



# Rising from failure

**Directorate: Counselling and  
Career Development**  
October 2025

**Define tomorrow.**

**UNISA**






Unganikezeli ithuba  
lisekho. Ungaxhalabi  
akukonakali nto,  
inkxaso  
engumangaliso  
ikulindile, ithuba  
lesibini lisekho.



- In 2020, I failed three modules and felt discouraged. It was my first big academic setback, and with lockdown, I felt isolated, unmotivated and often avoided my work out of fear of failing again.
- But slowly, I reached out for support through counselling, Unisa resources and drew strength from my family and friends.
- Repeating those modules and passing them showed me failure does not define me but builds resilience and determination.



~~I'm a failure~~  
I'm learning

# Some factors contributing to academic failure



Lack of learning interest

Procrastination

External stressors,  
e.g.: finance,  
trauma, lack of  
support

Lack of motivation

Fear of failure

Study habits

Time-management

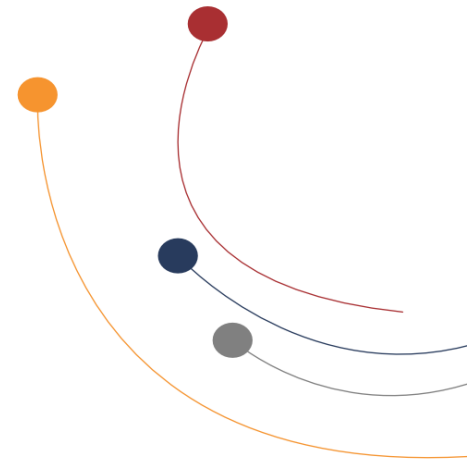
Health

Difficulty  
understanding the  
subject

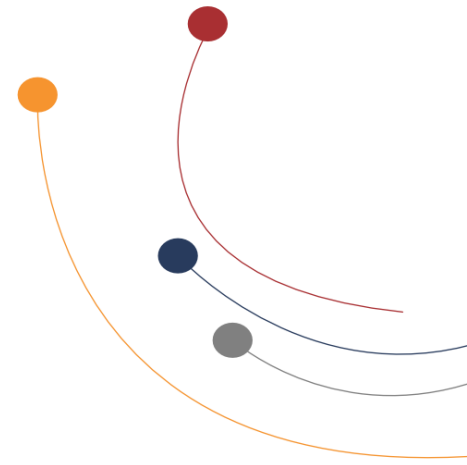


# Mindset

- Academia is full of people who feel like imposters. The widespread feeling of not being good enough fueled by hiding experiences of failure for fear of being found out (Ibarra, 2004, p. 56)
- It's usually more straightforward to learn from your successes than failure.
- Example: Imagine receiving your assignment script back. If you aced this assignment, you could reasonably deduce that you made good study choices, time management etc. and repeat those decisions for the following assignment. But if you failed, it could be for various reasons. This could make it difficult to learn how to improve.
- Wanting to learn from our failures is completely natural.
- There is also a lot to gain by practicing resilience and cultivating a growth mindset.
- Fixating on your failures can make it easy for you to forget all your successes.

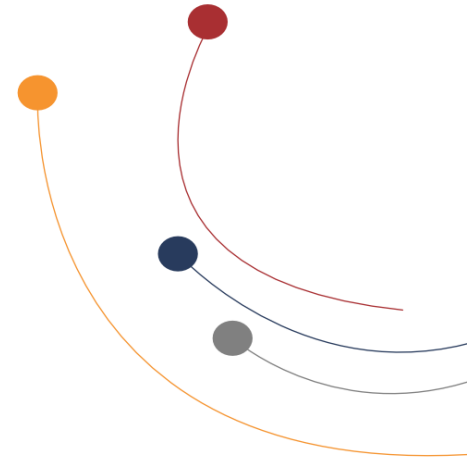


# Fixed and growth mindset



Fixed mindset	Growth mindset
Avoid challenges	View challenges as opportunities
Refuse to receive feedback	Embrace constructive feedback
Focus on proving yourself	Focus on the process not the results
Feel threatened by others	Be inspired by others success
Cant accept failures or mistakes	Learn and grow from failures

# Fixed and growth mindset

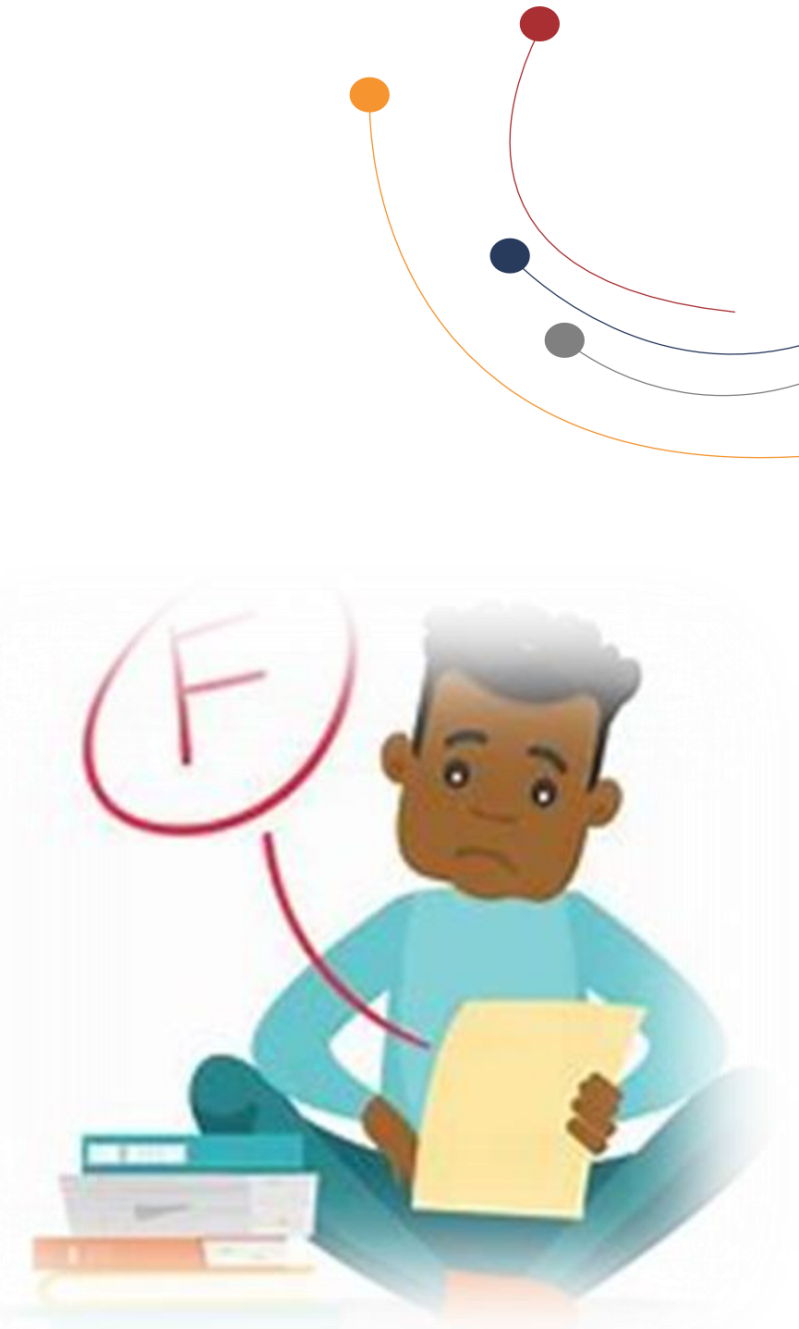


Fixed	Growth
Why is this happening to me?	What is this trying to teach me?
I always fail, I will never get this.	I am not where I would like to be, yet.
I will never get this right.	What am I missing, so that I can improve?
I will never be enough.	Where do these feelings come from?

# Dealing with Failure

**Many of us experience feelings of failure, but rarely talk about them.**

- We feel this way when we are alone or even with others, often finding it hard to make sense of what we are feeling.
- These feelings and emotions associated with non-success rarely show up by themselves. They show as gangs/groupies .EG: feelings of self-doubt, disappointment, anger etc
- According to Neff, Heish & Dejitterat (2005), when individuals do attempt to repress or deny their negative emotions, the strategy inevitably backfires. Holding negative emotions in compassionate awareness is a more adaptive way of dealing with failure, so that no one does not become inadvertently fixated on thoughts of inadequacy and self-doubt.

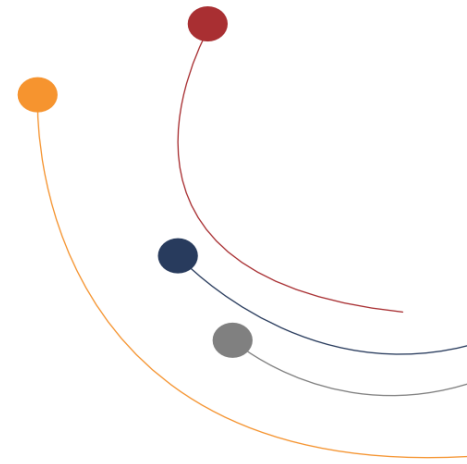




# Dealing with Failure

## Failure is a normal part of life

- Failure is inevitable and can be good, feeling like a failure is neither.
- Admitting our failures is important, the same way that negative results are submitted in science. In the absence of this, everyone ends up with a distorted view of reality and only the pretence of progress is made.



# Sharing experience of non-success

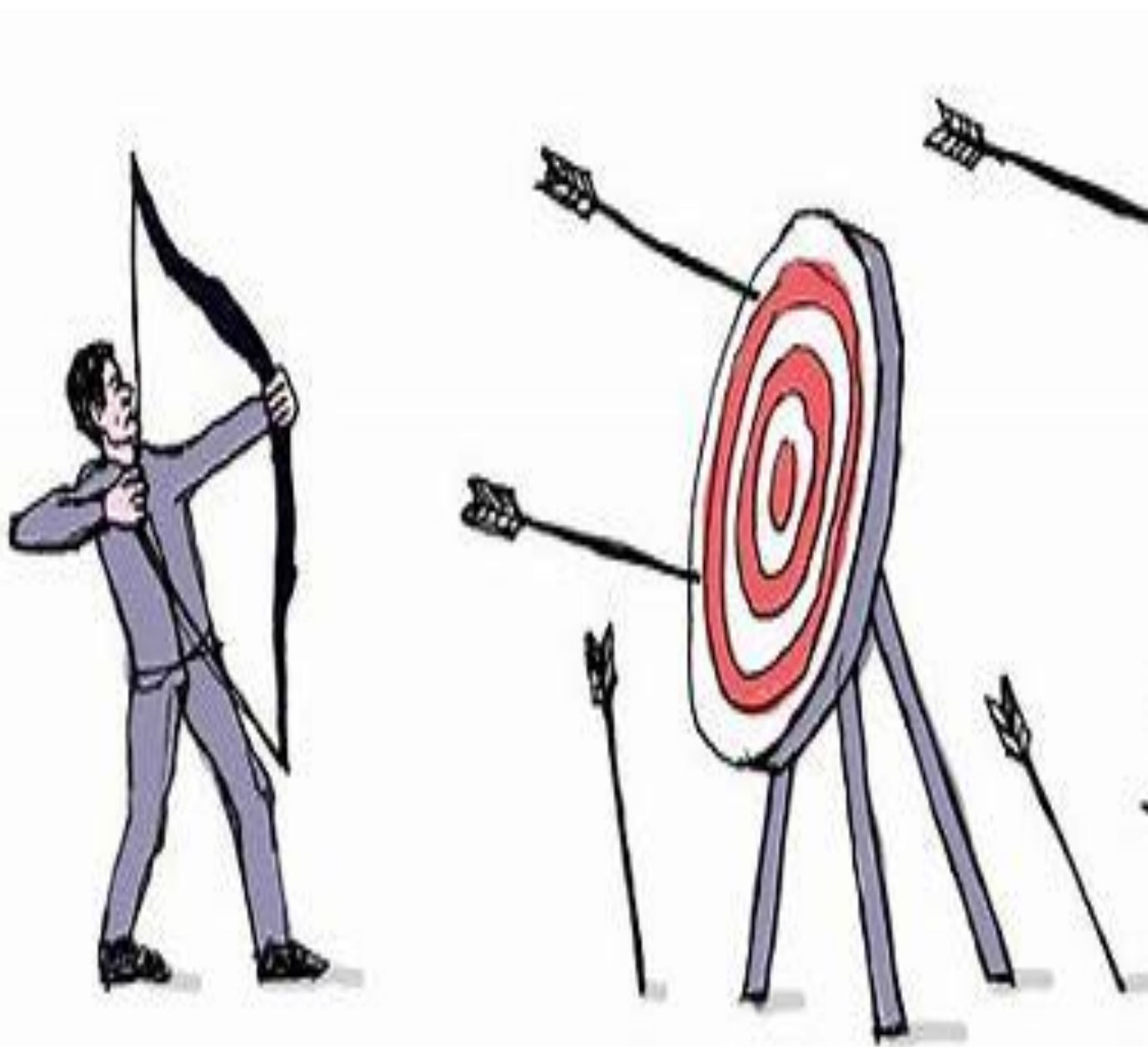
- Failure does not have to be a secret, talking about failure will not make you fail
- Find a mentor or be a mentor. Both could teach you a lot.
- Take up all opportunities for personal development, DCCD offers these.
- Know yourself, and don't be afraid to change what you know. Do your current coping strategies do more harm than good?



# Sharing experience of non-success

- Rather than shying away from them, look your experiences and feelings of failure right in the eye and say to them: “I will thrive despite you”.
- If you have no energy and feel constantly overwhelmed, seek professional help from student counsellors.
- Rule nothing out. You are more than what you have already done.







## Connect

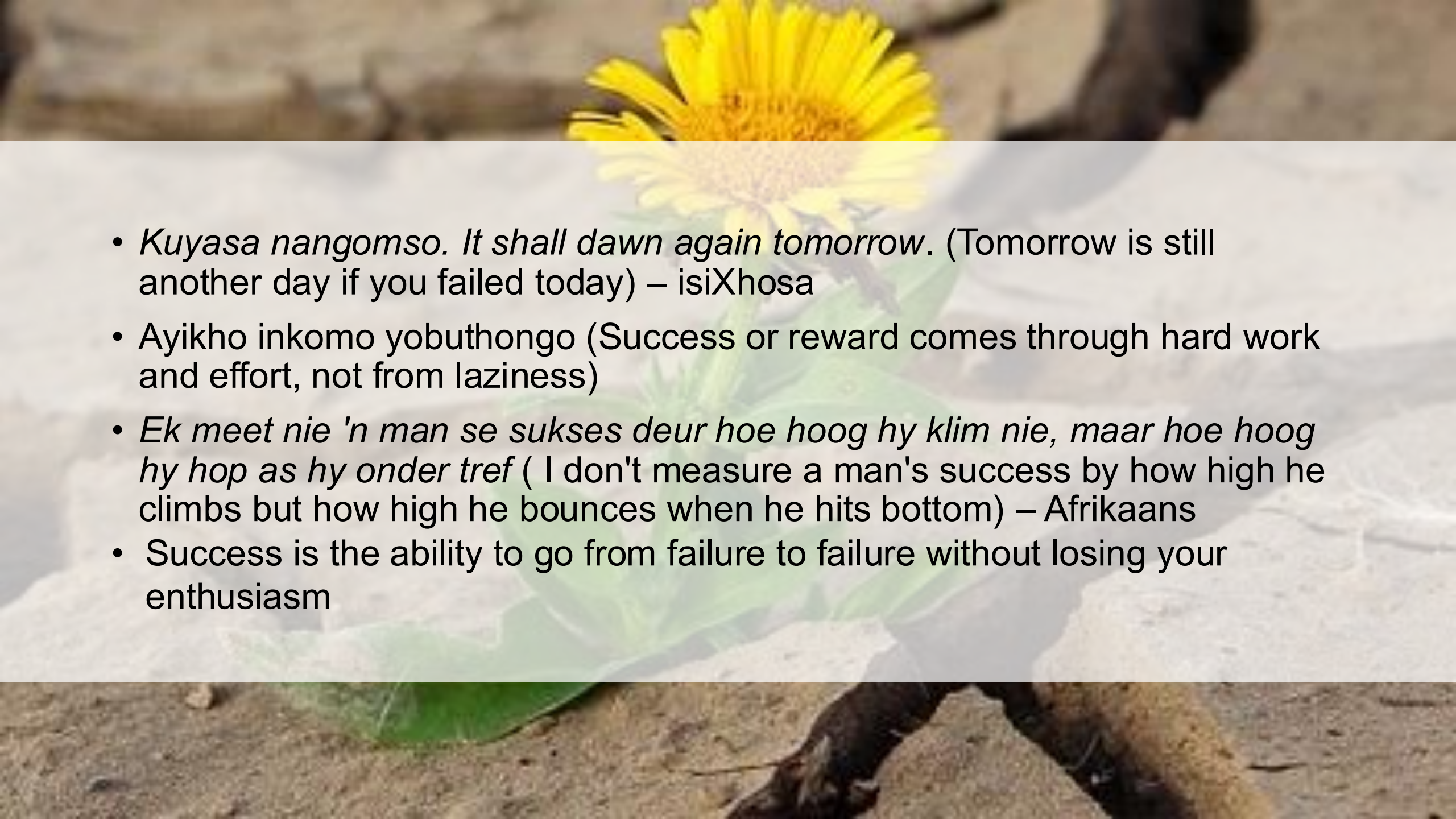
Connect to a higher purpose: Find your “why,” what contributing are you aiming to make in that career field, and consistently remind yourself of it. This cultivate hope.

## Surround

Surround yourself with gritty people: It’s only a matter of time before you’re just as gritty yourself (Duckworth, A cited from Edblad P.,(2017).

## Practice

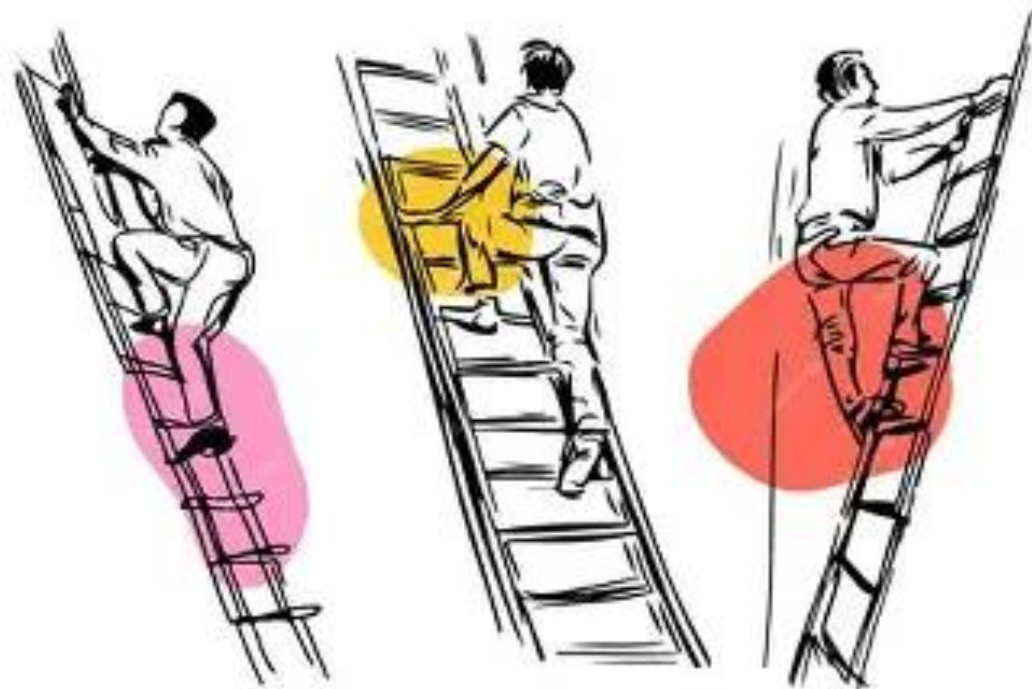
Practice, practice, practice: Talent alone is not enough. Use deliberate practice to improve every day.

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- *Kuyasa nangomso. It shall dawn again tomorrow.* (Tomorrow is still another day if you failed today) – isiXhosa
  - *Ayikho inkomo yobuthongo* (Success or reward comes through hard work and effort, not from laziness)
  - *Ek meet nie 'n man se sukses deur hoe hoog hy klim nie, maar hoe hoog hy hop as hy onder tref* ( I don't measure a man's success by how high he climbs but how high he bounces when he hits bottom) – Afrikaans
  - Success is the ability to go from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm

# Be kind to yourself

- Who is your best friend, your cheerleader, coach, motivates and believes in you and potential
- Talk to yourself as they would
- In your student groups: when others show successes: praise behaviours such as effort and curiosity, ask them how they did it







# Self-care Exercises: The Butterfly Hug



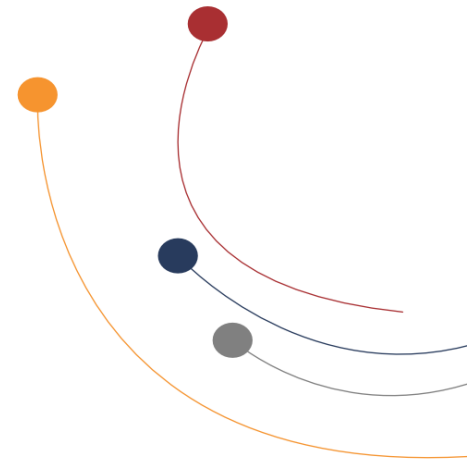
The butterfly hug technique is a form of self-soothing and emotional healing that involves bilateral stimulation. To do the butterfly hug, you need to: Cross your arms across your chest, making sure the tips of your middle fingers are touching right below your collarbones. Tap on your chest with each hand, alternating the rhythm, like the wings of a butterfly. Notice any emotions or distress that may come up and just continue to breathe through it.



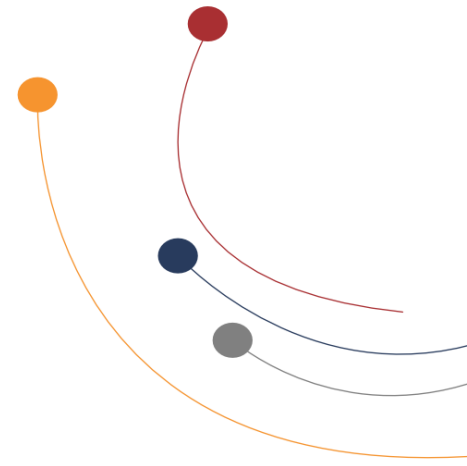
Find a comfortable, quiet location and sit up tall with your back straight.



Close or lower your eyes and start with some deep, purposeful breathing.



# Self-care Exercises: 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique



The 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique is a mindfulness exercise that helps calm the nervous system and reconnects you to the present moment by engaging all five senses.



Name 5 things you can see around you.



Notice 4 things you can feel (such as the texture of an object or the ground beneath your feet).



Listen for 3 sounds in your environment.



Identify 2 things you can smell (or imagine smelling).



Taste 1 thing (or imagine tasting one thing).



# Exercise/ Work-out

## Exercise boosts your immune system –

Mental benefits –  
concentration and memory.

Feel good about self.

**Dance – shake it off .**

Baleka

**Walking – walk and leave  
your worries behind.**





# Ukubhala + nokufunda = kuyaphilisa

- **Diary/ Journal:** Feel free to write about your thoughts, feelings, behaviors/actions, and interactions. Keep it safe/ or password protected.
- Dear God / Dear Dlozi/ Dear Me... lam .....
- **Motivational quotes:** Reflecting on them. Make time to reflect on what you are grateful for. Start by writing (today I'm thankful for). As an example – you may consider writing letter to people who have supported you in your life journey
- **Books ( life-changing ) :**
  - a. Nelson Mandela (The life lessons and rules for success).
  - b. Bonang Mohale (Lift as you rise).
  - c. Rorisang Thandekiso (Walking with God)







People that are always negative.

People that drain your spirit, mind.

People that put you down (bakuthathela phantsi).

## Benefits

Peace.

Protection from harassment.

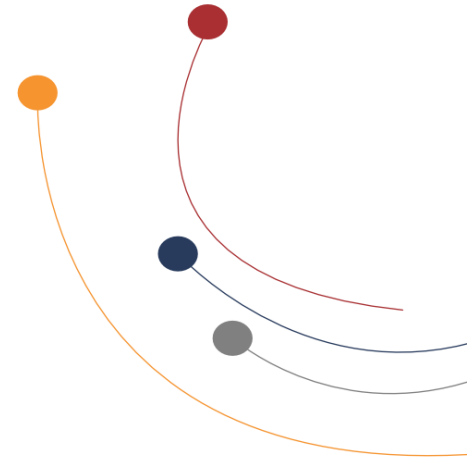
Maintain personal boundaries.

To avoid negativity.

Limit exposure to upsetting content.

Prioritise mental health and self care.

# Nature as therapy



# Art therapy/ colouring in

Creative channels for expression may be encouraged, for nonverbal self-expressions will often spring from unconscious sources and do not get blocked by the rational and critical mind (Hiltunen, 1988).





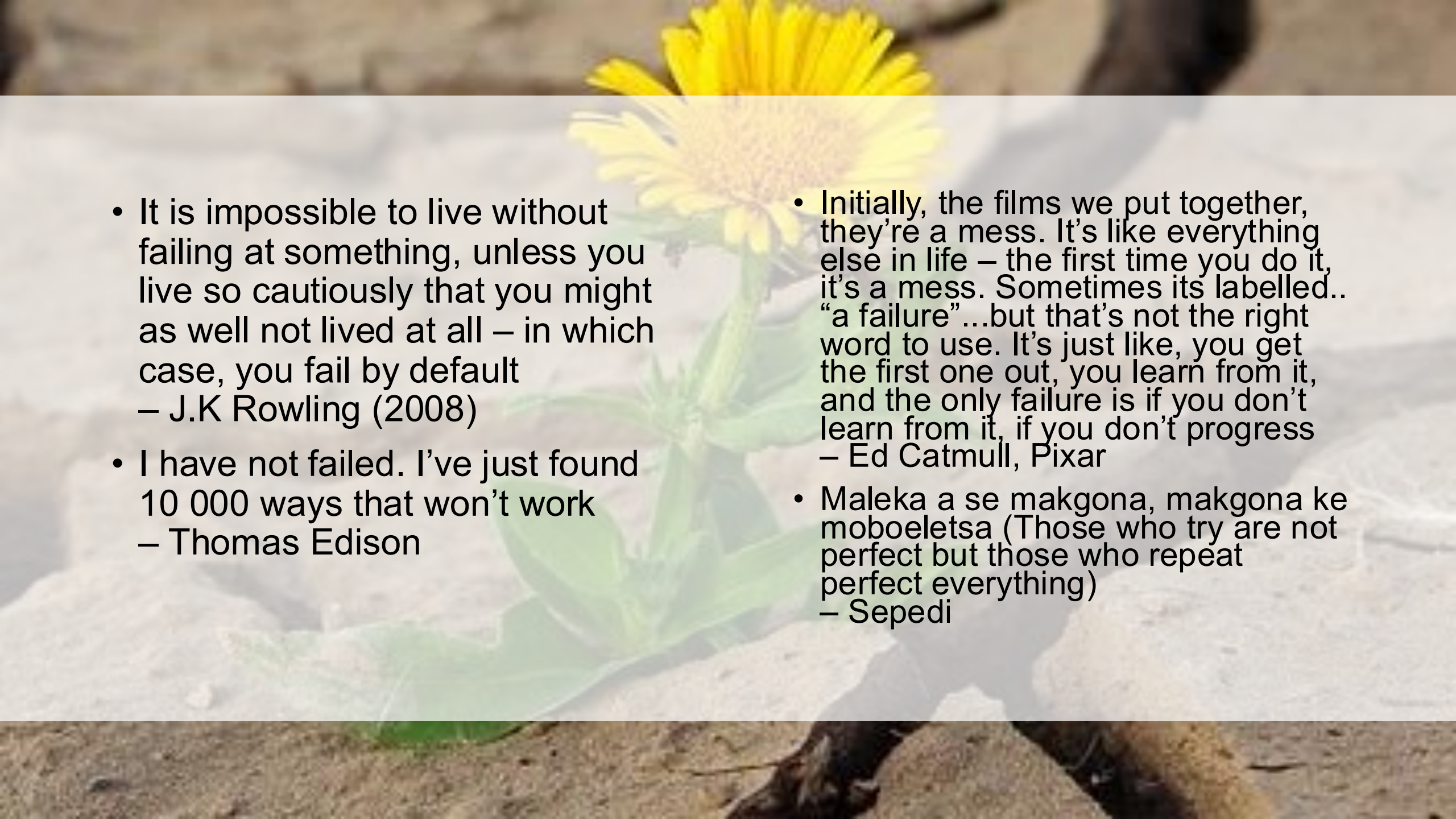
**Spirituality:** Find a scripture, mawube ne intonga yakho, a prayer linked to feelings to give you hope and direction, spiritual connection, a revival, conversations with higher power you believe in (God, Amazizi etc), practicing gratitude.

**Create a routine** of tasks for the day. This gives a sense of purpose( e.g. cleaning, work, cooking, etc )

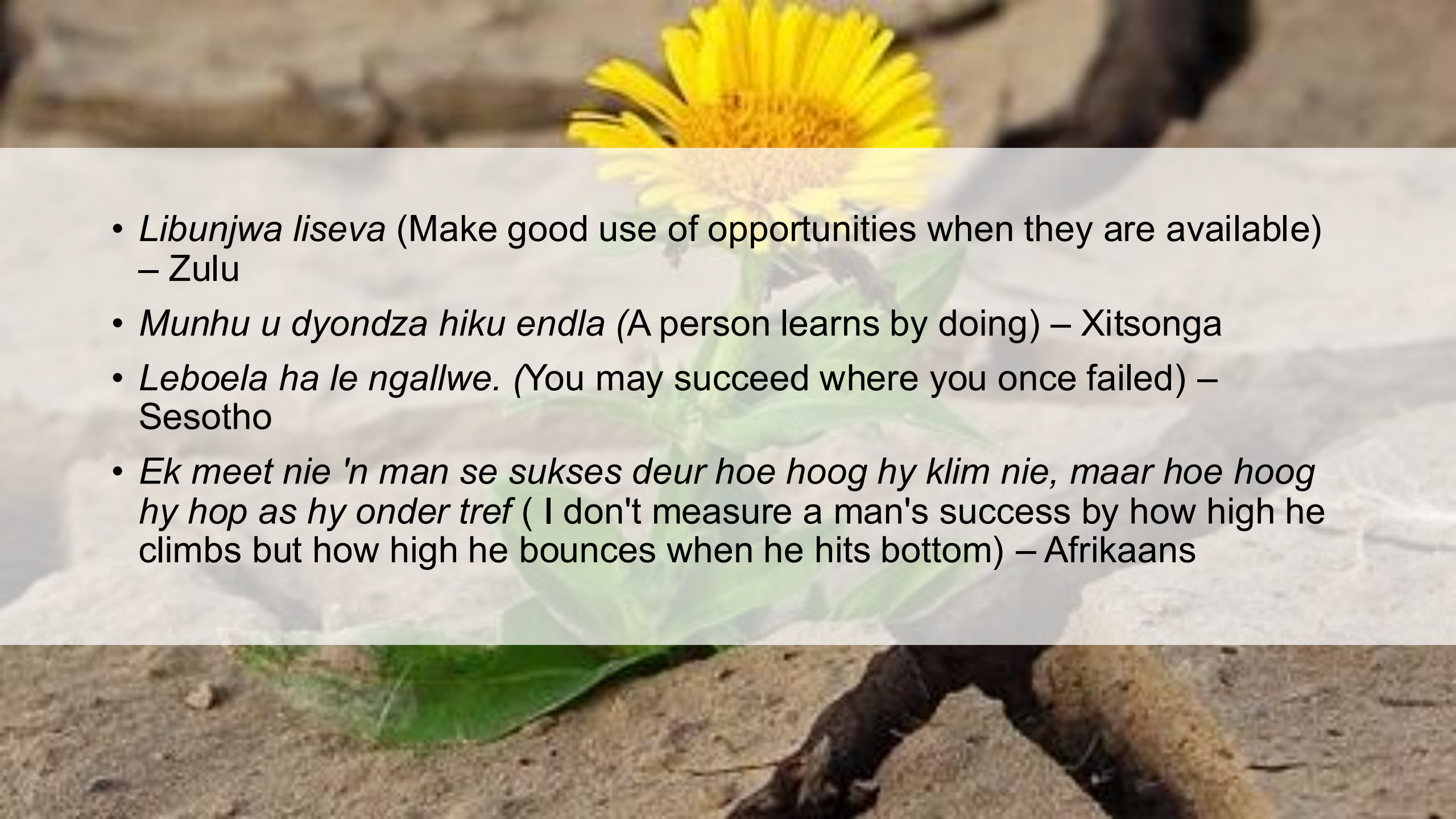
Give yourself a break from social media / **disconnect from technology.**





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- It is impossible to live without failing at something, unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not lived at all – in which case, you fail by default  
– J.K Rowling (2008)
  - I have not failed. I've just found 10 000 ways that won't work  
– Thomas Edison
  - Initially, the films we put together, they're a mess. It's like everything else in life – the first time you do it, it's a mess. Sometimes its labelled.. "a failure" ...but that's not the right word to use. It's just like, you get the first one out, you learn from it, and the only failure is if you don't learn from it, if you don't progress  
– Ed Catmull, Pixar
  - Maleka a se makgona, makgona ke moboetsa (Those who try are not perfect but those who repeat perfect everything)  
– Sepedi



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- *Libunjwa liseva* (Make good use of opportunities when they are available) – Zulu
  - *Munhu u dyondza hiku endla* (A person learns by doing) – Xitsonga
  - *Leboela ha le ngallwe.* (You may succeed where you once failed) – Sesotho
  - *Ek meet nie 'n man se sukses deur hoe hoog hy klim nie, maar hoe hoog hy hop as hy onder tref* ( I don't measure a man's success by how high he climbs but how high he bounces when he hits bottom) – Afrikaans

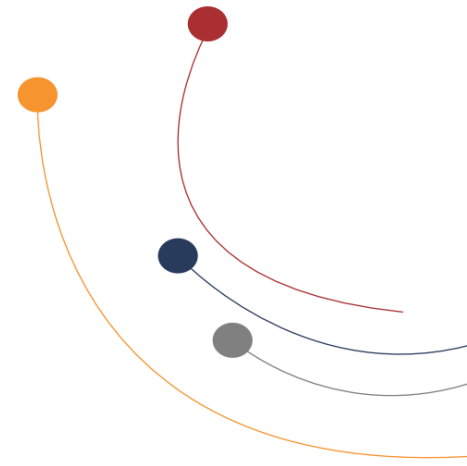
# DCCD Resources

## **Book a counselling session:**

<https://outlook.office365.com/owa/calendar/UnisaCounsellingandCareerDevelopment1@mylife.unisa.ac.za/bookings/>

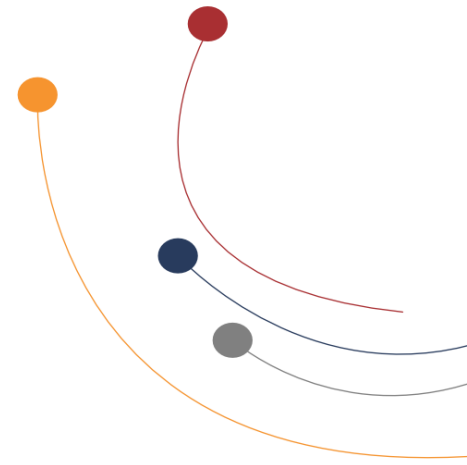
## **YouTube Channel:**

[www.youtube.com/unisacareers](http://www.youtube.com/unisacareers)



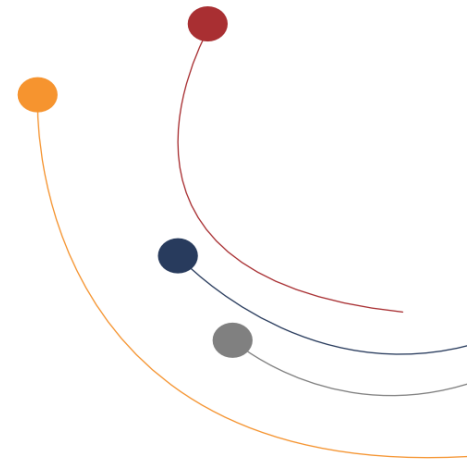
# 24 Hour Toll Free Emergency Helplines

- Suicide Crisis Helpline: 0800 567 567
- Dept of Social Development Substance Abuse Helpline: 0800 12 13 14 or SMS 32312
- Cipla Mental Health Helpline: 0800 456 789 or SMS 31393
- NPOwer SA: 0800 515 515 or SMS 43010
- UFS #Fair Kitchens Chefs Helpline: 0800 006 333
- Dr Reddy's Mental Health Helpline: 0800 21 22 23
- Adcock Ingram Depression and Anxiety Helpline: 0800 70 80 90





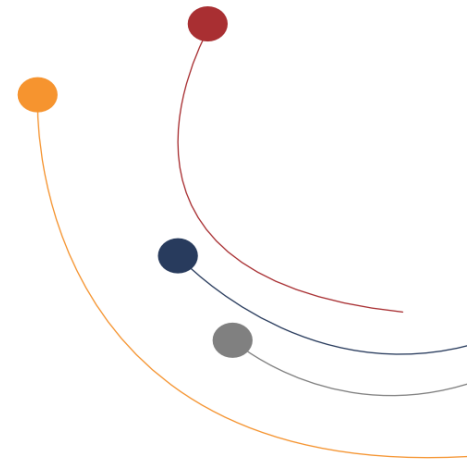
# DCCD Resources



## Manage Your Studies:

- Prepare to study : <https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/myunisa/default/Learner-support-&-regions/Counselling-and-career-development/Manage-your-studies/Prepare-to-study>
- Plan: <https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/myunisa/default/Learner-support-&-regions/Counselling-and-career-development/Manage-your-studies/Plan>
- Time management: <https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/myunisa/default/Learner-support-&-regions/Counselling-and-career-development/Manage-your-studies/Time-management>
- How to Study: <https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/myunisa/default/Learner-support-&-regions/Counselling-and-career-development/Manage-your-studies/How-to-study>
- Manage study challenges: <https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/myunisa/default/Learner-support-&-regions/Counselling-and-career-development/Manage-your-studies/Manage-study-challenges>
- Exams: <https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/myunisa/default/Learner-support-&-regions/Counselling-and-career-development/Manage-your-studies/Exams>

# Contact us



- **E-mail** to [counselling@unisa.ac.za](mailto:counselling@unisa.ac.za)
- **Online appointments** on MSTeams:  
<https://bit.ly/DCCDbook>
- **Contact a counsellor at a regional office** to make an appointment for counselling in person:  
<https://bit.ly/contactdccd>
- **Website:** [www.unisa.ac.za/counselling](http://www.unisa.ac.za/counselling)
- **YouTube channel:** [www.youtube.com/unisacareers](http://www.youtube.com/unisacareers)

# References

- Ibarra, H (2004). *Working identity: Unconventional strategies for reinventing your career*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Neff, K.D., Hsieh, Y.-P., and Dejitterat, K. (2005). *Self-compassion, achievement goals, and coping with academic failure*. *Self and Identity*, 4(3), 263- 287.
- Rowling, J.K (2008). *The fringe benefits of failure and the importance of imagination*.
- The Butterfly Hug Technique: <https://youtu.be/H9Hnisaqlns>
- Tembelihle Nogela, 2024 (TCGP intern), East London