

5 Ways to Overcome The Wall of Awful



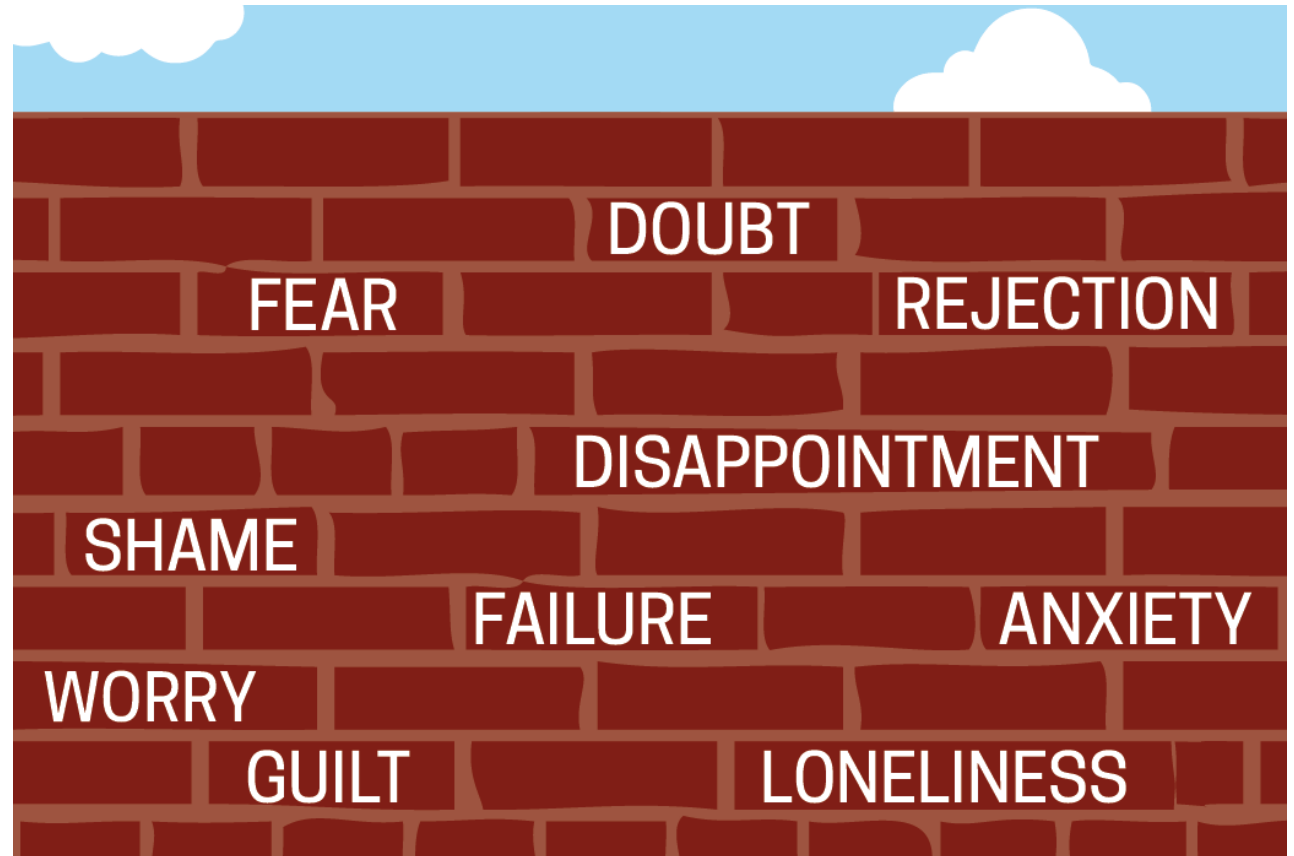
What is The Wall of Awful?

The Wall of Awful is the emotional barrier that grows out of repeated failure, preventing us from taking risks and initiating tasks.

Everyone has a Wall of Awful, but because those with ADHD fail more often than others, usually in the same or similar ways, their walls tend to be larger. This has a profound impact on their emotional well-being. And it is this impact, these Walls of Awful, that must be overcome in order for someone to take a risk or initiate a task related to their repeated failures.

Each time we fail, we experience negative emotions. More bricks are added our Wall of Awful.

Failure breeds negative emotions — guilt over the failure, feelings of disappointment, even rejection, from yourself and others as a result of the failure. These smaller emotions become stronger feelings of shame, fear about initiating new tasks, worry about one's ability, even loneliness if you are repeatedly rejected due to your mistakes.



How Do We Overcome The Wall?



There are five ways people deal with their Walls. Two don't work. One works but isn't healthy, and two more work just fine.

The two ways that don't work are staring at the Wall, and trying to go around it. Staring at the Wall sets us up for being overwhelmed by the emotions it represents; causing us to freeze and accomplish nothing. Going around leads to avoidance. We end up binge watching shows on Netflix rather than doing what needs to be done.





The unhealthy method of getting past the Wall is to "Hulk Smash" your way through it; tapping into all those negative emotions and turning them into anger. An example of this is the kid who battles over doing her homework before finally yelling, "FINE! I'LL DO MY MATH!!!" Another example is the person who turns that rage inward, criticizing themselves. "Why am I so bad at cleaning the house? Why can't I just do it? I'm thirty years old! WHY AM I SO BAD AT ADULTING!?!?" These subconscious strategies get us past the Wall, but they damage relationships. Both with others and with ourselves.

The two ways that work, are climbing the Wall of Awful, and putting a door in it. Which brings us to "Five Ways to Overcome the Wall of Awful".



Five Ways to Overcome the Wall of Awful



1. AWARENESS, ACCEPTANCE, ACTION

Climbing the Wall of Awful involves being aware of the emotions that are holding you back, accepting them, and then taking action to manage them. This action can take many forms — talking to friends, counseling, even practicing self-compassion. We're often much harder on ourselves than we are on others. Try treating yourself like you would a friend.



2. Mindfulness Meditation

Another highly effective tool for climbing the Wall of Awful is developing a mindfulness meditation practice. I use the word practice intentionally because practice is hard. Many people think that meditation involves a blissful, ethereal state or the mind going blank. Nothing could be further from the truth. Meditation is not supposed to be easy.



Meditation involves controlling one's thoughts. Focusing on a given stimulus, often the breath, and then refocusing on it when the mind wanders. Because your mind WILL wander. And that's okay. It is the act of refocusing the mind that gives meditation its power, because in doing so you are controlling both thought and emotion. Done regularly, this practice can strengthen your ability to focus your mind and regulate your emotions.

3. Music

Putting in a door, is another way to overcome The Wall of Awful. Doing so involves changing your emotional state.

Music is a great tool for this. We've all seen the movie montages where the hero is training with some energetic song playing over the top. Often we find ourselves excited to go do something afterward — run, lift weights, fight crime, play football. It's the music that got us going. And those songs are a great way to shift our emotions into a more productive state. Don't believe me? Listen to the Rocky IV soundtrack and see if you don't want to hit the gym.

4. Change Your Environment

Another way to put a metaphorical door in your Wall of Awful is to walk out your actual front door. There's a reason people write in coffee shops. At home, there are kids and spouses, unmade beds, dishes in the sink, video game systems, clutter and neighbors. We're surrounded by our responsibilities, struggles, failures, distractions and concerns. That's why The Wall of Awful is often strongest at home. Changing our environment can lessen its impact. whether you're writing in a coffee shop or having a difficult conversation at a restaurant.

5. Reframe Failure

Reframing failure is a way to climb your Wall and put a door in it at the same time because it changes how we perceive the Wall. The next time you fail, challenge that perspective.



Does the failure present new opportunities?

Are you stronger for it?

Can you learn from it?

Is it really a failure? (A vs. B+)



Reframing failure is a very effective way to reclaim your self-esteem and self-worth. We all have that Wall of Awful charged voice in our head that tells us how much we stink. Challenge it. Be the witness for the defense in the face of that prosecuting voice.

Often, we criticize ourselves without looking at the evidence. I had a client who told me he was always losing his keys. As we talked more, I began to doubt it because he couldn't remember the last time he had misplaced them. So, I had him record the times he lost his keys over the course of a month. He only misplaced them once, and for less than three minutes. But his Wall made the event so emotionally charged that it felt like a bigger deal than it was. Faced with this new evidence, he had to reframe the experience.

In Conclusion

The Wall is insidious. It can sap our motivation, cause us to lash out at loved ones, and make us assess ourselves inaccurately. But if we are mindful, and take the time to become aware of how and when it affects us, we can overcome the challenges it presents. And then we can ride past "The Wall of Awful" on "The Wave of Awesome".



About the Author



Brendan Mahan, M.Ed., M.S. is a nationally known ADHD/Executive Function trainer and consultant, as well as a veteran educator. A highly engaging speaker, he addresses the emotional, academic and lifestyle impacts the disorder has on the people who suffer from it, as well as those who love them.

Brendan is in the process of writing a book on "The Wall of Awful". Check out ADHDessentials.com for updates.

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