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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.

Usually on Mondays, I introduce you to a mentally strong person whose story and mental strength tips can inspire you to think, feel, and do your best in life. But today's episode is a little different. I'm going to count down the top 10 most popular episodes of 2021 for you. The show has undergone some big changes in the past year. We started out as The Mentally Strong People Podcast before joining forces with Verywell Mind, the biggest mental health site in the world. So earlier this year, we changed our name to The Verywell Mind Podcast and started putting our episodes up on the Verywell Mind website.

We've had some really cool guests over the past year... authors, experts, musicians, athletes, and celebrities who shared their struggles as well as the steps they're taking to build mental strength. I got to share tons of tips and strategies straight from the therapy office. And the fun part is, we recorded almost every single episode from a sailboat in the Florida Keys. I've heard from so many of you about which shows you liked, which exercises you've started using, and what kind of content you want to hear in the future. So today we're looking back at which episodes were listened to the most and why those seem to be so popular. Here are the top 10 episodes from 2021 on The Verywell Mind Podcast!

Coming in at number 10, episode 104, “How To Choose Progress Over Perfection with Peloton instructor Ally Love.” Ally is a Peloton instructor with a huge following on social media. Her positive energy seems to naturally attract people to her. She makes it clear though that she's also a work in progress.

And I have to come to terms with, and this is something that I tell myself often is, people's opinions of me has nothing to do with me, right? It's none of my business. I have to just be my best self. I have to do my best, be my best, and whatever that looks like, the opinions of others, that's their opinion. Right? And
so I think that that was a real live example, sincerely this morning of I'm letting go of this perfect idea of everyone needs to only write good comments about me, or I have to do everything perfect for everyone else to like me, because that's a reflection of who I am. I had to let go of that. And the way to do that is to look in the mirror. Again, check myself, get back to the point of everyone's opinions and what people think about me is none of my business. I have to continue to love myself and be happy with who I am. And so it was me doing that work and having that moment of shift. And it wasn't instantaneous. It's not like after I said that in the mirror, everything was fine. OMG, life is great again. No, it's just, again, it's work in progress.

Amy Morin: On the show, she talks about how she sometimes has an all-or-nothing thinking mentality. If she's going to do something, she wants to do it, be all in, and do it flawlessly. Of course, that's not realistic. We all make mistakes and a mistake doesn't mean that you're not good enough or that you shouldn't try. It's just an opportunity to learn and move forward. So in this episode, Ally talks about how to value your progress, even when you're not perfect. She gives some great examples of how she's working on this in her own life and shares how she encourages her fitness clients to work on getting back on track after they've messed up. If you tend to be a perfectionist or you struggle to get back on track after you mess up, check out episode 104 with Ally Love.

Number nine on our list is episode 106, “Psychological Tricks for Creating Lasting Change with Professor Katy Milkman.” Katy Milkman researches the science behind habits and change. Her book, “How To Create Change,” is really helpful for anyone who wants to stick to a new habit or get rid of an unhealthy one. We all have habits that we think about changing. Maybe you want to eat less junk food, or maybe you want to go to sleep earlier every night, but there's a huge gap between knowing something and doing it. That's where Katy's research comes in. She shares some effective, but simple strategies for changing our behavior and for making those changes stick.

Katy Milkman: So the more specific we can get with making those kinds of plans, the better, but sometimes you actually don't know enough about what it is you want to achieve to be able to get into the planning phase without gathering more information, and one overlooked path I think to gathering that information is something that my collaborator, Angela Duckworth and I have called “copy and paste.”

So often people don't look at those who surround them deliberately and look for what's working for them when they have a similar goal. And we've found that if you prompt people to go look for someone else who resembles you, who has the same goal and has been making some progress on it and try to actually interrogate them a little bit in a positive way about what are the tactics, what are the very specific tactics that they have used to make progress on their goal so that you can actually try to emulate, literally copy and paste what they're doing. Too few people use the strategy. And when we simply prompt people to do it, they end up getting further than if we simply prompt them to make a plan, because sometimes we need more information to get to our goals in the best
possible way. And a great source of information is like-minded others in your social network of similar constraints, similar lifestyles, and have actually figured out already how to make progress. So why not try to learn from them? That's even better than learning from the internet or books. You're often going to see that they have faced similar obstacles to the ones you've faced. And so their solutions will be more useful.

Amy Morin: She talks about some of the fun research studies she's done, like the one small change that made workers at Google more likely to hit the gym. So if you're looking to figure out how to make lasting change in your life, especially as you're thinking about possibly making a new year's resolution, listen to episode 106 with Katy Milkman.

Number eight on our list is episode 110, "How To Be Sad with Bestselling Author, Helen Russell." So at first glance, it might seem strange that one of our most popular episodes was about sadness. Rather than talk about how to be happy, this episode is about how to be sad, but most of us weren't ever taught what to do when we feel sad. When we see other people sad, we try to cheer them up, because we don't want them to be sad either. But there's nothing wrong with being sad. In fact, embracing a little sadness sometimes might help you appreciate the happy times even more. So I was thrilled to talk to Helen Russell for this episode. She's the author of a really good book called "How To Be Sad." She wrote it after she spent years studying happiness and why some people just seem to be happier than others. She found that allowing yourself the opportunity to feel sad is actually a really important component in happiness.

In this episode, she talks about how to tolerate sad feelings and what to do when you're feeling down. But I promise it's not a depressing episode. Instead, it might just give you a little more confidence that you can handle sad feelings, and doing just that might make you feel happier than ever.

Helen Russell: The Aristotle idea of happiness, of a good life being one where you have some good luck because tragedy can affect anyone and it will affect our happiness. So it seems to me that working out what has happened to us is really important, as well as thinking about whether there is something wrong with us, because perhaps there isn't a lot of the time. So yeah, I think sadness is a temporary emotion that can be awakening. It's this temporary message that can tell us what's wrong, but if we listen and many of us don't, I guess in our busy modern lives.

Amy Morin: Of course, Helen differentiates between sadness and depression and offers some helpful information on when to get professional help. So if you're looking to learn more about how to deal with sad feelings, check out episode 110 with Helen Russell.

And number seven on our list is episode 56, "How To Believe in Yourself with IT Cosmetics founder, Jamie Kern Lima." Jamie had skin issues that weren't addressed by makeup. So she created her own product line, but she was
repeatedly told that she wasn't going to make it in the beauty industry. She figured out how to believe in herself though, even when other people didn't believe in her. And she kept going.

Jamie Kern Lima: Rejection is so painful and always, it never really gets easier, I guess. And I still get rejection every day. Every day. I just try to not be afraid of it. I think that... And sharing it helps people feel less alone, but yeah, it was a long journey.

Amy Morin: Her products, known as IT Cosmetics, became a billion-dollar business. And she credits her success with the fact that she believed in herself. So she wrote a book called “Believe It.” And in this episode, she shares how she found the self-confidence she needed to reach her goals. If you struggle with self-doubt, this episode is for you. Check out episode number 56 with Jamie Kern Lima to hear her tips on how to believe in yourself.

And coming in at number six is episode 88, a Friday Fix episode called “How to Stop Sabotaging Yourself.” I'm thrilled that this episode has been so popular. As a therapist, I spend a lot of time talking to people about how to stop sabotaging themselves. On the surface though, most of us don't think that we're doing it. After all, why would you do something that essentially makes your life more difficult? Well, there's several reasons. Sometimes we like to get rid of the tension we feel that says we should be perfect. At other times we're uncomfortable when things seem like they're too easy or too calm, so we mess things up. Usually these things happen somewhat subconsciously though, but once you realize you're doing it, you can't unsee it. You'll see how you're tempted to sabotage yourself in some pretty creative ways. And you'll discover new ways of doing things.

So if you just can't seem to ever reach your goals, listen to this episode. You might find that you're sabotaging yourself without even knowing it. To learn more, listen to episode number 88, “How to Stop Sabotaging Yourself.”

And coming in at number five is episode 111, another Friday Fix episode called “How to Reduce Suffering Through Radical Acceptance.” No one wants to suffer. And usually the last thing you want to hear when you something tough is that you should accept it. But there's a reason this episode is so popular. Radical acceptance works. And I don't mean you have to accept people treating you poorly or anything like that. Instead, it's about accepting the situation for what it is. That doesn't mean that you can't create change later on. In fact, the sooner you accept something, the sooner you can take action. It's our unwillingness to accept certain things that often turns pain into suffering. So, in this episode, I share about a common therapeutic strategy, radical acceptance. Check out episode 111, and I'll explain how to use radical acceptance in your own life.

Coming in at number four is episode 108. Matthew McConaughey explains how to become more involved in your own life. It's not surprising that Matthew McConaughey made it near the top of the list this year. He had a new book come out called “Green Lights,” and he came on the show to talk about how to
recognize the green lights in your life, essentially when to take action and what to do when you encounter red lights, those obstacles that threaten your success.

Matthew McConaughey:

In the writing of the book I noticed, wow, every failure you had or hardship, a lot of them paid off. You got rewarded later. Every sacrifice you took or healthy risk you took, you paid off. The times where I was at my lowest had value. The Australian year. I don't think I'd be sitting here talking to you right now with the life I have if I didn't have that year in Australia. It was one of the hardest years of my life. So that had a green light asset, it had green lights in that, a very red light year. The death of my father, red light. I wouldn't be the man I am right now or would've had the courage to initiate myself to man up and become the person I am without his passing away.

Amy Morin:

There was a moment though, in the interview, that was a little uncomfortable. I had read his book and in it, he talks about the physical altercations his parents used to get into, but he refers to their story as a great love story. I wanted to make it clear that physical fights constitute domestic violence. As a therapist, I couldn't let that go. I felt like it needed to be addressed. He, however, didn't share my concerns. But that's OK. It would be boring if all of our guests agreed with me. Tune into this episode to hear more of the things he has to say about writing in a journal, increasing your self-awareness, and handling the green lights and the red lights in life.

Number three on our list is episode 67, another Friday Fix about how to stay mentally strong when you’re stressed out. Stress is another one of those things that most of us weren't ever taught how to manage, but we hear it all the time. People say things like, "You need to reduce your stress," or "You should find some stress management techniques." But no one ever really says what those things are. I teach classes at Northeastern University in Boston. One of the classes I teach is stress management. There's always a huge waiting list to get into that class because college students are genuinely interested in learning how to manage stress. It’s probably something that all of us should be taught at a young age.

These past couple years have certainly been stressful for most people. And we've done some surveys on stress at Verywell Mind and our findings surprised us a little bit though. Can you guess what the number one thing is that most people have consistently been stressed out about for the past year? Financial stress. Stress about the pandemic health issues, parenting problems, and relationship issues all went down over time, but financial stress hasn't budged even as the situation has changed in terms of the pandemic. So it's not surprising that this episode on stress has been a popular one. If you're looking for some strategies to manage your stress better, tune into this episode, and I'll tell you how.

Coming in at number two on our list is episode 99, “Can Psychedelics Heal Your Emotional Pain with Psychologist Brian Pilecki.” Our most popular guest episode of the entire year was this interview with Brian Pilecki, a psychologist in Portland, Oregon who's on the forefront of psychedelic research. As of now, psychedelics
are not prescribed and they're illegal in most places, but there's a lot of research that shows LSD, mushrooms, and other psychedelics might be really helpful in treating depression, anxiety, or substance abuse problems. It's been a little tricky to research the topic though, since psychedelics are illegal, but the research that is out is quite promising and it looks like therapists in some states will start using psychedelics in their therapy practice in the near future.

Brian Pilecki: And if we can get this right and show this can be done, yes, I believe it will really open the doors to more widespread use of this. I think there's also the potential for things to go wrong. And, so it's still up in the air, at least in my sense of understanding, it's kind of an experiment. Our modern culture doesn't really have a place for these experiences. We live in a very rational, more secular culture, at least that's the area of the country that I live in. Your audience members might be from all over the country, but in general, these kinds of far out experiences that can involve elements of a mystical experience or weird things happen when you take magic mushrooms, our culture doesn't hold a place for this. But as you mentioned, the attitudes around drugs are changing very quickly. We're seeing this with cannabis. So it's possible that as this becomes more known and widespread that people will understand that these experiences can actually be beneficial.

Amy Morin: So on this episode, Brian Pilecki explains what's going on in Oregon, how using psychedelics in therapy is different from recreational use, and how they're helpful. He also explains the risks associated with using them. So if you're interested in psychedelics or you want more information on how to join a psychedelics support group, check out episode number 99 to learn more.

And coming in at number one on our list is episode 102, a Friday Fix about “How to Stop Focusing on Things You Can't Control.” I love that this was our most popular episode of the year. I wrote an entire chapter about this subject in my book, “13 Things Mentally Strong People Don't Do.” And it's a topic that I'm often asked about.

When you really stop to think about it. You don't have control over a lot of things. You can't control the weather, the economy, or public policy. But the biggest thing that most of us struggle to accept is that we don't have control over other people. Most of us waste a lot of time worrying about how other people are going to behave, or we worry about whether they're going to change, or whether they're going to like us. You can easily waste a lot of time and brain power wishing that things would be different, hoping certain things wouldn't happen, or trying to predict the future. When you let go of those things that you can't control though, you'll have the mental strength that you need to focus on the things you can control. So I'm excited that this episode topped the list this year. If you want to learn more about how to stop focusing on things you can't control, check out episode 102.

So those are our top 10 most popular episodes from 2021. But of course, I'd love to hear from you. I want to know who your favorite guests were, the topics you
liked best, and the exercises you’re using to stay mentally stronger. The best way to reach me is on Instagram, where you can find me as @amymorinauthor.

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 this show, make sure to subscribe to us on your favorite platform.

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Thank you for hanging out with me today and for listening to The Verywell Mind Podcast! And as always, a big thank you to my show’s producer (who helped to make this podcast successful while also making the podcast studio a fun place to work), Nick Valentin.