

<http://www.coping.org/growth/guilt.htm>

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## Handling Guilt

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What is guilt?

### *Guilt is:*

- Feeling of responsibility for negative circumstances that have befallen yourself or others.
- Feeling of regret for your real or imagined misdeeds, both past and present.
- Sense of remorse for thoughts, feelings, or [attitudes](#) that were or are negative, uncomplimentary, or non-accepting concerning yourself or others.
- Feeling of obligation for not pleasing, not helping, or not placating another.
- Feeling of bewilderment and lack of balance for not responding to a situation in your typical, stereotype manner.
- Feeling of loss and shame for not having done or said something to someone who is no longer available to you.
- Accepting of responsibility for someone else's misfortune or problem because it bothers you to see that person suffer.
- Motivator to amend all real or perceived wrongs.
- Strong moral sense of right and wrong that inhibits you from choosing a ``wrong" course of action; however, you assign your own definitions to the words.
- Driving force or mask behind which irrational beliefs hide.

### How do others play on your feelings of guilt?

#### *People can and sometimes will:*

- Make you believe they will suffer greatly if you do not respond positively to their request(s).
- Call on your guilt to respond to their requests, even when it means violating your rights.

- Respond to your irrational self by reinforcing your irrational thinking, giving you a sense of blame, for past, present, or future actions.
- Build up a verbal or imagined scenario that portrays you at fault for inaction, thus guaranteeing your sense of guilt and your willingness to do anything to alleviate it.
- Accuse you of misdeeds, words, or actions to arouse your sense of guilt and make you believe you are the one with a problem in an interpersonal [relationship](#) difficulty. (This effectively takes the pressure off of them.)
- Reinforce your negative self-perceptions, encouraging you to be guilt ridden and self-judgmental for their benefit.
- Build a case with moral absolutes to convince you of the "right way" to do things, avoiding that negative feeling of guilt for themselves.
- Set up situations for you in which you will believe your alternatives are limited to that which results in the least sense of guilt.
- Feign or fake hardship, illness, discomfort, unhappiness, incompetence, or other negative behavior to arouse your sense of guilt and have you take over those tasks, or duties bringing imagined negative consequences for them
- Threaten negative consequences, like going to jail, to the hospital, to the juvenile detention center, failing school, dying, or divorcing you. This manipulation uses your guilt to benefit them..

### What can guilt do to you?

#### *Guilt can:*

- Make you become ***over responsible***, striving to make life "right." You overwork. You over give of yourself. You are willing to do anything in your attempt to make everyone happy.
- Make you ***over conscientious***. You fret over every action you take as to its possible negative consequence to others, even if this means that you must ignore your needs and wants.
- Make you ***over sensitive***. You see decisions about right and wrong in every aspect of your life and become obsessed with the tenuous nature of all of your personal actions, words, and decisions. You are sensitive to the cues of others where any implication of your wrong doing is intimated.
- ***Immobilize*** you. You can become so overcome by the fear of doing, acting, saying, or being "wrong" that you eventually collapse, give in, and choose inactivity, [silence](#), and the status quo.
- ***Interfere*** in your decision making. It is so important to always be "right" in your decisions that you become unable to make a decision lest it be a wrong one.
- Be hidden by the ***mask of self denial***. Because it is less guilt inducing to take care of others first, instead of yourself, you hide behind the mask of self denial. You honestly believe it is better to serve others first, unaware that "guilt" is the motivator for such "generous" behavior.
- Make you ***ignore*** the full array of ***emotions*** and feelings available to you. Overcome by guilt or the fear of it, you can become emotionally blocked or closed off. You are able neither to enjoy the positive fruits of life nor experience the negative aspects.

- Be a *motivator* to change. Because you feel guilt and the discomfort it brings, you can use it as a barometer of the need to change things in your life and rid yourself of the guilt.
- Be a mask for *negative self belief*. You may actually have low self-esteem, but claim the reason for your negativity is the overwhelming sense of guilt you experience.
- *Mislead* or *misdirect* you. Because many *irrational beliefs* lie behind guilt, you may be unable to sort out your feelings. It is important to be objective with yourself when you are experiencing guilt; be sure that your decisions are based on sound, rational thinking.

### **What irrational beliefs or negative self-scripts are involved in guilt?**

- I do not deserve to be happy.
- I am responsible for my family's (spouse's) happiness.
- There is only one "right" way to do things.
- It's bad to feel hurt and pain.
- My children should never suffer in their childhood like I did in mine.
- My kids should have more material things than I did.
- It is my fault if others in my life are not happy.
- If my kids fail in any way, it's my responsibility.
- It is wrong to be concerned about myself.
- People are constantly judging me, and their judgment is important to me.
- It is important to save face with others.
- It is wrong to accept the negative aspects of my life without believing that I am responsible for them myself.
- I am responsible if either positive or negative events happen to the members of my family.
- I must not enjoy myself during a time when others expect me to be in mourning, grief, or loss.
- You must never let down your guard; something you're doing could be evil or wrong.
- I must always be responsible, conscientious, and giving to others.
- How others perceive me is important as to how I perceive myself.
- No matter what I do, I am always wrong.
- I should never feel guilt.
- If you feel guilt, then you must be or have been wrong.

### **Suggested steps to overcome guilt**

**Step 1:** You can recognize the role guilt is playing in your life by choosing a current problem and answering the following questions in your journal:

- a . What problem is currently troubling me?
- b . Who is responsible for the problem?
- c . Whose problem is it, really?
- d . What did I do to make this problem worse for myself?

- e. How much guilt do I feel about this problem?
- f. How much does the guilt I experience exaggerate or exacerbate my problem?
- g. If I felt no more guilt what would my problem look like then?

If the answer to question "g" is that your problem can be solved by reducing guilt, go to Step 2.

**Step 2:** Redefine your problem with the absence of guilt as an issue.

In answering the questions in Step 1 you recognized that guilt was preventing resolution of the problem. To redefining your problem, answer the following questions in your journal:

1. How insurmountable is the problem?
2. Is this problem an interpersonal or intrapersonal problem?
3. If it is interpersonal: Can I help the other person and myself to set aside guilt and resolve this problem?
4. If it is intrapersonal: Can I set aside guilt or the fear of it and resolve this problem?
5. Does this problem have more than one solution? Can others and myself experience satisfaction, comfort, and resolution with a minimum of debilitating guilt?
6. Whose problem is it, really?
7. Is it my problem or another(s)?
8. Am I taking on another's responsibility?
9. Am I trying to keep another from experiencing pain, hardship, or discomfort?

**Step 3:** If the problem is really someone else's, give the problem back to the person(s) to solve and to deal with.

If the problem is yours, go to Step 4.

**Step 4:** You must confront the real or imagined guilt or fear of guilt preventing you from either handing the problem back to the person(s) whose problem it really is (Step 3) or from handling the problem on your own. Consider the following:

- a. What fears are blocking me at this moment from taking the steps I need to resolve this problem?
- b. What are the irrational beliefs behind these fears?
- c. Refute the irrational beliefs using the steps given in the "[Handling Irrational Beliefs](#)" section two in [Tools for Personal Growth](#).
- d. Initiate a program of self-affirmation as presented in the "[Self-Affirmations](#)" section 3 in [Tools for Personal Growth](#).

e. Use an imagery scenario with "guilt" as an object you packaged in a nice box. It is brought to a mountain top and thrown off a cliff for good.

f. Affirm for yourself that:

- You deserve to solve this problem.
- You deserve to be good to yourself
- You deserve to have others be good to you, too!

**Step 5:** If your guilt is not resolved after completing Steps 3 and/or 4, return to Step 1 and begin again.

## Handling Irrational Beliefs

**Content:**

- [What are irrational beliefs?](#)
- [What are some examples of irrational beliefs?](#)
- [How can we recognize irrational beliefs?](#)
- [What are the benefits of refuting our irrational beliefs?](#)
- [Steps to take in refuting an irrational belief](#)

**What are irrational beliefs?**

*Irrational beliefs are:*

- Messages about life we send to ourselves that keep us from growing emotionally.
- Scripts we have in our head about how we believe life "should" be for us and for others.
- Unfounded attitudes, opinions, and values we hold to that are out of synchrony with the way the world really is.
- Negative sets of habitual responses we hold to when faced with stressful events or situations.
- Stereotypic ways of problem solving we fall into in order to deal with life's pressures.
- Ideas, feelings, beliefs, ways of thinking, attitudes, opinions, biases, prejudices, or values with which we were raised. We have become accustomed to using them when faced with problems in our current life, even when they are not productive in helping us reach a positive, growth-enhancing solution.
- Self-defeating ways of acting. On the surface they may look appropriate for the occasion, but actually they result in a neutral or negative consequence for us.
- Habitual ways of thinking, feeling, or acting that we think are effective; however, in the long run they are ineffectual.
- Counterproductive ways of thinking, which give comfort and [security](#) in the short run, but either do not resolve or actually exacerbate the problem in the long run.
- Negative or pessimistic ways of looking at necessary life experiences such as loss, conflict, risk taking, rejection, or accepting change.

- Overly optimistic or idealistic ways of looking at necessary life experiences such as loss, conflict, risk taking, rejection, or accepting change.
- Emotional arguments for taking or not taking action in the face of a challenge. When followed they result in no personal gain, but rather in greater personal hardship or loss.
- Patterns of thinking that make us appear to others as stubborn, bullheaded, intemperate, argumentative, or aloof.
- Ways of thinking about ourselves that are out of context with the real facts, resulting in our either under-valuing or over-valuing ourselves.
- Means by which we become confused about the intentions of others when we are enmeshed in interpersonal problems with them.
- Lifelong messages sent to us either formally or informally by: society, culture, community, race, ethnic reference group, neighborhood, church, [social networks](#), family, relatives, peer group, school, work, or parents. They are unproductive in solving our current problem or crisis, but we are either unwilling or unable to let go of them. These messages can be very clear to us or they can be hidden in our subconscious.
- Conclusions about life that we have developed over time, living in an irrational environment not identified as being irrational (e.g., beliefs developed as a member of a high-stress family).
- Standards by which we were reared and from which we learned how to act, what to believe, and how to express or experience feelings. When followed, however, these standards do not result in a satisfactory resolution of our current problems.
- Ritualistic ways by which we pursue our [relationships](#) with others, resulting in nonproductive relationships and increased emotional stress.
- Outmoded, unproductive, unrealistic expectations exacted on ourselves and/or others, guaranteed to be unattainable and to result in continuing negative self-concepts.

### **What are some examples of irrational beliefs?**

#### ***Irrational beliefs (negative) about self:***

- I do not deserve positive attention from others.
- I should never burden others with my problems or fears.
- I am junk.
- I am uncreative, nonproductive, ineffective, and untalented.
- I am worthless.
- I am the worst example on earth of a person.
- I am powerless to solve my problems.
- I have so many problems, I might as well give up right now.
- I am so dumb about things, I can never solve anything as complex as this.
- I am the ugliest, most unattractive, unappealing, fat slob in the world.

#### ***Irrational beliefs (negative) about others:***

- No one cares about anyone else.
- All men (or women) are dishonest and are never to be trusted.
- Successful relationships are a trick; you have no control over how they turn out.

- People are out to get whatever they can from you; you always end up being used.
- People are so opinionated; they are never willing to listen to other's points of view.
- You are bound to get hurt in a relationship; it makes no difference how you try to change it.
- There is a loser in every fight, so avoid fights at all costs.
- All people are out for #1; you need to know you'll always be #2, no matter what.
- It's not who you are but what you do that makes you attractive to another person.
- What counts in life is others' opinions of you.
- There is a need to be on guard in dealing with others to insure that you don't get hurt.

### ***Irrational beliefs on other topics***

- There is only one way of doing things.
- Work is the punishment man must endure for being human.
- A family that plays (prays) together always stays together.
- Always protecting against the forces of evil in life is the only way to live.
- There are always two choices: right or wrong; black or white; win or lose; pass or fail; grow or stagnate.
- Once you are [married](#) and have children, you join the normal human race.
- A handicapped person is imperfect, to be pitied, and to be dropped along the path of life.
- Admitting to a mistake or to failure is a sign of weakness.
- The showing of any kind of emotion is wrong, a sign of weakness, and not allowable.
- Asking for help from someone else is a way of admitting your weakness; it denies the reality that only you can solve your problems.

### **How can we recognize irrational beliefs?**

#### ***Irrational beliefs can be present if we:***

- Find ourselves caught up in a vicious cycle in addressing our problems.
- Find a continuing series of "catch 22's" where every move we make to resolve a problem results in more or greater problems.
- Have been suffering silently (or not so silently) with a problem for a long time, yet have not taken steps to get help to address the problem.
- Have decided on a creative problem solving solution, yet find ourselves incapable of implementing the solution.
- Have chosen a problem solving course of action to pursue and find that we are unhappy with this course of action; yet we choose to avoid looking for alternatives.
- Are afraid of pursuing a certain course of action because of the guilt we will feel if we do it.
- Find we are constantly obsessed with a problem yet take no steps to resolve it.
- Find we are immobilized in the face of our problems.
- Find that the only way to deal with problems is to avoid them, deny them, procrastinate about them, ignore them, run away from them, turn our back on them.
- Find that we can argue both sides of our problem, becoming unable to make a decision.

## What are the benefits of refuting our irrational beliefs?

### *By refuting our irrational beliefs we are able to:*

- Unblock our emotions and feelings about ourselves and our problems.
- Become productive, realistic problem solvers.
- Gain greater credibility with ourselves and others.
- Gain clarity, purpose, and intention in addressing our current problems.
- Reduce the fear of guilt or of hurting others in solving problems.
- Identify the barriers and obstacles that must first be hurdled before our problems can be resolved.
- Come to greater honesty about ourselves and our problems.
- Put our problem into a realistic perspective as to its importance, magnitude, and probability of being solved.
- Separate our feelings from the content of the problem.
- Live richer, more authentic lives.
- View our lives in a healthier perspective, with greater meaning and direction.
- Gain our sense of humor in the presence of our problems and in their resolution.
- Recognize our self-worth and self-goodness and separate it from the errors and mistakes we have made in our lives.
- Forgive ourselves and others for mistakes made.
- Give ourselves and others kindness, tenderness, and understanding during times of great stress.
- Gain a sense of purpose and order in our lives as we solve problems.
- Feel productive as we labor through the muck and mire of our problems.
- Respect our rights and the rights of others as we solve problems.
- Clarify our feelings about the behavior of others without the barrier of self-censorship or fear of rejection.
- Gain a "win-win" solution to problems, which involves ourselves with others. It opens us up to compromise.

### Steps to take in refuting an irrational belief

1. **Step 1:** Is your thinking and problem solving ability being blocked by an irrational belief? Consider a specific problem as you answer the following questions:
  1. Am I going in **circles** in trying to solve this problem?
  2. Is there something inside of me that is **preventing or keeping me** from taking the necessary actions in this matter?
  3. Am I bothered by the thoughts of what I or others "**should do, act like, think, or feel**" in this situation?
  4. Do I find myself saying how this situation "**should be,**" having a hard time facing it the way it really is?
  5. Do I use **fantasy or magical thinking** in looking at this problem? Am I always hoping that by some miracle it will go away?
  6. Am I burdened by the **fear of what others think of me** as I work on this problem?
  7. Do I know what the solution is, but become **paralyzed** in its implementation?



8. Do I find myself using a lot of "*yes but's*" in discussing this problem?
9. Do I find it easier to **procrastinate**, avoid, divert my attention, ignore, or run away from this problem?
10. Is this problem causing much **distress and discomfort** for me and/or others, and yet I remain stumped in trying to resolve it?

**Step 2:** If you have answered yes to any or all of the questions in Step 1, you are probably facing a problem or situation in which a blocking irrational belief is clouding your thinking. The next thing to do is to try to identify the blocking irrational belief. Answer the following questions in your journal:

11. Is the blocking belief something I have believed in all my life?
12. Is the blocking belief coming from the teachings of my parents, church, family, peers, work, society, culture, community, race, ethnic reference group, or social [network](#)?
13. Is the blocking belief something that always recurs when I am trying to solve problems similar to this one?
14. Is the blocking belief something that has helped me solve problems successfully in the past?
15. Is the blocking belief one that tends to make me dishonest with myself about this problem?
16. Is the blocking belief an immobilizing concept that sparks fear of guilt or fear of rejection in my mind as I face this problem?
17. Is the blocking belief something that can be stated in a sentence or two?
18. Is the blocking belief a consistent statement as I face this problem, or does it tend to change as variables of this problem become more clear to me?
19. Is the blocking belief a tangible statement of belief or is it simply a feeling or intuition?
20. Can I state the blocking belief? If so, write it in your journal: ***My blocking belief is:***

**Step 3:** Once you have identified the blocking belief in Step 2, test its rationality. Answer the following questions about the belief, "yes" or "no."

1. Is there any basis in reality to support this belief as ***always*** being true?
2. Does this belief encourage personal growth, emotional maturity, independence of thinking and action, and stable mental health?
3. Is this belief one which, if ascribed to, will help you overcome this or future problems in your life?
4. Is this belief one which, if ascribed to, will result in behavior that is self defeating for you?
5. Does this belief protect you and your rights as a person?
6. Does this belief assist you in connecting honestly and openly with others so that healthy, growth engendering [interpersonal relationships](#) result?

7. Does this belief assist you in being a creative, rational problem solver who is able to identify a series of alternatives from which you can choose your own personal priority solutions?
8. Does this belief stifle your thinking and problem solving ability to the point of immobilization?
9. When you tell others of this belief do they support you because that is the way everyone in your family, peer group, work, church, or community thinks?
10. Is this belief an absolute? Is it a black or white, yes or no, win or lose, no options in the middle type of belief?

***Healthy answers are:***

1-no 2-yes 3-yes 4-no 5-yes 6-yes 7-yes 8-no 9-no 10-no

If you are unable to give healthy answers to one or more question in Step 2, then your blocking belief is most likely irrational.

**Step 4:** Once you have determined that the blocking belief is irrational, you are ready to refute this irrational belief. Respond to the following questions in your journal:

1. How do I consistently feel when I think of this belief?
2. Is there anything in reality to support this belief as being true?
3. What in reality supports the lack of absolute truth in this belief?
4. Does the truth of this belief exist only in the way I talk, act, or feel about this problem?
5. What is the worst thing that could happen to me if I do not hold on to this belief?
6. What positive things might happen to me if I do not hold on to this belief?
7. What would be an appropriate, realistic belief I could substitute for this irrational belief?
8. How would I feel if I substituted this new belief for my blocking belief?
9. How will I grow and how will my rights and the rights of others be protected by this substitute belief?
10. What is keeping me from accepting this alternate belief?
11. Once you have answered these questions, substitute a rational belief and act on it.

***My substitute rational healthy belief is:***

**Step 5:** If you still have trouble solving problems, return to Step 1 and begin again.

## **Self-Affirmations**

**Content:**

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- [What is the outcome of believing in negative self-scripts?](#)
- [What are self-affirmations?](#)
- [What shapes can positive self-affirmations take?](#)

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## What are negative self-scripts?

Before we can become self-affirming, we need to learn about the effects of negativism in our lives.

### *Negative self-scripts are the:*

- Negative beliefs you have about yourself and of which you remind yourself daily.
- Negative statements about yourself which sprinkle your everyday conversation.
- Self-deprecating remarks that influence your behavior or beliefs.
- Negative descriptions given to you by members of your family of origin or peer group when you were younger onto which you hold even to this day.
- Negative feedback you get from your spouse, boss, teacher, colleagues, children, parents, relatives, or others that you take personally and incorporate into your personal belief system.
- Negative self-images you have of your body, looks, face, weight, coloring, hair, feet, or other parts of your body, which as you visualize, influence your presentation of self to others.
- Negative assessment you or others have made of your competency, skills, ability, knowledge, intelligence, creativity, or common sense. You have agreed with this internally and, thus, believe it true of you.
- Negative stories about your past behavior, failures, or performances that you systematically run over in your mind and which influence your current conduct.
- Negative attitudes about the possibility of your achievement of success in your life; these influence your motivation, effort, and drive for attainment of goals.
- Negative visualizations you have of your current status or state in life to your personal detriment.
- Feelings of anger, resentment, hostility or rage you feel toward others for real or imagined mistreatment. This so immobilizes you that your emotional growth gets stunted and you feel negatively about both yourself and life in general.
- Feelings of guilt for real or imagined debilitating wrongs you have committed that prevent positive self-valuing thoughts.
- Negative prophecies that you or others have made about yourself, your future, your success, your relationships, your family, or your health; these haunt you as you face a daily struggle to "win" in life.
- Ways in which you deny yourself rewards for your goodness, hard work and caring by: (1) not taking time to enjoy the fruits of your labor, (2) living in a style of self denial and austerity and (3) being afraid to let down your guard and relax, lest you fail to achieve your "Big Pay Off."
- Feelings of over-responsibility with which you burden yourself. This includes the feeling that others in your life will never be able to fully take care of themselves and that you are "responsible" for them no matter what.

- Dread and fear you have when facing your future; the belief that you do not have what it takes to survive or to be successful in whatever circumstances you face.
- Feelings of failure you harbor about real or imagined mistakes in the past and your "assured" failures in the future.
- Feelings of jealousy you harbor toward others whom you perceive (real or imagined) to be more successful, prettier, luckier, better liked, smarter, more talented, more creative, and generally better off than you.
- Feelings of inferiority you harbor about yourself and the belief that no matter what you do in life, it will never be "good enough."
- Feelings that there is someone in your life (e.g., your spouse, one of your parents, a family member, a former teacher, a peer, co-worker, a boss) from whom you are still waiting to receive recognition of your worth, your goodness, your competency, your beauty, and your overall qualities.

### **What is the outcome of believing in negative self-scripts?**

*The outcome of believing in negative self-scripts can include:*

**Over-dependence on the approval of others:** You have an inordinate need to receive positive reinforcement or approval for what you are, how you act, and what you do from others, with an inability to be self-rewarding.

**Lack of self-esteem and low self-concept:** You have an inability to believe in your own worth, inability to see any value in your own life, a poor self-image, and a lack of belief in your competency to succeed in life.

**Immobilization:** A rigid belief system immobilizes you from taking risks in life, prevents you from wanting to make a change, freezes your feelings into a negative pattern, and convinces you that your only role in life is to be victimized by those from whom you cannot escape.

**Negativity:** Your negative view of yourself leads you to see all of your world in a negative light. You begin to believe and act as a "loser." You see nothing in a positive light and can't be convinced that there is a better option in life.

**Pessimism:** You no longer believe that you will succeed and are no longer willing to take an optimistic position as you look to your future. You can see only gloom and doom on the horizon.

**Self-Pity:** You begin to feel so sorry for yourself and how life has treated you that you become your best "pity party" guest. You are so lost in your self-sorrow, regrets, remorse, sympathy, and pity that you refuse to be shaken or changed. You begin to believe that no one will notice you if they can't feel sorry for you too.

**Cynicism:** You take a "yes-but" cynical look at every suggestion for change in your life. You begin to doubt in the sincerity, kindness, and love of others who are trying to help you. You

create a barrier of cynicism to block them out, thus convincing yourself when they leave you that they really didn't care.

**The "Guard-All Shield":** You create an invisible shield, tough for others to see or to penetrate. People will approach you and try to get involved, but you zap them with your shield and they back away or turn and run. The shield is so subtle that at times you don't even know it exists, and you get confused by people pulling away from you. This shield can take the form of coldness, wise cracking, fear of being hurt, aloofness, unwillingness to change or take a risk, fear of being taken advantage of, fear of intimacy, fear of failure, fear of hurting others, or any other feeling that keeps you from connecting emotionally with another person

**Fulfillment of the Prophecy:** Because negative self-scripts predict the worst, you at some subconscious level work to achieve the worst and succeed in fulfilling the negative prophecy of: failure, rejection, loss, disapproval, or any other catastrophe or malady. It is a pattern of being self-destructive with one's life.

**Depression:** Because of the anger, resentment, rage, hurt, disappointment, disillusionment, and suffering you experience from your negative self-scripting you are a "good" candidate for firm and long-lasting depression. Your emotions can become so stuck, rigid, and constricted that you can be embedded into a deep sense of melancholy, blue funk, and loss of hope. At this stage you are a candidate for mental health intervention before the depression reaches a despair level and you become even more self-destructive, possibly physically ill or suicidal.

### **What are self-affirmations?**

#### ***Self-affirmations are:***

- Healing, positive self-scripts you give to yourself to counter your negative self-scripts.
- Vehicles by which you can free yourself from the over-dependence on other's opinions, attitudes, or feelings about you and feel good about yourself.
- The visualization of a new order and sense in your life, which you can work toward achieving.
- You take personal responsibility for your health and emotional stability.
- You let go of negative emotional baggage you have been carrying. Only then will you be able to deal with your life in a realistic and positive manner.
- The resolution of feelings from the past so that you can face the present with a less obstructed view.
- You give yourself permission to grow, to change, to take risks, to rise up, and to create a better life for yourself.
- You take a healthy "selfish" or self-oriented route in your life so that you can "let go" of these people who drain your resources and keep you from experiencing full personal health.
- The recognition of your rights and affirming your claim on them, giving you an equitable chance of achieving your fullest potential.
- Success prophecies that, when visualized, imagined, or believed in, do come true.

## What shapes can positive self-affirmations take?

### *I statements:*

"I" statements are one-line statements that can be repeated to cover three areas:

#### *I am: A statement of who you are*

This is a positive affirmation of a real state of being that exists in you. You can achieve a full list of I am Y statements by taking a personal positive inventory of your attributes, strengths, talents, and competencies. Examples include:

- I am competent      I am energetic
- I am strong      I am enthusiastic
- I am intelligent      I am relaxed
- I am beautiful I am joyful
- I am a good person      I am trusting
- I am caring      I am generous
- I am loving      I am courageous
- I am smart      I am forgiving
- I am creative      I am open
- I am talented      I am sharing

#### *I can: A statement of your potential*

This is a positive affirmation of your ability to accomplish goals. It is a statement of your belief in your power to grow, to change, and to help yourself. I can Y statements are developed after you develop a set of "short-term" (three to six months) goals. Examples include:

- I can lose weight
- I can stop smoking
- I can handle my children
- I can gain self-confidence
- I can take risks
- I can be a winner
- I can be strong
- I can pass calculus
- I can laugh and have fun
- I can be assertive
- I can control my temper
- I can grow
- I can heal
- I can let go of guilt
- I can let go of fear
- I can change
- I can be positive
- I can be a problem solver
- I can handle my own problems
- I can be honest with my feelings
- I can let go of being compulsive
- I can succeed

#### *I will: A statement of positive change in your life*

This is a positive affirmation of a change you want to achieve. It is a positive statement of what you want to happen. It is a "success prophecy." I will Y statements are developed after you have set your priorities for the short-term goals you have set. Examples include:

- I will like myself better each day.
- I will gain emotional strength each day.
- I will lose weight each day.
- I will smoke less each day.
- I will control my temper today.
- I will give others responsibility for their lives today.
- I will grow emotionally stronger each day.
- I will smile more at my customers today.
- I will offer my comments in class today.
- I will praise my children today.
- I will feel good things about me today.
- I will sleep easily tonight.
- I will feel less guilt each day.
- I will face my fears courageously today.
- I will take on only what I can handle today.
- I will take care of me today.
- I will challenge myself to change today.
- I will manage my time better today.
- I will handle my finances wisely today.
- I will take a risk to grow today.

**I am**

**I can                    Statements of Self-Belief**

**I will**

The daily use of these "I" statements is another form of self-affirmation designed to counter negative self-concept. It can result in a positive attitude, optimism, and can motivate you toward emotional growth and progress.

### **Affirmation Visualizations**

There are *word*, *images or pictures* and *scenario* visualizations, all affirming positively.

#### ***Word Visualizations:***

**Step 1:** Take any single target word about who you are, your ability, or what you want to accomplish. Write it on a 3 x 5 card.

**Step 2:** Get yourself into a relaxed state, preferably just before you go to bed. Hold the card about 12" to 24" from your eyes. Focus your eyes on the word and concentrate your attention. Hold this thought for up to 20 or 30 minutes.

**Step 3:** Do this exercise nightly for at least two weeks. As you continue, you are burning the image of your goal word into your mind. It will be with you in your thoughts as you proceed in your everyday life.

### ***Image Visualization:***

**Step 1:** Create or find an image of an object, person, or thing that embodies your goal for who you are, what your abilities are, or what you want to accomplish:

- a comfortable house
- a diploma
- a cruise ship
- a happy, healthy child
- a slim body
- a rainbow
- a sunset
- a calm ocean
- a sunny day
- a snow topped mountain

**Step 2:** Get yourself into a relaxed state and either look at the picture or imagine you reaching your goal. Do this for 20 minutes each night for one month.

**Step 3:** Get copies of your picture or a simulation of your goal, and tape them in places where you will see them as you go through your normal day.

**Step 4:** Continue to keep your images in place until you have accomplished the "goal" feelings of success and/or achieved the "object" success. The important thing is to believe that it is possible to achieve. This motivation is the most important step on your journey to success.

### ***Scenario Visualizations:***

**Step 1:** Once you have a goal in mind for yourself, daydream a full color movie in your mind of what your life would be like if you achieved the goal.

**Step 2:** Get a tape recorder and talk out the whole movie on tape. Be fully descriptive, colorful, positive, and uplifting. Use your imagination to the fullest and describe how positively you will be handling the change resulting from your goal attainment. Describe how key "significant others" in your life will cope successfully with your change. Save this tape for future reference.

**Step 3:** Write out a description of the goal attainment scenario, and keep it handy for future reference.

**Step 4:** When you are in a relaxed state, listen to the tape and read your description of the scenario every day for two weeks.



**Step 5:** Refer back to the tape and script as time goes on until you have reached full attainment of your goal.

### **Self-affirmation statements**

These forms of affirmation are *words*, *phrases*, or *statements* written on 3 x 5 index cards and placed where you can see them daily and be reminded of positive aspects about yourself. Every time you see these affirmation cards they will remind you to affirm yourself about these positive qualities or attributes. State all affirmations in a **positive** way.

#### ***Suggested places for affirmation cards:***

- mirror in bathroom
- mirror on dresser
- closet door
- refrigerator door
- front door
- bedroom door
- at your telephone
- dashboard of car
- desk at office
- desk at home
- in your wallet
- in your brief case
- in books you use at work or school

#### ***Affirmation word examples:***

- bright
- creative
- intelligent
- smart
- quick
- loving
- caring
- successful
- calm
- pretty
- relaxed
- capable
- strong
- beautiful
- giving
- peaceful
- hopeful
- responsible
- problem solver
- quiet
- handsome
- enjoyable

#### ***Affirmation phrase examples:***

- think happy
- be calm
- take action
- do it
- do it now
- be a winner
- take a risk
- dare to be different
- take it easy
- think wisely
- work smart
- take the time
- have fun
- relax and enjoy
- sit back
- step back

- seize the opportunity                      take the lead
- get in control                                give them space
- let go    believe in me
- let them be                                    trust in me
- let it be                                        enjoy good health

***Affirmation statement examples:***

- I can be a winner.
- I am the best friend I have.
- I have solved problems like this before.
- I have the ability to handle this.
- I am a capable human being.
- I deserve to love and to be loved.
- I am a skillful and artistic person.
- I can show others a good example.
- Letting go is best for them and for me.
- They will thank me in the future.
- Nothing is worth losing my sanity over.
- I am responsible only for my own feelings.
- I owe no one explanations for my behavior, which is legally, morally, and ethically correct.
- I deserve to have my rights recognized.
- I am a deserving human being.
- I deserve to enjoy the fruits of my labor.
- I deserve to be rewarded for what I do.
- I love myself for who I am.
- It is OK to be selfish if I don't hurt anyone.
- I like the way I handle problems.
- I am able to handle any problem I face.
- I have the right to feel the way I do.
- My children will benefit from my healthy changes.
- My children will survive my healthy changes.
- My family will benefit from my relaxing more.
- I deserve to relax more and take it easy.
- There are beautiful things happening in my life daily.
- I experience the excitement of growth daily.
- Change is a blessing I am working toward.
- Taking risks is the path to growth.
- I grow in love daily.
- I face each new day as a race to be won.
- I am winning in the race of life.
- I am a rich treasure ready to be found.
- Let others know who I am.
- Say hello to a new person today.
- Open up to be loved today.

- Be responsible. Relax!
- Letting go is loving
- Be free of guilt today.
- To be loved I must love.
- God does not make junk.
- There are opportunities in life to be tried.
- My possibilities are endless.
- Success is to be enjoyed.
- Open myself up with one new person today.
- Belief in self is a step toward personal growth.
- I can handle all changes that come my way.
- There is nothing I cannot handle.
- Smile and let others in on the secret.

**Affirmation of the day exercise**

Write a single positive affirmation on thirty 3 x 5 index cards. Take one card a day for each day of the month. This card is your affirmation for the day. When you get to the last card start again.

To make this daily affirmation process grow, write out thirty different affirmations for each month of the year. Keep the 360 cards in a recipe box and continually use the collection year after year, adding new affirmations as you need them.

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