

CHANGE YOUR MIND--without "thinking"

By Judy Armes (The Homework Coach)

<http://www.HomeworkSuccessNetwork.com>

CHANGE YOUR MIND...without "thinking"

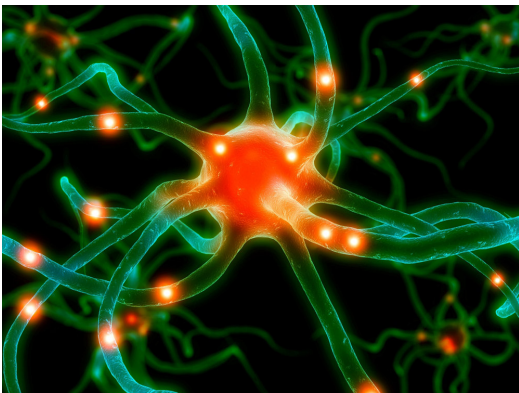
Using Affirmations is an easy and methodical way to focus your mind on a change you want to make in the way you think or behave. The brain is an amazing "animal"...it seems to have a mind of its own...often thinking thoughts we wish it wouldn't and talking us into behaviors we'd like to avoid. How often do we say things like "I can't make up my mind" or "I'm angry with myself that I did that."??? Don't you find yourself wondering who the "I" is and who "myself" is or even whose "mind" is this anyway?

There's been tons of research about how the brain works (and there will probably be a lot more, since we are an inquisitive species). But what we know for sure at this point is that the brain creates *habitual patterns of thought*. If it didn't, you wouldn't be able walk or talk in "real time"...it would take way too many processes to get the thoughts organized, the muscles to function and then orchestrate the response to all work in synch--INSTANTLY. It is literally mind-boggling.

Thank heavens we don't need to know *how* it all works (in detail) as long as we can acknowledge that it does and then use methodical automatic thought to our advantage.

In the beginning...

Thinking patterns develop probably before birth as the neurons (nerve cells) in our teeny-tiny brains are trying to figure out thumb-sucking and other intentional movements in the womb. However, once we're outside and responding to our new spacious and treacherous environment we are (for sure) busy creating patterns of thought to streamline immediate reactions/responses so they can be automatic when we need 'em.



For example, if you had to think about pulling your hand away from a hot flame, you'd get plenty crispy if you had to think about it and then coerce your muscles into action to save you. Instead, patterns of

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physiological behaviors develop between your brain and your body to keep you safe, automatically.

Similarly, there are *thinking behaviors* that we develop that are useful. When a child is startled by a big noise, it is a useful behavior to let a parent know he/she needs help--hence a big scream or cry is the valuable response a child learns. Kids also learn how to get positive attention. It is no accident that babies learn (all of 'em) to smile on purpose somewhere around 6 weeks. If they didn't figure out a way to endear themselves to an exhausted mom, who knows what would happen to them? So, a beginning socialization "tool" is learned and they get really good at using it when needed to stimulate parent action.

That brings us to *thinking habits*. A good example is a fear (or "healthy respect", if you will) for dogs. The first time a kid sees a dog, he'll experience either a positive or negative impression. The next time that kid sees a dog, he'll build on or refute his previous experience. And then, each subsequent dog experience will continue to emphasize a growing impression for the child about the concept of "all dogs".

A learned impression is darned hard to change.

You may have noticed with your kids, that once an impression becomes solidified in a child's mind, it's almost impossible to talk him/her out of it. Back to dogs for a minute, if your child has a fear of dogs, what happens every time she gets close to one? An automatic thought behavior kicks in and you're likely to see her shrink back behind you or maybe she'll even let out an outright wail. No amount of talking, cajoling or shaming will make her comfortable at that moment. (I bet you've tried...how did it work?)

Let's use another example: if a child experiences difficulty with reading, how willing do you imagine he'd be to read in front of the class? You may think it's all about the "reading". But it is likely also contaminated with a combination of accessory memories/thoughts. It is possible that he will be remembering a previous



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embarrassing experience when he read out loud; it is possible that he felt shamed by his teacher when he mispronounced a word; it is possible that when he was nervous he began to stutter or shudder and the physiological feeling reinforces his fear. --we learn to think that if we "feel" fear, there must be something to be afraid of.

EveryONE is a unique "specimen" of the human race

The point of all this discussion is to suggest that there are lots of reasons individual people do what they do. Everyone is unique with their own reflections of their own unique experiences. And each of us has developed our own individualized approach to new experiences based upon our own unique perceptions.

So what's a parent to do when his/her child is almost impossible to "push off the mark" about a fear or dreaded experience or a notion of helplessness? Are you doomed to accepting your child's perceptions or beliefs or reactions to new experiences? NO!

Do you need to ferret out the original experience and try to erase it? Nope...you couldn't even if you wanted to.

The only way to change your child's mind or belief system is to create new experiences. To return to our Dog example: just telling your child that dogs aren't scary won't change his mind. To go up to a strange dog and demonstrate that it isn't dangerous might even backfire--if the dog doesn't cooperate in the lesson. The only way to change an opinion or physiological response to an event is to intentionally create a new successful event...to be experienced enough times to de-fuse or over-power a previous impression.

"How?", you might ask. Aye, there's the rub! But hang on, there IS an answer.

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"Camera, Lights, Action"--Setting up the experience.



When you go to the movies, almost magically you are transported into sensory "experience". The tricks-of-the-movie-trade are subtle...but they are all intentionally created to bring you fully into the experience...to create a sense that you-are-there. Without narration, you can SEE evidence that whisks you into the experience. You HEAR the voices of the actors as you attend to their demonstration of their plight and you also hear the background noises that the sound techs have covertly crafted to make you experience the era and location of the scene. Nothing is left to chance; everything is congruent; nothing you see or hear startles you back to

reality-- which is that you are sitting in the dark watching flickering flashes of light on a screen teamed up with a blaring sound system that sometimes evens rumbles so you FEEL it.

Pretty soon you forget that what you're seeing is two-dimensional. You become absorbed in the action--You're actually "there". The sounds, the bigger-than-life images, your focused attention all work together to create an illusion of inclusion--your mind (for a moment) really experiences the same event that the actors seem to be "experiencing".

According to Dr Maxwell Maltz, in his old-old-old book PsychoCybernetics, our brains are sitting inside our skulls depending upon sensory input to evaluate our world. He contends that if when we experience enough detail in what we perceive (with enough sensory data), our brains don't know what's real and what's not. A good example is a really sensory dream (with sound, color and scary events). You might wake up shaking, sweating and fearful after such a dream, until you realize it was a figment of your imagination. But it will still take a few minutes to recover from your physiological reactions...until you "talk" yourself into realizing that it wasn't real.

Back to the movie example...remember the last scene in "Wait Until Dark"? If you're not *that* old, you're sure to remember startling events in movies like Jurassic Park. Even if

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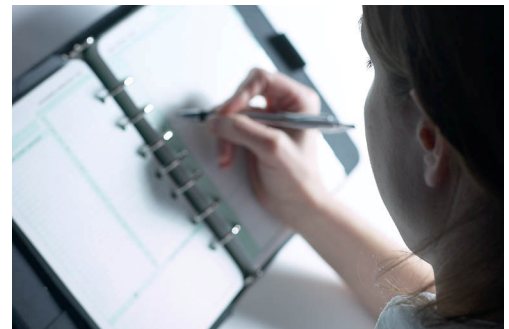
you've seen the movie before, there is a moment when EVERYONE jumps. It's a physiological reaction to the sudden startle...even when you know it's coming. This is one of the best examples of the mind-memory-body disconnect. When you are fully absorbed in the experience, your logical mind is just along-for-the-ride. You can become so present-focused that you don't access your rational memory banks for the reality that you KNOW!

So, now what...How do you change your mind?

How do you recreate what you think?

The first step is to acknowledge that many of your thoughts are automatic. As adults we've lived a long time with plenty of opportunities to create automatic patterns of thought. If you want to change a pattern, you're going to have to work *intentionally* to do it (because your "automatic" thinking wants to keep you doing the same as always).

Here's some Science: according to research it takes 21 days to change a habit...that's if you're working at it consistently and often. In one of the more famous studies, researchers wanted to find out how long it would take for people who routinely put on their right shoe first to change their habit to putting their left shoe on first. Sounds simple, doesn't it?



So every day when the subjects put their shoes on, they were prompted to *intentionally* put their left shoe on first. They actually had to be reminded otherwise their old habit would press them to automatically pick up that right shoe first. An important component of the experiment was *consistency*-- this habit was chosen because every subject was likely at least once each day to put his/her shoes on. And, it was also likely that most subjects didn't perform the "shoes-on" behavior more than once each day.

It took 21 days for the subjects to automatically (without prompting) change their habit. "Whoosh!", you might utter in disbelief --and maybe even frustration. If it took them 21 days to change such an inconsequential habit, how are we going to change our most unfavorable habits into good habits ALL BY OURSELVES????

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Good News--You can CHANGE YOUR MIND (if you really want to)

There are two very important principles in behavior change:

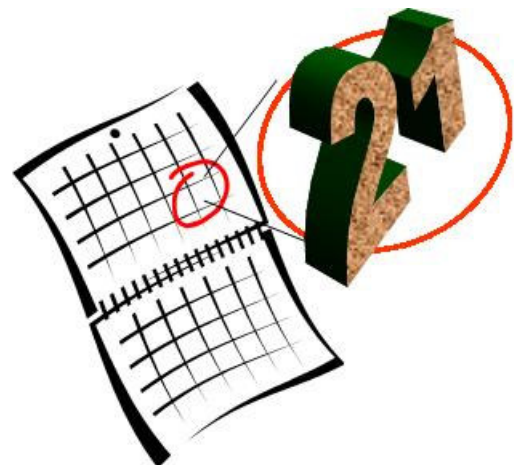
1. *Consistent repetition* of an action is required to create a new pattern of behavior
2. And, it's easier to DO something than to NOT do something

Two examples that resonate with lots of people are: 1) Stopping Smoking and 2) Sticking to a Diet. Both of these habitual behaviors have to do with NOT doing something...*not* smoking and *not* eating. The unfortunate aspect of not doing something that your "other mind" (where ever it is) wants you to do is that you have this constant conflicted argument. "I want to...*no you don't*...I want to...*no you don't*..." Can you hear it? "I" is me and the contrary voice feels like someone-else is telling "me" not to. It's confusing. Who is "I" and who is "me" and where is that other voice coming from?

The value of knowing the difficulty of changing a thinking habit by NOT doing something is that you know that "will power" isn't enough. It suggests that you're more likely to succeed in changing a habit (behavioral or thinking) if you actively DO something. The trick is to intentionally think (or do) something new until the new behavior becomes a habit. And remember, it takes 21 days, according to the shoe study.

How an "Affirmation" Works...

Changing a thought pattern isn't as hard as you might think. You just need to think a new thought frequently and consistently and avoid thinking the old thought for 21 days. The more you think the new thought, the more you're activating a new pattern in your brain (really!). It is important that you avoid using the old pattern because you'll dilute the replacement process. Think of it like taking two steps forward and one step back. It'll take you a lot longer to get wherever you are going...than if you keep taking forward steps only.



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The snag is that your brain has the old pattern all greased up and ready for you to slide right down the old pathway. So, you have to work extra hard on exercising the new pathway...and visit it often. So, let's do the math--if you think the new thought 10 times a day and the old thought 20 times a day, you're in for a long, long re-training...if ever. Instead if you can make the "experience" of the new thought more potent than the old thought, you'll make movement in the right direction...but it'll be even more profound if you can simultaneously reduce the old thought's frequency dramatically.

Here's where we learn something from the movie folks and Dr Maxwell Maltz. The more our brain (in its cranial isolation) can be made to "believe" our experience is real, the faster the behavior change will occur. If we want a new behavior to replace the old one, we need to focus upon the new one with *our senses* as well as our *mind*.

Include Sensory input to support New Thinking Behaviors (aka "thought habits")

If you want the most potent re-training for your new behavior you'll get faster results if you can consistently and frequently use ALL of your senses --Seeing, Hearing, Feeling, Smell and Taste. Seeing, Hearing, Feeling are easier to create method for practicing a new experience --Smelling and Tasting are a little more difficult--but for most people they are also often less potent than the first three.

Since a habit is an expected behavior (you expect yourself to do it and then you do it), we often don't actually have a full and detailed picture of what the new habit would look like. We know what the old behavior is, we know what to expect and what will happen as a result. We know how to think about it, how to argue with ourselves about it, what it will feel like if we don't do it and what it will feel like if we do. But we may not be as familiar with the "data" a new behavior will provide experientially.



What can you do to navigate uncharted territory? What this means is that like a gifted movie director, you need to put in a little work to *create an illusion* that your body and

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mind can *experience*. Meditation is one way to imagine, see, hear and feel--intentionally. For those who can do it, GREAT! But for a lot of us, meditation could seem like just another habit change and some of us find it difficult to commit to learning meditation to reap its rewards. (I am SO not putting down meditation...it is amazing and so useful for mind, body and soul. But, in our busy and thought-absorbed lives, it is sometimes difficult to create the peace-and-quiet moments required to learn meditation so that we can effectively use it to change our minds.)

Developing an Effective Affirmation Strategy

You may have used Affirmations before...and maybe you got results...maybe you didn't. Creating a successful strategy for using Affirmations is important. It's not difficult but there is a science to it. For example, some might say that you need to use "positive self-talk". As an example, imagine yourself looking in the mirror (the seeing component), and you say to yourself (the hearing and body-mechanical component), "I am beautiful and slim". That might work if you really believe it...right now. If the affirmation is to encourage you to change an eating pattern, this particular affirmation won't work...and without changing that behavioral pattern, the words alone won't work. You won't lose an ounce. In fact they could backfire... your mind might argue back to your statement--"you are not!". In which case, you could become discouraged and give up.

To change a thought or behavior habit, you need to be very clear and concise about the result you want. You need to imagine what it would look like and feel like. You need to experience what you're doing now that will result in the changed behavior.

Let's use an example of a behavior that lots of parents wish they could change: fighting siblings. The "doing" in stating a desired end result is that kids will interact peacefully and engage positively with each other. It might have been easy to consider "no-more-fighting" as a desired end result. But that would be coming at the problem from a "NOT" position rather than a "DO" approach.



Just to make this point a little easier to SEE: imagine your kids not fighting. What does it look like when they don't fight? What are they doing? What are they saying to each other? How

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are they physically positioning themselves--close proximity, an arm's-length apart? To say you don't want them to fight leaves them potentially without a "picture" of what not-fighting truly looks like. It may seem like a vacuum, an empty space. And how do you DO nothing? At any particular moment none of us is "doing nothing"...we're breathing, we're moving, we're thinking, we're speaking, we're watching, we're always *doing something*.

So rather than visualizing a VOID, an effective affirmation (to get a desired behavior change) has to include a "doing"--something you can visualize or sense. To use the "stop-kids-fighting" example, an *effective* affirmation strategy might include as a desired end result: "playing cooperatively with each other", "talking in normal voice", "taking turns", "sharing toys"--these are all DOING things that you can imagine, see, "hear" and physiologically feel (i.e. peaceful, happy, content, etc.).



Crafting an Affirmation Strategy including Thinking and Sensory cues

The most effective Affirmation Strategy includes Thinking and Sensory cues that will re-program automatic thought behavior patterns. This means you'll get more punch with your affirmations if you can include multiple senses in addition to an intentional thought. Therefore, in preparation for developing an Affirmation, imagine what you want as an outcome...using as much sensory prompting as possible.

See it:	Imagine yourself performing the new behavior, imagine the results or outcome of your behavior change.
Hear it:	Imagine the sounds you'll hear while performing the new behavior (i.e.--friendly conversation, children giggling, etc.)
Feel it:	Intentionally imagine and notice what your body would feel like when you perform the new behavior (i.e.--relaxed, confident, comfortable, energized, etc.)

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Smell it & Taste it:

Thank heavens these senses are the least potent of the experiential learning pathways, because they are a little tough to creatively include for most behavior changes. But you CAN do it! Try to imagine the scents that you'll smell when you perform the new behavior...or the tastes of food that you might enjoy when you perform the new behavior.

Now, this may seem like a gargantuan task at this point...and you might think it is going to take a lot of effort to make your behavior change via an Affirmation Strategy. But take heart: I've included a description of the complete process so that you can understand how important it is to "fool" your mind a la "PsychoCybernetics".

Once you've imagined what you want, you need to craft a statement that characterizes your desired outcome. Remember, it'll take 21 days if you merely perform the new behavior once a day. But, when you have an accurate and potent statement (and you repeat it several times a day) you'll speed up the process and get results quickly.

Crafting an EFFECTIVE AFFIRMATION Statement

Many people have used the process of Affirmations and become discouraged when it appeared to be "busy-work" and didn't get results. Part of the problem might have been a poorly crafted statement...or an arguable vision.

Imagine if you thought you were WAY-overweight (just for a moment!!!!), how would your mind respond if you looked in the mirror and told yourself, "*I am slim and full of energy*". For many people who have tried to lose weight, this particular statement can backfire! You say to yourself one thing...and your mind (the other "you") argues back.

Again, if you do the math, it's like taking one step forward and one step back--except you may actually be slipping further behind as your old thinking has more practice and more profound impact on your thinking. Instead, a person who wants a dramatic change needs to craft a statement that does not cause an automatic knee-jerk argument.

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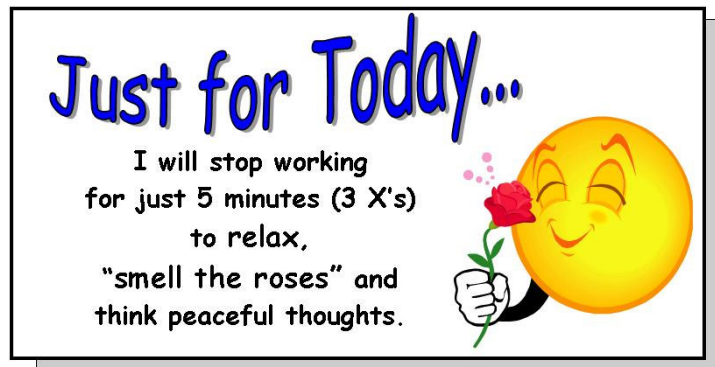
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A useful Affirmation for someone who wants to lose weight might be: "Just for today, I will eat only healthy foods". Or to take an even smaller step: "Just for today, I will eat a healthful lunch".

To avoid an internal argument that will undermine your efforts, the Affirmation Statement must be Truthful and Possible. Test your Affirmation Statement before you get too involved. It should start with: "I will _____." for a *particular*

length of time or for a *specific number of times per day*. Then you need to specifically state what *you will do*: "take a 5 minute walk", or "say something kindly to my child", or "breathe deeply", or "drink a glass of water". [Beware: If your affirmation says, "Before the end of the week, I will design and build a new Taj Mahal", you can bet you will be disappointed. And, your other mind is sure to argue with you!!! So, make certain that your statement is do-able!!!]

I also suggest that you make the Affirmation *time-limited*. For this reason, including the phrase, "Just for today", is especially useful. It makes the statement possible...just for today. And, even if you don't do it, you can start fresh tomorrow with the same statement.



Tools to Maximize Your EFFECTIVE AFFIRMATION Strategy

Each of us is unique (have I said that before?)!!! So, each of us has our own way of responding to Affirmations. Some people "get it" better by reading...some by seeing graphical pictures...some by hearing...some by touching. The benefit of using several modes of input is that no matter who you are or how you learn, you'll "get it" by using as many of the modes of input as you can muster.

Affirmation cards or **post-its** are easy to make, easy to distribute and easy to use. So, for the beginner, I suggest writing, drawing, or snipping graphics that will stimulate you to think newly about a behavior change you'd like to make. Then applying the following

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Affirmation Strategy, you can press forward easily. Part of the re-learning comes from the physical act of doing/thinking/feeling. So, don't delegate the process.

- YOU choose the words you want to use & write or type them (it's tactile!)
- YOU choose and cut out the graphics you might want to use (it's tactile!)
- YOU scan them or copy them so that you'll have lots of chances to think newly
- And YOU commit to a week-by-week Affirmation Strategy

Note: If you are multi-media savvy, there are more complex and potentially satisfying methods of using the Affirmation process to create effective mind-changing materials. Multi-media projects require more effort than simple Affirmation cards and it is beyond the scope of this guide. However, using the principles of multiple sensory input and well-crafted Affirmation Statements, you can create very successful and art-worthy Affirmation processes!!!

If you know how to use your computer's custom screensaver program, you might want to put your Affirmations on a SCREEN SAVER. This is especially useful if you are often in an office where your screensaver can provide an interesting and changing subliminal message.

If you know how to create a POWERPOINT presentation or custom MOVIE, you can create an automatic Affirmation system that is "in your face" a LOT! This is especially useful if you backdrop a song that is meaningful and aligns with your Affirmation. By associating pictures or graphics or written Affirmations with a FAVORITE SONG, you'll automatically be reprogramming your mind whenever you listen.

Creating a Successful Affirmation Strategy

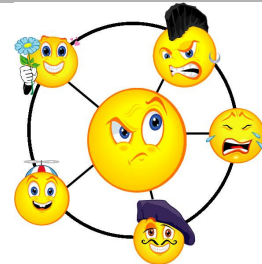


Step 1: Imagine your DESIRED BEHAVIORAL RESULT

- Describe your desired behaviors in "doing" terms
- What will it LOOK like? What will it SOUND like? What will it Feel like?
- How do you imagine you will feel when the new behavior is habitual?
- How will your day-to-day life be different with the new behavior?

Step 2: Determine WHO must be included to achieve your Desired Behavioral Result?

- You, your kids, your boss, your partner?
- Who will benefit from the behavioral change?
- What will the benefits be?



Step 3: What must YOU do to achieve your Desired Behavioral Result?

- Is it a DOING or a NOT DOING?
- DO!!!!!!...[Don't NOT DO....]

Step 4: List your repeated thought patterns that get in the way?

Be specific and thorough-- What words do you use? Where are you when you think 'em? What circumstances seem to stimulate the thoughts?



Step 5: Create potential new thought patterns to replace old thought patterns

- write down the old thought patterns
- reword them so they express your desired NEW thought patterns.

Step 6: Fabricate an AFFIRMATION card to start you off

- Make a bunch of them (for repetition)
- Use color (it's **visual** and **sensate**)
- Stick them up in places you're likely to see them often
(**touch & frequent repetition**)
- Explain them to anyone who asks (**restate** your desired result)
- Read your "affirmation" every time your gaze settles on one. (**Visual and Hearing**)



(Read out loud, if you're alone. Read quietly to yourself if other people are within earshot)

Resources:

Read about it:

Psycho-Cybernetics, A New Way to Get More Living Out of Life (Mass Market Paperback) by Dr. Maxwell Maltz (Author)

<http://www.amazon.com/Psycho-Cybernetics-New-More-Living-Life/dp/0671700758#>

You Can't Afford the Luxury of a Negative Thought (The Life 101 Series) (Paperback)

by Peter McWilliams & John-Roger

<http://www.amazon.com/Cant-Afford-Luxury-Negative-Thought/dp/0931580242>

Your Erroneous Zones (Mass Market Paperback) by Wayne Dyer

http://www.amazon.com/Your-Erroneous-Zones-Wayne-Dyer/dp/0061091480/ref=sr_1_13?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1242769946&sr=1-13#

--or anything else by Wayne Dyer ☺

"I cannot always control what goes on outside. But I can always control what goes on inside."

--Wayne Dyer

"I think and that is all that I am." --Wayne Dyer

To maximize your Affirmation strategy...

Mind-Body Experience: The more you *physically interact* with your Affirmation format, the more you'll impact your experience. When you write a phrase out (by hand), you make the most of your physical/muscle memory, you use your visual memory and you are practicing repetition by re-reading your statement again and again.

Crafting your card on a computer keeps your mind and body involved--your attention (for however long it takes you to design your statement and your visual representation) works toward making your statement "real" in your mind. Then when you print them out, you'll have truly identical Affirmations to stimulate thought behavior change.

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Feel it: If you are able to dig up a graphic or a photo that evokes the feeling you want, cut it out or copy it. Then you can include it in your Affirmation *visually*, but it will also stimulate the *feeling* you want to promote. If you use Microsoft, you can cut-and-paste emoticons like the ones used in the chart --visit: <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/clipart/results.aspx?qu=emoticons&sc=20#0>. Or if you prefer photos or drawings, visit Clip Art for Windows at <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/clipart/default.aspx> --you can choose your category, key words and style of graphic. Have at it!!!

Smell it & Taste it: (these are a little tough to creatively include for most behavior changes)...thank heavens it is the least potent of the experiential learning pathways. Suppose you are having a tough time with a child, and you're forgetting what he/she was like before turning into a nay-saying inconsiderate kid. One way you can get "smell" in the act is to put a small dab of whatever baby products you used (lotion, oil, powder) on your wrist, on your Affirmation card, on a handkerchief. Then when you're reading your Affirmation, you'll be also accessing the scent memory you had when your child was little.

Repetition retrains your thinking: The more often you are mentally involved and physically experiencing your new thought, the faster the old thought patterns will dwindle away. A new pattern will be developing and you want to make it STRONG! Therefore, to get the most "bang" for your Affirmations, put them wherever your attention might be caught. Make at least 8-10 identical Affirmation cards/post-its/notes so that you can sprinkle them liberally wherever your gaze might land: on the fridge door, on your bathroom mirror, on the doorway out of the house, on you sun-visor in your car, on your computer screen frame, on a kitchen cabinet by the sink...wherever you're likely to read 'em.

Then plan on keeping them "up" for a week. On the first 2 days, read them to yourself or out loud. (This is making your mind-body experience more profound as you are seeing and saying and even hearing your own voice when you are reading. The more often you read them, the more rapidly your new thought will become a "pattern".

For the remaining 5 days of your week, you don't need to read them (if you don't want to). Your mind is excellent at taking a "snapshot" of your card and re-experiencing the entire message---content and experience. So, continue to intentionally glance at your Affirmations wherever you see them--and know that it is working whether you read them entirely or not.

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Use Science: Remember the 21 day experiment? Here's some math: if you have 8 places you display your Affirmation and you look at 'em only 3 times a day, that's 24 "experiences". But to be really, really certain that you're impacting your thought pattern, why not continue your process for 7 days --that's over 150 experiences in a week. Whoop!!!

To write your own Affirmations, Craft your statement carefully (do-able, inarguable, time-specific, behavior specific). Then taking advantage of the mind-body experience, write your Affirmation on cards, post-its, or slips of paper, Make at least 8 identical cards/post-its/slips so that you're reinforcing an identical message/experience.

Add some pizzazz and color: I've included a page of ready-to-cut out Affirmation forms. Print out this page, write your Affirmation Statement on each one and cut 'em out. The added benefit in actually repeatedly writing your Affirmation is that it strengthens the mind-body memory you're creating.

Or, if you're fancy-dancy: make your own from scratch using photos or graphics clipped from magazines, photos of your kids, photos of yourself.

The more "Senses" you can include in your Affirmation, the more potent it will be...

Think it...

Write it...

Read it...

See it...

Touch it...

Hear it...

...and soon you'll Be it !!!

To access ready-to-print "Affirmations for Parents",
click on "Print Out Affirmation" at: <http://www.HomeworkSuccessNetwork.com>

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By Judy Armes (The Homework Coach)

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Just for Today...

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