

WHAT IT IS

Students often become caught up in the idea that if they can't do something perfectly, then they have failed at the task. This challenge is often described as having a low frustration tolerance or students who may be lacking persistence or resiliency on a task. Another aspect of how students approach failure is related to their past experiences, which may include challenges experienced as someone who is neurodivergent, has experienced trauma, or had negative experiences based on gender, sexual orientation, race, or ethnicity. Our task becomes finding ways to inspire hope and encourage students to overcome the obstacles on their path to success.

The term "narrative therapy" was used by Australian family therapists Michael White and David Epston in their book *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends* to define the way we all use stories to relate to our experiences. They suggest that people organize and give meaning to their experiences through the stories they tell. Individuals construct the meaning of life through stories and then treat these stories as the "truth." Those helping students should seek to elicit stories related to their past experiences to better understand their points of view. Narrative therapy helps students see their stories from a different perspective. The story doesn't change, but how they think about it is shifted.

WHO TO USE IT WITH

Students who have experienced negative social interactions, barriers to accessing services, or a lack of opportunity for growth and success. This approach works well with students who feel no matter how hard they try, they aren't living up to the expectations of those around them. They often feel disheartened and even hopeless about how they will be able to move forward in their studies or careers.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. What are some examples where it feels like no matter how hard you try, you end up back in the same place?
2. What are some stories of success and failure in your life? How have these stories changed over time as you've gained perspective (e.g., have there been stories in which you first saw the experience as a failure but then, over time, began to see how the story could be seen with a different perspective?)

TEACHING INSIGHTS

- Help your students understand failure as an essential part of their journey. Too often, we see failure as a sign of weakness, rather than a lesson we can learn from. Share examples from your life or stories from others where failure was simply a delayed success.
- Part of being successful is being connected to those in your life who can support your positive choices, not negative ones. This goes hand in hand with assessing where your energy is going and prioritizing tasks that allow you to build from prior successes. Help the student redirect their energy.
- A great video to share with students is called life=risk. They can google it on YouTube and watch some examples of famous people who were able to overcome setbacks.
- Expect failure as part of the process. When we strive for perfection, we end up falling short. Learning from past mistakes and adopting an approach to success that allows for hiccups and speedbumps along the way is critical to our overall success.