

Discovering the Best Version of You Through Behavior Change

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What does the best version of you look like? I'm not referring to the skinny, athletic you. I mean the actual best version of yourself. The version with the most confidence, highest self-esteem, and most unconditional love, yes, that you. According to some researchers, behavior change occurs mainly as a result of internal motivation instead of external influence. This means that if we, as individuals, want to change our lives we must want to change. Many of us like the idea of our best selves but don't appreciate the work required to achieve it. So how do we bridge the gap between the idea of changing our bad habits, wanting to change, and putting in the work to change? Discover how small changes, self-affirmation, and a little motivation can lead to your best self.

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This lesson is a beginner's guide to changing our mindset and enabling us to become the best versions of ourselves.

Objective: In this lesson we will:

1. Learn about self-affirmations and how we can use them to positively influence the way we think.
2. Discover our most valued priorities and virtues in life and what characteristics our "best self" has.
3. Discuss action steps on how to improve the areas in our lives we have neglected and/or want to improve.
4. Set S.M.A.T. goals to improve those areas of our lives using self-affirmations and a positive mindset.
5. Practice self-affirmations and use them to improve our attitudes and outlook on life.

List of supplies needed: Be sure to hand everything out before beginning the lesson!

1. Paper and writing utensil for making a list of core values/virtues and for taking notes.
2. Timer for keeping track of how much time you wish to spend on each activity. The specified time mentioned in the activities is just a suggestion and more time may be allowed if the participants would like more.
3. Copies of the handouts. One for each participant. This includes the example list of virtues, and the Tips and Tricks.
4. Sticky pads for each participant to record their self-affirmations and S.M.A.T. goals. One pad for each participant (they will use them multiple sticky notes for their goals and affirmations so they can post them in different places where they will see them every day).

Introduction: Many of us think of our best selves in some physical sense, we think about our physical selves and what our "ideal bodies" look like. Many of us also think of our best selves as if it is from our dreams or a goal that's too difficult to achieve, but what if it's not? What if becoming our "best self" is a simple process of choosing to refocus our minds? What if it's a mindset and a way of living rather than just a body type? Thinking about our best selves can be intimidating and lead us to think about an easier way of life. One that may include ordering

take out, sitting on the couch, and trying to move as little as possible. Well, becoming our best selves SHOULD be a simpler process than it seems, it may take time but small changes are usually easier to make and maintain than big changes.

Studies on self-affirmations tell us that we can use them to improve problem solving under stress (Creswell et. al, 2013), decrease the impact of negative emotions (Cascio et. al, 2015, Moore, 2020), and improve the overall psychological well-being (Moore, 2020). Therefore, we can surmise that self-affirmations can help us change our mindsets to build and reinforce positive associations in areas of our lives we want to improve. By practicing self-affirmations routinely, we can also establish healthy habits by promoting positive thinking and mindfulness. Mindfulness has also shown to help our mental health and fight depression ⁽⁴⁾. Self-affirmations can be described as positive statements or phrases we say to reinforce positive beliefs or ideas we want to believe more. An example is, “I am a positive and happy person.” Self-affirmations can begin with I and are usually brief (sometimes referred to as “I statements”). It is also recommended to keep a short list of them and repeat them over and over again for a few minutes at a time.

Activity 1 – Determining Core Values

1. Let’s begin by asking ourselves “what’s important to me in life?” and “what do I value most?” By establishing our personal values and virtues, we determine why we want to be better and provide ourselves with a piece of the roadmap on how to achieve our goals. Go ahead and spend 3 minutes thinking about and answering these questions. Write down your top five values and then narrow that down to 3 (more time may be allowed if participants need more). A list that includes some examples of values can be found in the handouts section. Remember, our values can change over time, based on our experiences and life circumstances so don’t get too caught up in only choosing the “best” three. The goal of this first activity is to identify what we value most in our lives.
2. Now that you have your top few values let’s take another 3 minutes (approximately) and think about which of these values we have neglected or could use more of our attention.

We can also think of who we want to work on these values with and in what ways. For example, if one of your core values is family, how can you improve your relationship with your family? Do you want to spend more time with them? If yes, what do you want to do in your time together and what do THEY want to do? ****Additional option**** If time allows, ask participants to share their values and thoughts on the first two steps. Also ask them why they chose those values and if there are other areas of their lives they want to improve on that fall under those values but may not be considered values. For example, many people wouldn't consider eating healthy a value, but it falls under the umbrella value of living a healthy lifestyle.

3. This is where we really begin to nit-pick. We have our values but how do we want to apply or live out those values in our lives? If joy/happiness is one of your values, then what makes you happy or brings you joy? If living a healthy lifestyle is important to you then how do you want to do that? Diet? Exercise? Getting enough sleep? If your goal is to have a more positive outlook on life, then do you want more self-esteem? More confidence? Maybe you just want to be more positive in general? Take some time to further identify HOW you want to live.

Activity 2 – Practicing Self-affirmations

1. Now that we have identified areas of our lives we wish to improve; we can use self-affirmations to install positive associations of those areas into our minds.
2. Start by using the first-person narrative and write statements that include the words that describe your values and write them on the sticky notes.
3. Write a new affirmation or “I statement” for each value.

Examples: I am confident. I am intelligent. I am happy. I enjoy eating healthy. I enjoy the benefits of exercise. I can solve this problem.

4. Make a list of a maximum of 20 affirmations. Using only one self-affirmation is also acceptable.
5. Read your list of self-affirmations, either quietly to yourself or out loud. Read the list at least three times. The more you say/think of them the better!!!
6. Place these lists/sticky notes around your home in obvious places where you will see them often such as the bathroom mirror, on a door you open and close. If you keep many other notes or items on these places, try using a color of paper that stands out and catches your eye. Place the notes as close to eye-level as possible, this makes them easier to read.
7. Say them out loud while looking in a mirror.
8. Practice them as often as you can.

Activity 3 – S.M.A.T. Goals

1. Let's set between one and three S.M.A.T. goals. Many people have heard of S.M.A.R.T goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timely) but I like to set S.M.A.T goals (Simple, Measurable, Achievable, Timely) when talking about self-affirmations. The difference is that I like to use Simple for the S rather than Specific and "Relevant/Realistic" does not really apply since we are focusing our goals around our core values. Example goal: I will say and repeat my list of self-affirmations for 5 minutes, when I get out of bed on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays for one month. 2nd example: I will repeat my list of affirmations 5 times when I am faced with a stressful event this week.
2. A few notes about setting S.M.A.T. goals.
 - a. Simple is not always easy so start small and gradually increase your goal.
 - b. Do not get discouraged if you do not reach your goals. Just try again. Effort and determination will be rewarded.
 - c. It is ok to get distracted while practicing self-affirmations, just re-focus and pick up where you last remember or just start over.

- d. Use an accountability buddy and talk to them about how your goals are coming (or not coming) along.
- e. Record your progress either in a journal or on a calendar.
- f. Set and celebrate goals you are comfortable with. You can start small by setting short-term goals (typical timeline is between a day and a month). You can also extend your timeline by setting medium-term goals (usually lasts between one month up to a few months), or you can challenge yourself with long-term goals (a few months or longer). Be sure to determine rewards when you set your goals, so you know your rewards BEFORE you check off goals. Celebrate all victories.

References

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Tips and Tricks

Core Values

1. Take some time to review your core values every six months. They may change depending on the stage of life we are in and it's ok to adjust our goals accordingly.
2. Keep a list of your core values posted around places where you will see them often and use brightly colored paper to help them stand out. Use a different color paper to differentiate them from your goals and affirmations.

Self-affirmations

1. Begin each affirmation with "I". Ex. I work hard to achieve my goals. I enjoy walking the benefits from walking.
2. Keep your list of affirmations to less than 20 at a time.
3. Writing down or acknowledging why something is important to us can also serve as an affirmation.
4. When using affirmations during stressful events, take a deep breath and focus on why you want to be successful.
5. Set S.M.A.T. goals.
6. Keep a list of your self-affirmations posted in areas where you will see them often and use brightly colored paper to help them stand out. Use a different color paper to differentiate them from your goals and core values.
7. Remember that it's ok to change our affirmations as our core values change but the more we say and use them will improve our chances for success.

S.M.A.T. Goals

1. S,M,A,T, stands for Simple, Measurable, Achievable, and Timely
2. Share your goals with an accountability buddy,
3. Track and record your progress in a journal or on a calendar.
4. Celebrate your victories and schedule assessments to routinely re-evaluate your goals.
5. Keep a list of your goals posted around places where you will see them often and use brightly colored paper to help them stand out. Use a different color paper to differentiate them from your core values and affirmations.

Core Values

- Authenticity
- Achievement
- Adventure
- Ambition
- Autonomy
- Altruism
- Balance
- Beauty
- Compassion
- Challenge
- Citizenship
- Community
- Competency
- Contribution
- Creativity
- Curiosity
- Courage
- Determination
- Dignity
- Fairness
- Faith
- Fame
- Friendships
- Fun
- Growth
- Generosity
- Grace
- Happiness
- Honesty
- Hope
- Humor
- Influence
- Inner Harmony
- Justice
- Kindness
- Knowledge
- Leadership
- Learning
- Love
- Loyalty
- Meaningful Work
- Openness
- Optimism
- Patience
- Peace
- Pleasure
- Poise
- Popularity
- Recognition
- Religion
- Reputation
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Security
- Self-Respect
- Service
- Spirituality
- Stability
- Success
- Status
- Trustworthiness
- Wealth
- Wisdom

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