

Moving Beyond Helplessness: Strategies for Empowerment and Growth

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Helplessness is a feeling of powerlessness or lack of control over a situation or outcome. It can be a frustrating and debilitating experience that leaves you feeling trapped and unable to progress. Fortunately, you can reduce feelings of helplessness and regain a sense of agency. In this post, we'll explore a variety of behavioral objectives that can help you overcome feelings of helplessness and move forward in your life.

Identify Your Triggers

The first step to reducing helplessness is to identify what triggers these feelings in the first place. Triggers could be anything from a particular person or situation to a specific thought or belief. When you know what triggers a sense of helplessness, you can approach things in a problem-solving model and develop strategies to manage them more effectively. For example, if being around a particular person leads to feeling helpless, you may need to set boundaries or limit your exposure to them.

Build Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is a crucial component of reducing helplessness. When you can identify your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, you can better understand the source of your helplessness and look to eliminate or manage it.

Practice Mindfulness

Embracing mindfulness offers a profound and invaluable resource to cultivate self-awareness. This transformative practice empowers

individuals by reducing feelings of helplessness and alleviating stress. Mindfulness invites us to immerse ourselves in the present moment, embracing it without judgment or attachment. By consistently engaging in mindfulness, we awaken to our triggers, enabling us to develop healthier coping mechanisms and embark on a journey towards holistic well-being. Through the practice of mindfulness, we embark on a path of self-discovery and empowerment, paving the way for greater self-awareness and resilience.

Reframe Your Thinking

Helplessness often stems from negative or limiting beliefs and thoughts about ourselves or our circumstances. When you can reframe your thinking and focus on more positive and empowering beliefs, you build yourself up for more effective action. Replace counter-therapeutic self-talk with affirming thoughts like, "I can learn to do this." By focusing on solutions and growth rather than limitations, you can empower yourself to take action and overcome obstacles. By identifying and challenging negative thoughts, you can replace them with more positive, realistic ones. Positive self-talk, and focus on your strengths reduces the power of negative thinking and sense of helplessness.

Set Realistic Goals

Setting realistic goals can help you feel more in control of your life and reduce feelings of helplessness. When setting goals, it's important to be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART). Start by identifying an outcome you want to achieve, then break it into smaller, bite-sized pieces. If you are trying to problem solve with a loved one, use the [Fair Fight Rules](#), which is about collaboratively identifying the problem, identifying potential solutions, and making a plan, then enacting it. Celebrate your progress along the way. If you are not making the progress you had hoped for, adjust your goals or timelines as needed. Don't give up. Setting realistic goals reduces feelings of helplessness, and taking action on those goals replaces helplessness with empowerment.

Take Action

Taking some action reduces stress and negative feelings about the self. Waiting for the right moment or for conditions to be perfect is self-sabotage. The reality is that there will never be an ideal time to take action. Making small daily gains toward your goals on a daily basis will get you there. Even if you need help with what to do, taking any action is better than doing nothing. As you take action, you'll build momentum and gain confidence in your ability to effect change.

Practice Self-Care

When we care for our physical, emotional, and mental health, we become better equipped to deal with stress and overcome obstacles, reducing helplessness. Self-care intertwines with other efforts to minimize helplessness and increase your sense of well-being. Some examples of self-care activities include exercise, healthy eating, getting enough sleep, spending time with loved ones, practicing relaxation techniques like yoga, meditation, and hobbies or activities that bring you joy. Self-care can be anything you do for yourself that you enjoy and that helps you feel refreshed and rejuvenated. Get some physical exercise.

Practice Self-Compassion

While practicing self-care, throw in some attention to self-compassion. It is simply treating yourself with kindness and understanding, even in difficult circumstances. Practicing self-compassion allows you to recognize that everyone experiences setbacks and failures and that making mistakes allows us to learn and grow. Try to extend to yourself some of the same compassion you extend to others.

Embrace Imperfection

If you have a hard time allowing self-compassion, perfectionism may be one of the impediments. Setting unrealistic standards for yourself, you may feel like you can never measure up, leading to feelings of defeat and helplessness. Instead, try embracing imperfection and focusing on progress rather than perfection; you can celebrate the small successes along the way and maintain the perspective that every step you take is in a process heading in the right direction.

Cultivate Gratitude

Cultivating gratitude is a powerful tool for maintaining your perspective of progress along the way and shifting your focus from negative frames of reference that hold you back. Regularly practicing gratitude can help you develop a more positive outlook and increase your resilience in the face of obstacles.

Seek Support

Seeking support from others can be a powerful tool in reducing helplessness. Having a support system, a friend, a counselor, a workout group, or simply someone to talk to and lean on can help you feel less alone and more empowered. Reducing feelings of helplessness may require professional help to overcome obstacles and achieve your goals.

Set Boundaries

When working toward self-growth goals, you may find that other significant people do not support your goals. Setting and maintaining boundaries can be critical in moving from helplessness to empowerment. Relationships in which you feel powerless reinforces a position of feeling stuck and helpless. Rather than cutting off the relationship, boundaries can help you protect your needs, values, and priorities and prevent others from sabotaging your efforts or making you feel trapped.

Reducing feelings of helplessness is a complex process that requires a multifaceted approach that takes time and effort. By identifying your

triggers, building self-awareness, reframing your thinking, setting realistic goals, taking action, practicing self-care, and seeking support, you can reduce feelings of helplessness and move forward with confidence and empowerment. It's okay to ask for help, to make mistakes, and to have compassion for yourself as a human being. By persisting through the challenging times, you can achieve your goals and live the life you deserve.



**Building Self-Esteem: A Workbook
By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.**

Embrace the power of self-reflection and growth as you think about and write on each prompt or question on the carefully crafted slides. Let "Building Self-Esteem: A Workbook" be your roadmap for self-empowerment, enhanced happiness, and self-worth. This workbook offers practical tools that align seamlessly with the strategies outlined in Dr. Peggy L. Ferguson's article. Begin your transformative journey today and witness the positive changes that unfold when you change how you think and feel about yourself.

\$9.95