

AAO's new initiative: The Mental Wellness Task Force.

We all face the challenge of overcoming setbacks. It seems to me that one's ability to bounce back from these setbacks can be an indication of one's resiliency. Mental health challenges can magnify the toll a setback takes on an individual's resiliency and their ability to bounce back. In my opinion, the balance of orthodontic practice and personal life often depends on how you prioritize self-care and well-being. AAO has a recently formed a Mental Wellness Task Force to investigate resources that we can make available to members so that, in the face of adversity, you and I can be better prepared to "pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and start all over again.

Soon, I look forward to reporting back to you about the resources that the AAO Mental Wellness Task Force has assembled to help you reduce the friction of everyday life.

At this time, I wish to share an article from 2021 by Christopher Hinds that, although unrelated to the AAO, I believe gives some insight into how learning how to the interfere with your own downward thought spirals will help you become more resilient in a variety of situations, both personally and professionally. (<https://taylorcounselinggroup.com/blog/pick-yourself-up-dust-yourself-off/>)

Pick Yourself Up, Dust Yourself Off

"Nothing's impossible I have found, for when my chin is on the ground, I pick myself up, dust myself off, and start all over again." (Pick Yourself Up by Dorothy Fields/Music by Jerome Kern)

On the path to a **greater understanding of yourself**, or even just an improved outlook, you may be tempted to beat yourself up whenever life throws a curveball your way. A moment, a day or even a week occur that make you feel like you have messed it all up. It can sometimes feel like you have to press the reset button on all of your progress, and that nothing you accomplished before those difficult moments counts anymore.

Perhaps you've fallen back into old, destructive habits or thought processes. Or, maybe the depression you've been battling has kept you down all week. Now you think you are back to square one.

I know I have struggled with this concept. I felt that if my plans for self-improvement weren't just perfect, that either I wasn't doing it right or I was just a failure. I was living in a black and white world where there wasn't room for progress, only "perfection." Then one day, I was introduced to a couple of concepts that actually made me pause and reflect on how I was approaching my life.

Pick Yourself Up

When coming face to face with adversities that made me feel like a failure, I was told that I couldn't push the river, it was simply going to flow as it needed to.

Pushing the river is trying to force something to happen instead of just letting go and moving with the flow. Everyone struggles and experiences failure from time to time — from the invincible super mom who seems to have it all together to the barista who serves you coffee with a smile. Struggles are a simple truth of life. The difference lies in how you approach them.

Will you let a few challenges beat you back like a raging river? Or, will you understand that a certain amount of turmoil is a natural part of life, and go with the flow? One moment or even a season of struggle doesn't determine your entire future. Slow and steady growth, moving one step at a time, is all you need for today.

Dust Yourself Off

Something else I was told is that if I did find my “chin on the ground,” to be a gentle cop. It's okay to acknowledge that you've experienced something difficult and perhaps didn't make the best decision in the moment. You don't have to beat yourself up so badly that you can't even get back up again. You can love yourself, understand that you're human, and just dust yourself off and continue down your path.

Even if your inner critic is right — that you've faltered or failed for a moment — you don't have to listen helplessly as it rips you to shreds. Not everything it says is helpful, even if there is some truth mingled with the lies. We are all imperfect, and we have all failed. That doesn't mean you have to receive a beating.

Dusting yourself off means taking control of your thoughts and breaking the cycle of letting your critic define who you are. Even if you don't know how to quiet it, taking action and doing something can be powerfully effective, including:

- Tackling your to-do list.
- Exercise.
- Playing music.
- Getting out of the house.
- Talking with a friend or loved one.

Start Over in a Healthy Way

As I adopted these thought patterns and practiced them, I found I did indeed become more gentle with myself, and over time I actually stopped perceiving myself to be on the ground so much. Each challenge just felt like life, and I was walking down my path with a greater feeling of Self-love and Self-acceptance.

Each one of us is a messy, imperfect person. Some have physical limitations or mental health issues to contend with. Others are encountering obstacles that feel too big to overcome. Everyone has quirks, baggage from the past and down days. We are all works in progress. Embracing your limitations and imperfections doesn't mean complacency. Instead, it means going with the river of life.

While some things you can work on and overcome, other challenges are out of your control. Making peace with this can go a long way in helping you move forward.

If you find yourself in a moment with your "chin on the ground," perhaps you can practice pausing. Remember, you can't push that river of Life. Gently remind yourself that it's okay. You've still accomplished so much, and you are experiencing your journey exactly the right way for you. You don't even have to start all over again — you simply pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and keep moving forward.

Have you've encountered a setback, and you're struggling to move on? Or, do you find yourself regularly battling your inner critic? You are not alone. Sharing your feelings and talking things through is one of the best ways to pick yourself, dust yourself off and start all over again.