



Fear of Failure: The fear that stops you from thriving

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Although we are born with only two fears – the fear of falling and the fear of loud noises, somehow, by the time we are adults, we have managed to accumulate a lot more fears. And while fears are meant to keep us alive, many of our fears stop us from living our best lives and achieving our potential. One of those fears which is not usually beneficial, is the fear of failure. Failure is a concept and so different people will have different definitions of what it means. A lot of people, though, fear this concept of failing because they fear looking stupid, they crave the approval and support of others, and they doubt their own capabilities.

Although fear of failure is not classified as a mental disease it does actually have a name – atychiphobia. And while it may not help you in your attempts to live a great life and achieve your full potential, it can also harm you. It especially becomes a problem when it is persistent and extends over a variety of tasks.

Signs and Symptoms

Let's have a look at some of the signs and symptoms that you may have a fear of failure. Do any of these apply to you?

1. An unrealistic feeling that you need to master a task the first time you do it.
2. Feeling you are unable to achieve your goals in life that you aspire to and which are realistic for most people.
3. Believing that you cannot learn new skills or knowledge to do a new task.
4. Reluctance to try new things.
5. Feeling stuck and literally not taking any action.
6. Telling people you will fail if you try something they ask you to do.
7. Worrying that you will disappoint others if you don't do a task correctly.
8. Worrying that you will look like a fool or other people will think of you as a fool if you make a mistake or don't do something perfectly.

9. Self-sabotage when trying something new that you want to do.
10. Procrastination for fear you will mess up the task.

Like most things about human beings the causes of fear of failure can be extensive. Some of the more common reasons given are:

- Growing up in a highly critical or unsupportive home environment.
- Never being able to live up to the expectations of family.
- Perfectionism – when someone has exceptionally high standards.
- Trauma and being afraid to try something because it looks similar to something that was traumatic. An example of this might be being ridiculed for something you did or failed to do.
- Never being allowed to try new things and challenges. i.e. everyone does everything for you.
- Sense of shame and worthlessness

Now while you may not be able to change some of the causes, you can certainly do something to overcome the fear of failure. Some methods you can use are the following:

Overcoming the fear of failure

- Change your thinking. Reframe your thoughts to understand that everyone fails. Failure has nothing to do with your worth and value. You can only be successful after you have repeatedly failed.
- Stop the inner critic and turn it into the inner coach. Also, realise that criticism is not an indication of your worth and value as a human being.
- Sometimes anti-anxiety meds or meds for depression can help, however they are best used to help you find the courage to do the tasks you are afraid to try.
- Stop trying to please other people. Don't let them run your life. Do things because you want to do them, not because other people might laugh if you do them and fail.
- Realise that making mistakes is okay. We all make mistakes and that is how we learn.
- Adopt a beginner's mindset – which means approach the task with curiosity rather than fear.
- Remind yourself of the cost of not trying. You can miss out on some great experiences.
- Deliberately take some risks. You can start with smaller actions first.
- Try new things often.
- Remember the times when failure did eventually lead to success. And what that success has brought you.
- Work on your self-esteem, anxiety, and any depression.

- Observe the behaviour of people who are good at dealing with failure and implement actions they do that would work for you.
- Stop thinking about the worst thing that could happen and think about the best thing that could happen.

A lot of fear of failure is to do with approval from family, friends, colleagues, or society, which we feel we need. We don't need the approval of others, and we won't get it all the time. We need our own approval, and we need to be true to ourselves. Anyway, most of the time people are so concerned with what is going on in their own lives, they don't pay much attention to ours. Everyone fails. It is normal to fail. There is no one who has not failed, and the people who have achieved the most in life have failed the most as well. Mistakes, setbacks, and hurdles are a reality of life. Instead of fearing them consider them to be one more step towards success. Reframe how you understand failure. If you are failing, then you are trying something new and that is a step towards ultimate success.