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Amy Morin ([00:01](#)):

Welcome to the Verywell Mind Podcast. I'm Amy Morin, the Editor-in-Chief of Verywell Mind. I'm also a psychotherapist and a bestselling author of four books on mental strength. Every Friday, I share a quick mental strength strategy that will help fix the thoughts, feelings, and actions that can drain you of the mental strength you need to be your best. Now let's dive into today's episode! Today, I'm talking about why you should develop a personal mantra.

Amy Morin ([00:28](#)):

When you think of a mantra, you might be envisioning someone who just repeats while they're meditating. That's what we call mantra meditation. There's tons of science behind it, and studies show it's quite effective in helping people feel better. It reduces depression and anxiety and improves overall happiness. But that's not what I'm talking about today. Today I'm talking about developing a little phrase that you repeat to yourself as needed. It's not necessarily the same thing as an affirmation though. A positive affirmation about how you love yourself or how you're a good person can be helpful. But there's also some evidence that repeating empty phrases to yourself that you don't really believe doesn't necessarily shift your mindset.

Amy Morin ([01:16](#)):

A mantra is different though! It's not necessarily a positive phrase about yourself, although it could be. But it could also be a phrase that helps you stay on track when you want to change your behavior. Or it might help you drown out negative thoughts when your brain's trying to sabotage you. I talk a bit about this in my kid's book, *13 Things Strong Kids Do*. There I call it, "Creating Your Own Catchphrase." It's a great skill no matter what age you are, and it can be used by a lot of different kinds of people. It's a strategy that's been adopted by some elite athletes, and there's science showing it can help them perform better.

Amy Morin ([01:56](#)):

A 2015 study published in a journal called *Brain and Behavior* found that people who repeated a mantra displayed decreased brain activity. You might be thinking, "Wait! Why on earth would I want less brain activity?" But less brain activity is actually a good thing. People who repeat a mantra increase their focus and feel more relaxed (two things that can help them perform better). There's an Olympic runner named Courtney Frerichs. She uses mantras to improve her race times. She specializes in something called steeplechase, which is a type of obstacle course. She won a silver medal in the Tokyo Olympics, and she said it was her mantra that helped her succeed.

Amy Morin ([02:42](#)):

Over the years, she had lots of mantras, and she said that she came by most of them naturally. When she heard a phrase that she liked, she often adopted that to be her mantra. She told *The New York Times* that one of those mantras that helped her was, "Let yourself run". It's something that her coach used to say to her. And when she repeated that phrase in her head over and over again, her anxiety decreased and her focus increased.

Amy Morin ([03:12](#)):

Mantras aren't just helpful for athletes though. I worked with a woman in my therapy office who kept in contact with one of her exes. He treated her terribly, which is why she'd ended the relationship in the first place. But whenever she saw his number pop up on her phone, she said she couldn't help but answer it. Sometimes she got together with him too hoping that he changed and that things might be different, but they never were. He was mean to her. He asked for a lot of favors. He asked to borrow money. Whenever she was feeling good, she'd say she didn't want contact with him anymore. She knew that she deserved better, but in that unexpected moment when he called her, she felt like she just couldn't help but pick up the phone.

Amy Morin ([03:57](#)):

Sometimes she even called him if she felt lonely or sad. So she developed a mantra for herself, "self-respect." She felt like it was disrespectful to herself to allow him back into her life. So from that day forward after she developed her mantra, whenever she was tempted to call him or whenever she saw his number pop up on her phone, she just repeated that phrase "self-respect" over and over again. And it worked! She stopped all contact with him, and within a few weeks, he quit trying to reach out to her. She said she just needed that mantra to remind herself of how she wanted to be treated. And if her ex wasn't going to treat her with respect, she needed to have enough self-respect to cut off contact.

Amy Morin ([04:44](#)):

I also read about the story of Jai Pausch. Her husband Randy was a professor and the author of one of my favorite books called *The Last Lecture*. Jai and Randy had two young kids. And although Randy looked really healthy, he was diagnosed with a terminal illness. So naturally Jai felt really sad as she thought about losing her husband and what that would mean for her and her two young children. But she didn't want to spend the remaining days of her husband's life crying and thinking about how awful life was going to be.

Amy Morin ([05:17](#)):

She wanted to enjoy whatever time they had left together as a family. So her mantra became “not helpful.” Whenever she found herself getting so upset that she couldn't enjoy the moment, she would repeat to herself “not helpful,” and warding off the negative thoughts in her head helped her find some happiness during the worst times. And just to be clear, we usually talk about the fact that it's okay to feel whatever you're feeling. But there are those moments where experiencing and expressing your feelings isn't going to be helpful. You might need a catchphrase like this too.

Amy Morin ([05:54](#)):

Sometimes you just need to get through the moment. Maybe you're visiting someone for what might be the last time, and you don't want to spend it crying. Or maybe you're in a business meeting and bursting into tears over something going on in your personal life isn't going to help. In those cases, a little mantra can help you get through it. Then later when it's safe and comfortable to do so, you can let yourself experience those emotions.

Amy Morin ([06:20](#)):

There are lots of different ways that a personal mantra could help you. It might help you change your behavior. For example, let's say you want to quit smoking. Every time you crave a cigarette, you might repeat a mantra like, “My lungs need to heal,” if health is the real reason that you want to quit. If you're motivated to quit because you want to save money, your mantra might be something like, “a vacation fund,” which might make you think twice about spending money on cigarettes. Or if you're afraid that smoking is going to age you, repeating a phrase like “wrinkly face” might motivate you to ride out the craving.

Amy Morin ([06:59](#)):

You might also create a mantra that motivates you to achieve something rather than one that just scares you into staying the same. For example, if you want to exercise more (but you find yourself looking for an excuse to skip your workout), your mantra might become, “Fit people work out even on days when they don't feel like it.” And if you want a mantra that quiets your mind, you might find a phrase that you can repeat to yourself when you can't stop worrying at 2:00 AM saying, “Just rest,” as you breathe in slowly and breathe out slowly might quiet some of the chatter in your brain that's keeping you awake.

Amy Morin ([07:38](#)):

You might find this helpful to have several mantras or change them every few months or find a new one unexpectedly and decide to adopt it. But I challenge you to give it a try, develop a personal mantra, and repeat as needed.

If you know someone who could benefit from hearing this message, share it with them. Simply sharing a link to this episode could help someone feel better and grow stronger! And if you like the show, make sure to subscribe to us on your favorite platform!

Amy Morin ([08:07](#)):

Do you want free access to my online mental strength course? It's called "10 Mental Strength Exercises That Will Help You Reach Your Greatest Potential." To get your free pass, just leave us a review on Apple Podcasts. Take a screenshot of your review and email it to us. Our address is podcast@verywell.com. We'll reply with your all-access pass to the course. Thank you for hanging out with me today and listening to *The Verywell Mind Podcast*. And as always, a big thank you to my show's producer, who knows lots of random fun facts about baseball, Nick Valentin.