

## Affirmations and Rewiring the Brain

Have you ever driven home from work and spaced out, and when you finally got home you could not remember how you got from point A to point B? This autopilot happens when your unconscious mind knows the way, releasing your conscious mind from having to pay close attention.

This is called **implicit memory** and is ingrained, automatic, and habituated. This is where our limiting beliefs have become lodged after years of repeated belief. A popular method of changing these underlying beliefs is to use **affirmation statements** that focus on what you WANT to believe, think and feel. You see, you're affirming yourself all the time, whether you realize it or not. Your repeating thoughts are what you are affirming, whether they are negative and limiting or positive and empowering.

The problem is that you'll believe whatever you tell yourself regularly. If you tell yourself, "I'm just not smart enough" or "I don't have time" you'll find both to be true. However, if you repeat carefully crafted, positive affirmations to yourself regularly, such as when a negative belief is triggered AND throughout the day, you practice this *new* belief, helping it become ingrained into your implicit, automatic, memory.

**The goal of positive affirmations is for them to become habituated and turn into BELIEFS!**

This takes time and repetition. This is especially true if the old beliefs are highly emotionally charged. Let's look at this further.

***Neurons that fire together, wire together.*** Your habituated thoughts (aka beliefs) are wired responses in your brain. They work through **associations**, meaning a particular person, location, topic, or thing is associated with a certain memory and/or emotional state. This association, at a physical level, is a neuron connection or "wire" in your brain that connects the "thing" to the **emotional memory**. When we're exposed to that stimulus (whether thinking about it or experiencing it), the brain automatically follows the wire from that "thing" to the thought and emotion associated with it. The reason this happens is that the brain likes to be EFFICIENT! It is designed to make these connections so that you can quickly interpret and respond to future life experiences.

These wires are created even more strongly when we get emotional about something. The brain connects the emotional state to whatever is going on around us at the time. The best example is music. If you've ever listened to a song while experiencing emotional situations in your life (positive or negative), that song will forever trigger the emotion to come back when you listen to it in the future. This is why that song you listened to and cried when your girl or boyfriend broke up with you still makes your heart ache or why your favorite high school anthem still pumps you up.

Unfortunately, sometimes the associations our brain creates link the emotion to something that was not truly the cause. This faulty wiring can do more harm than good. For example, if your

parents told you “we need to talk” every time just before you got in trouble, then in the future if a friend or spouse says “we need to talk” you’ll immediately become defensive.

Practicing positive affirmations is important, but taming your **negative triggers** is even more vital. The key to recognizing your negative triggers is to become a student of your own emotions—especially when the emotion does not seem to fit the situation. By becoming aware of triggers, you start to take their power away. Then, you can practice a new, desired thought (affirmation) about that same object that triggers you, and you can train the brain to associate the object with positive emotions and intentional thoughts, rather than those old programs.

*Over time, the neural network in your brain **LITERALLY** gets re-wired through repetition and these new affirmative beliefs become the new **NORMAL**—they become your automatic, go-to thought, response, or emotion.*

## **KICK YOUR AFFIRMATIONS UP A NOTCH WITH INCANTATIONS!**

Incantations are affirmations that engage your body and brain! Incantations take affirmations a step further and make them **PHYSICAL**. An incantation is a phrase or language pattern that is said *out loud* and with an engaged physiology. Putting affirmations into motion engages more of your brain and makes it more real. Incantations are spoken **OUT LOUD** because this sends additional signals to your brain that you are **SERIOUS**. If you must do your incantation when other people are around and you don’t want to draw undue attention to yourself, you can do it silently—but whenever you can, say it out loud and with gusto!

## **The 6 P’s of Effective Affirmations (and Incantations)**

When working on your affirmations, use what you’ve learned about psychology and the brain to **AMPLIFY** your results by following the 6 P’s!

1. **Possible:** You must believe your affirmation is possible. You don’t necessarily have to believe it 100% yet, but you at least have to reasonably believe it is possible and reasonable.
2. **Power:** Your affirmation must be within the power of your control. Affirmations are what we are telling our own brains to take action on. Affirming that it won’t rain on your wedding day or that your boyfriend will stop being so critical is ineffective because they’re outside of your control. Instead, affirm that you’ll find great joy in your wedding, regardless of the weather, or that you’ll communicate openly and honestly about how you feel and take constructive criticism with grace.
3. **Present:** Write affirmations in the present tense—as if it’s happening now. Use words like “am” instead of “will”.
4. **Personal:** Use “I” statements and, again, keep your affirmations focused on yourself, not things outside of yourself.

5. **Positive:** Focus on what you DO want, not what you do NOT want. Avoid words such as “not” and “don’t”. For example, instead of saying “I am not yelling at my kids” say “I am speaking to my kids constructively and lovingly.”
6. **Passion:** The key ingredient to effective affirmations is to FEEL IT! The emotional response to your affirmation statement is what allows the brain to create new wires. This is also why using incantations is so powerful.

And, lastly, repeat your affirmations consistently. This means repeating them often and over a long period of time. Write them down and post them somewhere visible in your home. Program an alarm to remind you to look at them at specific times of day. Keep a copy of them in your phone or wallet. And, commit to reviewing them daily for 30 days.

*Now that you understand the science behind affirmations and the keys to making them effective, you have the power to rewire your brain!*