

References

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ATYCHIPHOBIA

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Fear of failure, also called atychiphobia, is a constant, overwhelming feeling of dread that accompanies the undertaking of projects or pursuit of life goals. People who live with atychiphobia often feel absolutely certain they will fail, even if that feeling is not based in reality. This sense of insecurity can interfere with their thoughts, emotions, and actions.

When kept in check, a healthy fear of failure can be positive and lead us to better plan, focus, and prepare. But when a fear of failure grows out of control it can become paralyzing and isolating.

Atychiphobia Definition Fear of failure, or atychiphobia, involves the belief that you are not or will not be “good enough,” and that you’ll disappoint yourself or other people in your life. It is far more than being afraid to do poorly on a task, and instead is an all-encompassing reaction to the notion that you won’t measure up. Fear of failure involves extreme worry, negative thoughts, and a hesitation or unwillingness to work toward a task or goal.

The unpleasant feelings associated with the fear of failure exist on a spectrum ranging from mild to severe. When mild, anxiety such as the fear of failure can be motivating, providing positive stress and encouraging people to persist and achieve

their goals. When severe, atychiphobia can interfere in life and stop people in their tracks, rendering them unable to take action toward a goal, and potentially lead to other forms of anxiety, like a fear of work. It's closely connected with procrastination and perfectionism, other sets of beliefs and actions that can prevent people from moving forward. Fear of failure and perfectionism are often associated and similar to some extent. Both concepts involve underlying issues related to low self-esteem and sensitivity to criticism. A perfectionist has a persistent personality trait in which they place high standards and are overly critical of themselves and others. Perfectionists can experience fear of failure and become fixated on proving to themselves and others that they are flawless.

Identifying the Fear of Failure Signs of atychiphobia include procrastination, worry, hopelessness, and even physical symptoms like fatigue or headaches. A little bit of worry about the outcome of a project or what people might think is perfectly normal, but becomes a problem when it keeps you from working toward a goal.

Here are several signs that you're experiencing an intense fear of failure:

- A sense of hopelessness about the future
- Chronic (versus occasional or limited) worry
- Concerns about what others will think of you if you fail or don't do well
- Frequent procrastination
- High distractibility, being pulled off task by irrelevant or unimportant things
- Avoiding tasks or people associated with a project or general goal
- Physical symptoms (fatigue, headaches, digestive troubles, joint or muscle pain) that prevent working toward a goal

Causes of Atychiphobia Fear of failure can develop at any time in life, but like other phobias, it follows a pattern of contributors that include biological and environmental conditions, like experiencing a traumatic event or having parents who put pressure on you to be a high achiever.

Five of the most common causes of fear of failure include:

1. **Patterns Learned From Parents** Parents have tremendous influence over their children in terms of fear of failure. Children whose parents are overprotective or place a very high value on accomplishments and success could increase the odds of their child developing a fear of failure.

2. **Traumatic Life Experiences & High Stress** High stress and traumatic experiences are linked to a variety of mental health conditions, and fear of failure is no different. Physical, sexual, or emotional abuse or emotional neglect are all possible causes of atychiphobia.

3. **Genetic & Biological Issues** Parents can affect a fear phobia through their actions and communications, but they can also influence the condition through their biological makeup and genes, as anxiety has a genetic component. When a parent or other close relative has a phobia, the child will be much more likely to have the same anxiety.

4. **Perfectionism** Someone with an intense and unmanaged need for perfectionism could see a fear of failure develop as a related outcome. If people are so set on presenting themselves as perfect, any failure will be unacceptable and greatly feared.

5. **How You Define “Failure”** Failure can mean different things to different people. Some people have incredibly high standards for themselves, and when they don't feel that those standards are perfectly met they feel inadequate. Others are so afraid of making mistakes that this works against them, leading them to the very result they were dreading. Ultimately, these cognitive distortions can limit a person's ability to look beyond and deprive them of learning, growing, and prospering.

The Impacts & Consequences of Atychiphobia The fear of failure can lead to missed opportunities and problems in daily life. It can affect someone's outlook, creating an approach to tasks that involves extreme caution in order to prevent loss instead of a success orientation with actions designed to meet a goal. Extreme fear of failure can affect mental health, relationships, and overall quality of life.

How to Overcome Fear of Failure If you are dealing with the fear of failure, these tips could help:

1. *Recognize & Own Your Fears* Understanding and pinpointing why you are afraid of failing and how failing might truly affect you helps you face your fears. This insight is also useful to identify precisely how the fear of failure is impacting your behavior. For example, are you overstriving or working frantically—not to achieve success but simply to avoid the consequences you think might happen if you fail? Or, are you engaging in self-protective behaviors such as procrastination or avoidance to give yourself a reason to explain away failure? Once you've identified stressful or self-sabotaging behaviors, you can change your actions to make success more likely.

2. *Redefine What Failure Actually Is* An important part of overcoming fear of failure is developing a new perspective about the idea of failure. Instead of seeing failure as an absolute, life-destroying disaster, develop a new relationship with it.

Shift your thinking so that you begin to see failure as:

- Feedback—a chance to learn and grow
- A lesson, because reflecting on past failures to find their benefits can help you be more open to failure as a teacher now
- A surmountable challenge that provides an opportunity to move forward rather than a road block stopping you in your path
- A fleeting or impermanent situation, not a permanent end to your path

3. *Redefine Success* Sometimes people spend so much energy and time trying not to fail that they forget to succeed. Think about what you really desire and decide if your fear of failing is standing in the way of true achievement.

4. *Boost Your Self Esteem* While you are developing a new perspective about failure and its role in your life, also shift your thoughts about yourself. Boosting your belief in

yourself and your abilities is a key part of overcoming fear of failure. Rather than ruminating about your perceived shortcomings, focus instead on your inherent strengths and talents you bring to your work or school.

5. *Think About the Worst-Case Scenario & Have a Contingency Plan* If you tend to catastrophize, don't let this feed into your fear and anxiety—instead, use it to your advantage. Think about all the different ways things can go wrong. For each possible “disaster” plan on how you'd cope if it were to come true. Make two columns on a piece of paper, one for the worst-case scenario and another for your contingency plan. Covering all your bases will make you feel more self-assured and less nervous. You may come to realize that your worst fear may not likely happen but if it does at least you'll be prepared.

6. *Give Yourself Permission to Fail* While at first giving yourself permission to fail may feel terrifying, it can be liberating. Ask yourself, what would be the worst possible outcome of failure? Would you survive? Quite likely, you'll discover that, while perhaps unpleasant, you would survive your imagined worst-case-scenario and continue to move forward.

7. *Plan to Fail* Thinking about failing is one thing, while committing to failure is something completely different. Find a situation or scenario where you can control the outcome and dedicate yourself to failing. It could be a school test or just a game night with friends. One of the best ways to cope with failure is to actively expose yourself to it.

8. *Focus on What You Can Control* When you are faced with a challenge, look at the big picture and focus on what you can control. Take a moment to evaluate yourself and the entirety of the situation, paying attention to things where you have some say while letting go of those that are beyond your grasp. Then direct all your efforts on those things. This can range from taking steps toward a specific action to simply managing how you feel about the situation, or making a decision to confront it. You'll notice feeling more empowered and less fearful about the outcome.

9. *Break Your Project Into Smaller Tasks* Sometimes, dread of failing looms large when tasks or goals are overwhelming. Breaking down daunting projects into

manageable chunks can help you feel more in-control. It can also help to reflect on aspects of success that are within your control so you can make effective choices and actions to set yourself up for achievement.

10. *Change What's Not Working* List your typical work habits and approaches to tasks. Then, be honest with yourself in evaluating what works well for you and what gets in your way. Choose to do more of what works and replace what doesn't work for you with different actions. This reflection and decision-making process will help you feel in control of your tasks and yourself, something that can be motivating and empowering.

11. *Stay as Focused as You Can to Block Out Negative Thoughts* It's difficult to concentrate on what you are doing right now, in your present moment, when your mind is whirring with negative self-talk about what is already over or what might or might not happen in the future. Focusing on the task at hand in any given moment helps you keep abreast of your current actions rather than ruminating over thoughts and feelings about imagined consequences and perceived shortcomings.

12. *Utilize Positive Mantras* Cultivating an optimistic outlook with positive mantras can improve how you see yourself and diminish your fear of failing. These mantras can help to shape your mind so you can get closer to your desired outcome. You can either engage in a mantra meditation or simply recite a self-affirming statement anytime you feel spiraling into self-defeating thoughts. Saying things like, "I believe in myself," "I can do this," "I am enough," or anything else that resonates with you can shift your perspective and build your self-confidence.

13. *Establish a Calm Body & Mind* Phobias are anxiety disorders, which means they feed off of resting levels of stress, worry, and tension. To combat this, actively practice relaxation techniques and find calm. Deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, guided imagery, and meditation are all wonderful ways to decrease stress. At the same time, place more emphasis on your diet, sleep, and exercise to get your body in its best state.

Reference

1. <https://www.healthline.com/health/atychiphobia>