

A New Kind of Resolution: Befriending Failure

Well-Being Tips



If you are anything like most people, you might find yourself cringing on January 1 recalling last year's New Year's resolutions that didn't go quite as planned ([Gracia, 2024](#)). That goal to read 20 books this year? Maybe you only read five (and a half). That resolution to start learning another language in 2024? Maybe it took a backseat to all of life's other demands. One way to view these unrealized resolutions is as failures; another way to view them is as opportunities for learning and growth. Failure can be our friend if we allow it to be. The problem with succeeding is that we tend to keep on doing the same thing, because it is working. In contrast, failure encourages us to think creatively so that we can adapt and change up the way we do things ([Barber, 2021](#)).

So, how do we make the most of our failures in 2025, and maybe even befriend them?

- **Be kind to yourself!** Punishing yourself with unkind words and self-criticism is not very motivating and might cause you to avoid striving toward meaningful goals in the future. **Tip:** Consider what you might be able to say or do for yourself in the moments following a failure that would be encouraging or helpful? If this is challenging, consider what you would say or do for a loved one in the same situation, then you can offer that same kindness to yourself. People sometimes fear that being kind to themselves will result in becoming "soft" or lazy. In fact, research has shown that self-compassion intrinsically motivates people to work toward their goals and is connected to having more of a growth mindset ([Neff, 2023](#)).

- **Normalize it.** For some people, it can feel like they are the only person in the world to have failed so miserably or struggled so hard. This could not be further from the truth. Everyone experiences setbacks and painful periods of life. Our failures and struggles are a large part of what makes us human. Accepting our failures as a natural part of life that everybody experiences can help to reduce feelings of shame and increase our sense of connectedness to one another. **Tip:** Seek out stories about the spectacular failures of people you respect and admire! Notice any commonalities in your shared experience and allow for setbacks to be a source of connection to humanity.
- **Separate yourself from what happened.** Be careful not to overidentify with setbacks. It can be easy after a failure to fall into thinking traps that cause you to overidentify with what happened. These unhelpful thoughts might sound like “I’m a failure” or “I always mess things up.” **Tip:** If you catch yourself thinking these unhelpful thoughts, it might be helpful to remember that setbacks are something we experience, not who we are.
- **Look for the gifts and lessons.** The benefit we derive from failure is limited to the extent to which when we pause long enough to pay attention to what we may be able to learn from the experience ([Winkler et al., 2024](#)). Setbacks can spark creative ideas for approaching problems in the future, build resilience, and increase self-awareness. **Tip:** It can be helpful to reflect on the lessons and gifts offered by failure. You might consider taking some time to write down the gifts or lessons a recent setback offered to you.

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