

## **Dealing with Setbacks**

Experiencing setbacks can make you question your self-worth, your goals, and your future. The fear of “failing” may limit your behavior, leaving you nervous to face your responsibilities and the people who count on you. The truth is that anyone who has encountered success has also had to recover from their fair share of setbacks.

Here are some steps that may help you to recover from a setback:

1. **Reframe the “failure”:** Instead of a “failure,” call it a life-learning experience. Much of our lives follow a routine, and sometimes it takes a setback to make us see that some of our habits are not productive.
2. **De-catastrophize:** A negative experience is not always as terrible as it feels. Check your perception with that of others around you. Do they believe that a catastrophe has occurred? If we allow the feeling of failure to guide us, we will avoid risks and never attempt to achieve difficult goals. As painful as it may be to suffer a setback, recognize that you can go on.
3. **Accept responsibility:** Carefully examine the events that led up to this experience. Decide which ones you could have altered, and which ones were beyond your control. You are responsible for the choices you make, and you can resolve to make better choices in the future. Next time, what will you do differently?
4. **Acquire knowledge:** Your life-learning experience has let you know that you need to change direction—but in which direction should you go? What is it that you need to do differently? Use the pain as an impetus to study the experience and gain new skills. If your setback was academic, the Study Skills tools could help you to gain the skills you need. If the setback was interpersonal, look over the Communication Skills and Emotional Control sections of the Tool Shop.
5. **Persevere:** When Thomas Edison was working on developing the lightbulb, he is said to have failed more than 1,500 times. Of course, he persevered. He reframed his failures by saying that he had discovered over 1,500 substances that do not work in lightbulbs. Often, learning from your setbacks means changing your behaviors in ways that will lead to success, but not giving up on your goals.
6. **Join forces:** Talking with others about your experience can be very helpful. Others may be able to see the behaviors that led to the “failure” more clearly than you can. They may see your strengths more clearly as well. Even better, if you know someone who has also recently experienced a setback, you may be able to support each other.

7. **Set Goals:** In order to change your direction and/or habits so that you can be more successful in the future, it is helpful to set goals. Read the article “Identifying and Setting Goals.”
8. **Build Self-confidence:** Experiences of “failure” tear down some of our self-confidence. To repair the damage, consider the suggestions presented in “Building My Self-confidence.”

While a setback can seem devastating, it can also serve as an opportunity. It is our “failures” that make us interesting people and help us to acquire wisdom. Our setbacks teach us to see life more clearly and cope more effectively with the problems life sends our way.