are feeling like a failure.

Next, every time you feel like a failure or believe you are useless, choose one of the above ten exercises. Record your experiences in the following chart. Note the date, describe what preceded your feelings, and write down how you felt. Describe what you did (choosing one of the ten activities, above), and write down the outcome.

Date	What happened?	How did you feel?	What did you do?	Outcome

Reflections on This Exercise

What did you learn from this exercise that you did not know before?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What can you do differently to make progress in this area?
