

Affirmations

Through the words you say to yourself, you can be your own worst enemy. You can drive and pressure yourself, stop and inhibit yourself, or confuse and distort the information that comes to you. In contrast, you can learn to talk to yourself in a loving, supportive way, like a good parent, coach or mentor. It's all up to you. By talking to yourself in a new way, you will have a different life."

(Butler, 2008)

Anxiety, depression, other moods, and self-esteem are significantly affected by what we tell ourselves. One effective way to change our moods and our self-perception is by using affirmations.

What are affirmations?

Affirmations are "positive statements designed to combat negative thinking" (Naparstek, 2004, 220).¹ They are positive statements about one's self, including one's actions, attitudes, body, health, or life.

How can affirmations help?

Affirmations have been shown to be helpful to changing moods, including reducing anxiety; improving health and health treatments, for example, chemotherapy in the treatment of cancer; and performance.

How does one create affirmations?

One approach to creating affirmations that will best help you is described by S. Giessmann (1997) in *Conquering Your Cravings: Four Steps to Stopping the Struggle and Winning Your Inner Battle with Food*. Although her approach focuses on how to control cravings for food, her method can be applied more generally.

- Step One: Identify what thoughts you are thinking about yourself and list them.
- Step Two: Change the negative statements to positive ones.
- Step Three: Repeat the positive statements to yourself either silently or out loud several times a day —*even if you do not presently believe them*. Changing our thoughts and attitudes requires repetition—the more habitual negative self-statements have been a part of us, the more we must repeat positive ones.

What qualities should affirmations have?

According to Giessman, affirmations should have 5 qualities:

1. *easily accessible*. Write them on 3x5 cards [or if you have the means to record and listen to the recording, that is a more powerful way of changing your thinking, especially if put the affirmations to music that does not have words and

¹ Belleruth Naparstek has affirmations spoken and recorded to soothing music focusing on several different issues (i.e., Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, general wellness, cancer, insomnia, stress, and weight loss.

- that has a biurnal beat—a binaural beat]. Note: In a small study of 8 individuals who listened to music with a binaural beat for 60 minutes daily, the results for a majority of the patients were decreased anxiety, increased quality of life, decrease of 25% in anxiety prior to surgery, decrease in confusion, and increased attention (Walbeh, Calabrese, & Zwickey, 2007).
2. *positive*. Giessman says that affirmations should not include any negative words like *not*, *don't*, and *never* (25). One of the reasons is that if one thinks, "I don't want to be fat," the image that comes to mind is of that individual being fat. A better affirmation would be "I am thin" [or "I love my body"].
 3. *desirable*, even if they are not true now. For example, if I am 40 pounds overweight, I can still say, "I'm thin" or "I love eating healthy and taking care of my body!" The idea is that the good thoughts about the body will lead to changes in the one's perception and behavior.
 4. *energizing*. Write your affirmations in a way that pleases and energizes you.

Examples of affirmations

Here are examples of a few affirmations created by Belleruth Naparstek for individuals recovering from traumas:

"More and more, I can acknowledge and accept the times I feel anger, loneliness, sorrow, guilt, terror, despair, or shame."

"I am better and better able to be kind and gentle toward myself."

"More and more I can let go of worrying about things I cannot control and focus on my own inner peacefulness."

"I see myself becoming more and more patient, with myself and others."

"I know that I am learning to listen to my body and sense what it needs."

Here are some other examples of affirmations designed to fit specific beliefs one might want to change:

I am becoming more and more patient with myself.

I think creatively and intelligently.

I love learning math.

More and more, I'm learning how to be assertive.

The chemotherapy is attacking (or gathering up, surrounding, etc.) the malignant cells.

I am a good writer.

I am a good pitcher [in baseball or softball].

I enjoy eating healthy foods.

Many CDs or MPIs are available online with affirmations set to music with binaural audio tones, which further increase relaxation. The ULM Counseling Center mentions Belleruth Naparstek's CDs specifically because several of the counselors have used them successfully with clients. A word of caution: not all affirmation CDs and MPIs are equal in quality. Be sure to check the sources carefully before purchasing.

**The best affirmations are those we create for ourselves,
tailored to our own lives and needs and in our own words.**

References

Butler, P., *Talking to Yourself: How Cognitive Behavior Therapy Can Change Your Life*, 2008, retrieved on June 8, 2009, from <http://www.talkingtoyourselfbook.com/>

Giessmann, S. (1997). *Conquering Your Cravings: Four Steps to Stopping the Struggle and Winning Your Inner Battle with Food*, Lincolnwood, IL: NTC Contemporary.

Naparstek, (2004, 220). The following examples are taken verbatim from Belleruth Naparstek's book, *Invisible Heroes: Survivors of Trauma and How They Heal* (2004, p. 221-222)

Walbeh, H., Calabrese, C., & Zwickey, H. (2007.) Binaural beat technology in humans: A pilot study to assess psychologic and physiologic effects. *The Journal of Alternative and Complimentary Medicine*, 13.1, 25.32.

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We are here to help. If you would like additional help creating affirmations or would like to talk about how to be your best self, please call for an appointment.

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