

# Overcoming Self-Sabotaging Behaviors

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From time to time, my eighth grade science teacher would end the class with a lecture about the importance of doing homework, studying, being organized and share other helpful hints. He would conclude by saying, “you are your own worst enemy.” It took me several years into my adulthood to understand what he meant. He meant that we can sabotage our own success, or to use another term, we can “self-sabotage.”

Self-sabotage refers to our behavior that harms us and is self-destructive. While this behavior is typically overt, the motive behind the behavior is most often unconscious. Ultimately, this behavior leads us further away from our goals and desires. The areas of relationships, health, finances, education and career are most vulnerable to self-sabotage.

The following are *some* examples of self-sabotaging behavior:

- Procrastination
- Frequent tardiness
- Irresponsibility
- Inability to finish what is started
- Inability to control anger
- Impulsivity
- Addictive behavior
- Ignoring health
- Crisis-driven life
- Seeking out or staying in an abusive relationship
- Putting yourself down
- Overly concerned about what others think of you
- Making decisions to please others

While we are all capable of self-sabotage, individuals with the following history are more vulnerable to self-defeating behavior:

- children of alcoholics
- victims of child abuse
- victims of sex crimes
- victims of trauma
- scapegoats or “black sheep” of the family
- overly sensitive individuals

A reasonable question to ask is: why would someone sabotage their own success? The answer to this varies from person to person. The underlying cause may be self-loathing; anger directed at oneself; low self-esteem; depression; or acting out the family’s assigned role of scapegoat.

It is possible to work through the tendency of self-defeating behavior. Half the battle is already won when individuals become aware of their self-destructive behavior. The following is an outline of a plan to work through self-sabotaging behavior:

- Become aware of negative thoughts of yourself. Unchecked negative thinking is usually the start of self-defeating behavior.
- Be honest with yourself. Often times there is secondary gain to self-defeating behavior such as when the class clown receives negative attention. The gain is the attention the individual receives although it is negative.
- Be willing to give up the secondary gain for a more positive gain. This may take some time because it will *feel* different.
- Ask a trusted friend or relative to help by gently giving you feedback when you are engaging in self-sabotaging behavior.
- Become aware of your individual behavior patterns and consider the list of examples of self-sabotaging behavior mentioned above.
- Take responsibility for your actions and stop blaming others. You are in the perfect position to be the instrument of change in your life.
- Give yourself permission to move out of the victim role.
- Give yourself permission to stop suffering. Haven't you suffered long enough?
- Give yourself permission to succeed as well as fail. Fear of success is closely related to fear of failure.

If you continue to struggle, seek out a qualified therapist to come alongside you and help you to change, and give yourself permission to overcome self-sabotaging behavior.

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