

Affirmations: How to guide your participants to create useful and productive affirmations.

Therapists and other professionals in the field often ask their clients to write affirmations. An easy assignment? Once you guide someone through their maze of negativity to a point where they can see the many good things about themselves, the rest should be easy. That is not always the case, especially for those we work with who have spent a lifetime being criticized by folks whose opinions matter to them. Below is a nice list of what should be included in an effective affirmation, excerpted from *Teens: Positive Thoughts + Affirmations = Positive Actions* by Ester R.A. Leutenberg and Carol Butler, MS Ed, RN, C.

A brief restatement of affirmation theory based on the work of Claude Steele, 1988.

Claude Steele proposed a particular theory behind affirmations known as the self-affirmation theory. In this theory, Steele states that we have a fundamental motivation to maintain our self-integrity, or our natural perception of ourselves as being good, virtuous, and capable to control the outcome of important events. Steele noted that affirmations allow us to preserve and support our unconscious self-integrities; thus, through time, our subconscious will accept the affirmation as being true.

Effective affirmations are...

- Positive to create the reality you want.
- Personal and in your own words, the way you really talk.
- Powerful to motivate your thoughts and actions.
- In the present tense as if you already are who you want to be, or already have what you want.
- Believable.
- Achievable.
- Short and easy to remember and repeat.

So, to reiterate, participants should aim for affirmations that are positive, personal, powerful, present tense, believable, achievable, and short. Below is a list of 12 good ones.

1. I am kind.
2. I complete my work assignments on time.
3. I eat healthy foods.
4. I exercise an appropriate amount each day.
5. I stick to my budget.
6. I spend an appropriate amount of time each day gaming.
7. I attend my children's concerts.

8. I walk my dog daily.
9. I give to charities I believe in.
10. I am cheerful at work.
11. I find good in everyone.
12. I support the members of my team.

Finding success with affirmations is like finding success with anything. Clients must understand that practice, practice, practice is key. Each time they repeat an affirmation they are closer to the ideal they are describing.

12 Affirmations Exercise

Audience: Group or individual working with esteem issues, career building, core values, etc.

Time: 1 hour +/-, depending upon how long the facilitator allows for writing affirmations and size of the group.

Tools: Black or white board or computer screen the participants can see.
Download and copy the *Affirmations Participant Handouts*, which includes 3 handouts: What Is An Affirmation, Positive Traits, and Monthly Affirmations.

Presenter's Guide

1. Hand out the 3 Affirmations Participant Handouts. Have them read Participant Handout #1: What Is An Affirmation.
2. Discuss the theory of affirmations and how to write them effectively.
3. Solicit from them what makes a good or not-so-good affirmation.
4. Ask participants to consider what they learned in the group discussion and the definitions and examples you provided. Ask them to synthesize the information, writing a brief paragraph. Let them know this will not be graded.
5. Discuss their conclusions with the participants.
6. Introduce Participant Handout #3: Monthly Affirmations. Be clear about the steps of the activity.
7. If they seem to be having trouble coming up with 12 attributes they like about themselves go around the group and solicit ideas from each person. Of course, remember that no one should be forced to share their ideas. If they are stuck reference Participant Handout #2: Positive Traits.
8. After giving the participants time to write their 12 favorite traits about themselves or goals they have, proceed to the next step. Remind them again what the traits of a well-written affirmation are. (Affirmations are positive, personal, powerful, present tense, believable, achievable, and short.)
9. Instruct them to write out the affirmation they chose for this month and put it up at home where they will see it every day.
10. Remind them to journal about how they are feeling throughout the month.

Participant Handout #1 What is An Affirmation

Claude Steele proposed the theory behind affirmations calling it the self-affirmation theory. Steele states that we have a fundamental motivation to maintain our self-integrity, or our natural perception of ourselves as being good, virtuous, and capable to control the outcome of important events. Steele noted that affirmations allow us to preserve and support our unconscious self-belief. Through time, our subconscious will accept the affirmation as being true. In short, human beings like to believe they are good. Affirmations that continually emphasize this goodness eventually become what we believe about ourselves.

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Notice that they are short, in the present tense, and address the issue or goal as though it is already achieved.

Practicing affirmations not only is a pleasant thing to do (who doesn't like to hear good things about themselves,) but these repetitions anchor it to our brains where it becomes true.

List of positive traits excerpted from *Teens: Positive Thoughts + Affirmations = Positive Actions* by Ester R.A. Leutenberg and Carol Butler, MS Ed, RN, C.

Participant Handout #2 Positive Traits

Accessible	Dedicated	Interested	Secure
Accountable	Dependable	Interesting	Self-aware
Active	Determined	Intuitive	Self-confident
Adaptable	Disciplined	Joyful	Self-reliant
Adventurous	Discreet	Kind	Self-sufficient
Advocate	Dynamic	Knowledgeable	Sensitive
Agreeable	Educated	Leader	Sentimental
Ambitious	Effective	Listener	Sincere
Amiable	Efficient	Lively	Skillful
Appreciative	Empathetic	Logical	Sociable
Appropriate	Energetic	Lovable	Solid
Articulate	Enthusiastic	Loving	Spiritual
Aspiring	Ethical	Loyal	Spontaneous
Assertive	Expressive	Mature	Stable
Astute	Fair	Moderate	Stress manager
Attentive	Faithful	Neat	Strong
Authentic	Flexible	Nurturing	Studious
Aware	Focused	Open-minded	Successful
Balanced	Forgiving	Optimistic	Supportive
Brave	Friendly	Organized	Sympathetic
Calm	Fun-loving	Patient	Tactful
Candid	Extraordinary	Peaceful	Talented
Capable	Generous	Perceptive	Team player
Caring	Gentle	Planner	Thorough
Charitable	Genuine	Pleasant	Time manager
Cheerful	Good-natured	Polite	Tolerant
Clear-headed	Gracious	Powerful	Trusting
Collaborator	Grateful	Practical	Trustworthy
Communicator	Hardworking	Principled	Truthful
Compassionate	Healthy	Proactive	Uncomplaining
Confident	Helpful	Problem-solver	Understanding
Connected	Honest	Productive	Venturesome
Conscientious	Honorable	Progressive	Versatile
Considerate	Humble	Proud	Vibrant
Consistent	Humorous	Punctual	Warm
Contemplative	Imaginative	Rational	Well-read
Contributor	Independent	Realistic	Well-rounded
Cooperative	Individualistic	Reflective	Willing
Coping	Initiator	Reliable	Wise
Courageous	Innovative	Resourceful	Zealous
Creative	Inquiring	Respectful	
Curious	Insightful	Responsible	
Decisive	Intelligent	Role-model	

Participant Handout #3 Monthly Affirmations

In the spaces below list 12 things you like about yourself or would like to make part of yourself.

Things I Like About Myself or Traits I Want to Grow
<i>Example: Kindness</i>
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.
11.
12.

Rewrite this list in the form of an affirmation. Remember that an affirmation should be written in the present tense as though you have already achieved your goal. *For example, if kindness was one of your attributes you might restate it as I am kind to my friends and family.* Make your affirmations short so they are easy to remember.

Affirmation of the Month
<i>Example: I am kind to my family and friends.</i>
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.
11.
12.

