



PUBLIC HEALTH &  
HUMAN SERVICES

# TAKING CARE OF OURSELVES



Topic of the Month

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# How To Get Good At Failing (and why you should)

Failure is simply the opportunity  
to begin again,



this time more intelligently.

- Henry Ford

**M**ost of us try to avoid failure at all costs. We fear being seen as incompetent. We dread that sick feeling of letting someone down. We hide our failures by shoving them to the back of our hearts and minds, trying to never think of them, and certainly never talking about them.

What would happen if we shifted our individual and collective opinion of failure and began to see it as something to be explored, encouraged, and even celebrated?

## Failure as Cage, Failure as Teacher

We can sort failures into two types. First, there are "procedural failures," in which we fail because we lack information, or we fail because we don't have the skills needed to apply information correctly. Secondly, there are what's called "big-picture" failures. This when we become caged in our comfort zone; we fail because we're spending all our energy trying not to fail.

**We are guaranteed to experience failures.  
We forget that it's up to us to choose which type.**

If we choose to use failure as a teacher, then we have to search for opportunities where failure is a real possibility. If there's no chance that we'll fail, there is zero chance that we'll grow. Once we've acquired more information or skills (i.e. once we've messed up and figured out why), we must step up and risk failing again. Entrepreneurs refer to this as "failing fast." What didn't work? Change it. Now, what still didn't work? Change that. Repeat. Grow.

This is part of having a growth mindset. When we opt for this outlook, we ask ourselves, "What am I wrong about?" and "What questions haven't I asked?" We choose to engage with people and perspectives that we disagree with. We go looking for the unexpected. We surround ourselves with people that will tell us when they think we're wrong. The new information generated by these questions and experiences then get plugged back into the "failure as teacher" process, and we begin to work again.

A willingness to quickly start over isn't the only aspect of learning to fail well. In fact, it's possible to get comfortable with things not working out. We can simply continue to flounder, making change after change, without ever really learning anything from those changes. In order to get really good at failing, we also have to fail mindfully. We need to widen our focus to include the impacts of our failure, both on ourselves and others.

So...we've "failed fast" and we've "failed mindfully." The next step for a successful screw-up is to then "fail forward." Our failures don't have to be kept secret. We can be generous enough and bold enough to allow others to learn from them. When we share the stories of our failures and what we've gained from them, it erases the myth of anyone's perfection. It creates a safe place where, together, we can learn, grow, and learn again.

**While not all failures have a happy ending, most happy endings have a failure story.**

- Jean Case

**TAKING CARE OF OURSELVES CAN TAKE A LOT OF SUPPORT. WE'RE HERE TO HELP!  
ASK A NURSE OR PROVIDER IF YOU'D LIKE TO TALK.**

# After The Fail: How To Apologize (and if you should )



**Sometimes our failures are limited in scope, and we're the only person affected.** Sometimes, though, our failures cause pain for other people. When that happens, a strong apology can help rebuild trust, while a weak one can add another layer of hurt.

## Why would I apologize?

The first question to ask is, "What am I hoping to achieve?" The primary goals of a good apology are to ease the pain that we've caused someone else, to request that person's forgiveness, and, if all goes well, to try to heal the damage that's been done and lessen our own feelings of remorse. If the primary motive is to get ourselves out of trouble, it will never be a good apology.

## How to tell if you should apologize or not.

Some people apologize frequently for almost any behavior, whether it has caused harm or not. Reflexive apologizing doesn't strengthen relationships and can diminish our own self-worth. For more ideas of what to say instead of an automatic "I'm sorry," visit <https://nbcnews.to/2PhwjD>

Other people rarely apologize, even if their behavior has caused someone significant pain. If we've caused another person to feel ignored, betrayed, frightened, or humiliated, it's time for an apology. If we've broken someone's trust, been unfair, or belittled who they are or what they believe, it's time for an apology.

## How do I apologize effectively?

There are 7 components of a true apology:

- *A clear statement of regret.*  
"I'm sorry that ..."
- *An acknowledgment of specific, concrete behavior.*  
"I took your camera without asking and dropped it."
- *An acknowledgment that the behavior was wrong.*  
"I was in a hurry, but that's no reason to ignore your right to be in charge of your own belongings."
- *An expression of empathy and a real understanding of how our behavior impacted the other person.*  
"I can imagine that makes you feel betrayed and causes you to wonder if you can trust me to ask first or to be careful with your things."
- *A request for forgiveness.*  
"I hope that you can forgive me, and, that one day, you can trust me again."
- *An outline of what we'll do to help ensure those behaviors don't happen again.*  
"From now on, I'll always ask for permission before I use anything of yours."
- *An example of steps we could take to try to repair any harms our behaviors have caused.*  
"I'll happily pay to have your camera fixed."

## It's not a real apology if:

- It contains the word "but" or another form of excuse.
- It doesn't take real responsibility for specific actions.
- It's defensive or transfers blame.
- Its main point is regret either over being caught or of no longer being liked, instead of guilt about harm inflicted.

**...the apology is a show of strength.** It is an act of honesty, because we admit we did wrong; an act of generosity, because it restores the self-concept of those we offended. It offers hope for a renewed relationship and, who knows, possibly even a strengthened one. The apology is an act of commitment because it consigns us to working at the relationship and at our self-development. Finally, the apology is an act of courage because it subjects us to the emotional distress of shame and the risk of humiliation, rejection, and retaliation at the hands of the person we offended.

**All dimensions of the apology require strength of character, including the conviction that, while we expose vulnerable parts of ourselves, we are still good people."**

- Aaron Lazare