Welcome to The Verywell Mind Podcast. I'm Amy Morin, the editor-in-chief of Verywell Mind. I'm also a psychotherapist and a best-selling author of four books on mental strength. Every Monday, 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. And the fun part is, we record the show from a sailboat in the Florida Keys. Don't forget to subscribe to the show on your favorite platform so you can get mental strength tips delivered to you every single week.

Now, let's dive into today's episode!

Do you struggle to recognize your own strengths? Do you have a hard time owning your success? Do you treat yourself harshly? If any of those things sound familiar, you're going to like today's episode. I'm talking to KJ Smith. She's an actress who's appeared in a long list of TV shows. Currently, she has a leading role in the hit show “Sistas,” and she's starring in the upcoming season of the extremely popular show “PowerBook III: Raising Kanan.”

KJ struggled with depression at times, and she also struggled when her career didn't take off as fast as she'd hoped. But she's learned to become her own biggest fan, and she's created a healthy environment that allows her to thrive. Some of the things she talks about today are how she gets proactive about creating a positive environment for herself, how she takes care of herself, and the creative things she does to cheer herself on.

Make sure to stick around until the end of the episode for the Therapist's Take. It's the part of the show where I'll break down KJ's strategies and talk about how you can apply them to your own life. So, here's KJ Smith on how becoming your own biggest fan can help you grow mentally stronger.
Amy Morin: KJ Smith, welcome to The Verywell Mind Podcast!

KJ Smith: Hi, thanks for having me.

Amy Morin: So, your ears may have been burning a few weeks ago. Skyh was talking about you when he was on our show. He told us that you tell him to listen to affirmations before he goes to sleep at night.

KJ Smith: Yeah, I do.

Amy Morin: And for people who don't know, can you explain your relationship to Skyh Black?

KJ Smith: Skyh is now my fiancée!

Amy Morin: Congratulations.

KJ Smith: We got engaged over the holidays. So excited. That's my baby, my future husband. And yeah, it's really cool because we have gone through the same mental... I don't want to say issues but the mental trials and victories together. So, it's been very exciting to talk to someone who's very self-aware as well.

Amy Morin: And you met on the set of "Sistas," right?

KJ Smith: We did. Yeah, yeah. Our first meeting and I have it recorded, is I was vlogging at the time. And I was like, "You guys, it's season two." It was like, the best thing that ever happened. It was like, I'm on a show. Oh, my goodness. And then, it's like, we get to come back during a pandemic. Oh, my goodness. And so, I wanted to record every moment. And I'm so happy I did. Because truth be told, I never really ended up... I posted some of the footage. But I'm really happy because I feel like that moment was captured and I'll have it forever.

The very first moment I met him was captured on film. And I recorded it and I was just really proud of that. So, yeah, we met before we actually got on the plane to go to shoot season two.

Amy Morin: Oh, how fun that you have that. And am I right, you're in two TV shows right now?

KJ Smith: I am. Yes, I am on "Sistas." We're in our fourth season. Still the number one show on cable on Wednesday night. Okay. And then, I am also currently shooting "Power Book III: Raising Kanan." And that's an incredible show. Sasha Penn, Courtney Kemp created that show and it's a part of the “Power” franchise which is one of the number one franchises that's on television right now on a premium network.
Amy Morin: I happen to be a big fan. I'm excited for season two to come out and to see about your character.

KJ Smith: Yeah, I'm a fan of the show as well. It's one of my favorites, actually. So, I was really honored when they told me that I booked a role. I was like, "No way." And Skyh can tell you, I have been saying, "I have to get on 'Power.' I have to get on 'Power.' I have to get on 'Power.'" I didn't know which one, but I was going to get on “Power.”

Amy Morin: Well, congratulations.

KJ Smith: Thank you. Thank you so much.

Amy Morin: So, what's your schedule like now that you're filming two different TV shows?

KJ Smith: My schedule is actually kind of crazy. And in addition to filming TV shows, I do public speaking events. I do charities and doing interviews like this lovely one. So, my schedule is, I have to stare at my calendar a week before anything happens. And then, two days before and then a day before, just so I can mentally say, "Okay, this is what I have going on today. This is what I have going on today." Because I will get wrapped up in something that's four months from now and forget what I have in two hours.

So, my calendar is pretty packed. I actually like it that way. They say if you want to get anything done, give it to a busy person. Because I find that when I'm not busy, I just crash, like I do absolutely nothing. You can't ask me to do nothing. I'm not going anywhere. I don't do anything. So, I like it that way until it's time to actually crash, then I'll give myself that grace.

Amy Morin: So, I hear you talk a lot about mental health on social media and other interviews that you've done. How did you start talking about mental health and how did you decide to make it such an important part of your life?

KJ Smith: I'm very vocal about my emotions, my feelings. I'm blessed to have been raised in a home where my mother and my father allowed me to be vocal and say, I don't like that, or that doesn't feel good to me, or I really like this, or I want to do this. And it's naturally a part of my personality. However, I think as I got older, it was shunned. It was looked down upon to say, I don't feel good today. Or, I am in a weird space, or I wonder what that meant? Or, that energy, I'm not sure why I felt that or what that was. And I think people thought it was weird that I was so vocal about feeling in tune or being aware of my emotions.

And at the time, I didn't know what that was. I didn't know, like there will be a whole movement of people knowing that therapy is okay. And that is energy and
people being more attuned to what energy is. I did not know that at the time. But when I was growing up in my teenage years, being passionate was not cool. Why are you so excited? It's all good. You don't have to be so excited. Relax. And it's like, what, this is an exciting moment. Aren't you excited? And it's like, No, chill. Yeah, I'm cool. It's cool. But you're doing too much. When people will be like, "You're doing too much. You're doing too much. You're doing too much."

So, I learned how to mute myself. Oh, I'm so emotional. Oh, my God. I'm getting teared up here. Because it's weird. Because when you talk about these things, like some things are just coming to the surface that I didn't even know. I'm like, "Whoa, I'm thinking all this happened when I was in my adult, adult years." But now, I'm thinking back and I'm like, "Wait, I started muting myself when I was a teenager."

So, you start to unmute yourself because it's not cool to be excited about something that's excitable or exciting. It's like, you're supposed to just chill and just let it happen. I dated a person before. And I remember, I got my first booking. I got my first acting job. And I was like, "I posted on social media." I was like, "Yeah, I booked it!" It was literally like, I mean, hindsight being what it is, it was not a great job. But it was my first job.

And social media was a thing. And I was like, "I booked it! I'm so excited, da, da, da, da." And then, the person I was dating was like, "Act like you've been there before." And I was like, "But I haven't. Why would I act like this is a normal occurrence for me when it's not?" So, again, I've just been told my whole life to mute myself. And I'm sick of that. I'm sick of it. So, now, I'm telling people to be loud and proud and excited about your accomplishments and celebrate every victory and celebrate every feeling.

If it's good or bad, acknowledge the feeling because if you mute it, it's just going to be repressed and it's going to end up tearing you apart, in some cases, killing people. And so, it's important for me because, and I'm going to... I promise I'm going to finish. It's important for me because I had two bouts of depression. And I just wouldn't wish that on anyone. What I went through mentally during those bouts with depression, I don't want anyone experiencing that. No one.

And so, for me, going outward is how almost I helped heal myself and talking to people who have also gone through it, and share my testimony because people think that everything is all peaches and cream because I am often very excited and I am smiling all the time. And it's not all peaches and cream, and I need people to know, like even if it's not, we can get through this. So, that's why I started just being more vocal about it.
And I'm still cool. And I'm still cool. I'm still that girl. That does not make me uncool. Because I'm like, "I don't really want to go outside today." “Come on, man, you need to go to this party, man. What's up? You want to come? It's going to be fun, da, da, da.” “Yeah, I don't really want to go.” “Why? What's wrong? Is something wrong?” “No, I'm honoring the way I feel. And the way I feel right now is like, I want to be alone.”

Amy Morin: Thanks for sharing all of that. Can you talk a little bit about depression? How did you get through it?

KJ Smith: Well, the first bout, my best friend who is a therapist. What another blessing. My best friend at the time. Of course, I was struggling in Los Angeles. I had no friends. I had no money. I did not know how I was going to pay my rent. Because that's just the way it is in Los Angeles. It's a very expensive city. And people come here to pursue a dream. Yeah, I didn't know what to do. I didn't have anyone to advise me, no one in my family or none of my friends had ever done anything like this before, had never pursued something so far away. And I mean that physically, mentally, emotionally.

If you want to be a doctor, there are other doctors you can call on, right? If you want to be a movie star, I can't pick up the phone and call Viola Davis and say, “Hey, how'd you do this?” I can't do that. So, I just was lost. I didn't know what to do. I was, frankly, making bad decisions. I was just like, going out all the time and just drowning my worries like drowning myself so that I don't have to think about how I'm going to pay my bills.

I was eating Top... Is it Top Ramen? Wow. I haven't had it in a while. Wow, that's a gift. I was eating ramen every night and Cheerios. I lived off ramen and Cheerios. And I was talking to Skyh recently. I would go buy a big rotisserie from Ralph’s. And it was $5.99. And I would go buy a rotisserie and I would eat... My balanced meal was Cheerios for breakfast, ramen for lunch, and a piece of the rotisserie for dinner. And that would last me for a week. That was $10 a week as far as food goes.

And, yeah, it was just really sad. And my best friend was like, "I didn't want to be here anymore." And so, my best friend, she flew me to her city and took all my devices, took social media away from me. I do love social media. I always loved it. I think it's great. But at the time, it was my enemy. It was not my friend. Because what I was doing was, I was going on social media and comparing my life to other people.

I was going on social media and seeing all my friends start a family or get more degrees or buy a house or get married or all these things or even the simple things, go see their mom, go see their dad. I couldn't even do that because I'm
3000 miles away from my family. So, even I would get jealous of my family members because if someone had a birthday party, everyone was there but me.

And so, she flew me there, took all my devices away, made sure I wasn't online, made sure I wasn't on my laptop, made sure I wasn't on my cell phone or anything like that. And she would come home from work. And she would say, "When I get back from work, I want you to have all these things. I want you to have a list of all the things that you have accomplished, all the things that make you happy," all the things that I could tap into right now.

Because every time I thought about the future, it would make me even more depressed because it was so far away. It was like, I can't even wake up happy. So, how am I going to think about having $200 in the bank? I have nothing in my account. I can't even think about getting my first acting job. Because I can't even pay for acting class. I don't even have an agent.

There were just so many things that I just was like... It's almost like you can't even get to the next step because, in the current step, you're miserable. So, she just taught me how to pour life into myself and encouraged myself and she was like, "Well, what are the things you have done?" That's right. You got a degree. Yes, you went to graduate school. Yes, your parents are proud of you. You have a family that loves you. I had to start thinking about all the good things because I was so consumed with all the bad things. And they weren't even bad. In my perspective, I felt like they were bad.

But she was like, "Yes. So, let's talk about the good things. You woke up this morning. You're in Florida right now. The sun is shining. Look at the palm trees. You could go outside." It was just all these good things. I was like, "Yeah." And I just started gradually being like, "Yeah, I want to go outside. I'm going to go for a walk." Started to get some sunlight, started to get some vitamin D. And you just start like, yeah. "What music do you like to listen to? Why don't we listen to some music? It makes you feel good. Yeah, let's turn on some Beyonce."

Her name is [Jessica Newby]. And we've been friends since I was 13. And she just really taught me how to come out of it, how to just focus on the present. That's what I always tell people, focus on the present. Because if you think about the future, it's going to take you down. You got to focus on the present, what's good right now, what's good right now. Don't even think about the past unless you need it to focus on the present. So, yeah, that's how I got out of the first one.

And the second one, that was a little bit more difficult because I was in a toxic relationship. And it was harder because I wasn't alone. So, I was trying to come out of it with someone who was still in it and enjoy being in it. That one was a little bit harder.
It took like two years for that one because of the relationship that I was tied to and realizing in that time that we were practiced in being toxic together. So, it felt weird to not be. I don't know if that makes any sense. But it's like-

Amy Morin: It does.

KJ Smith: It felt weird to not be toxic with a person. And I almost felt comfortable because I would hang out with my friends and their lives were super normal and great. And I was like, "Ah, I'm not there yet. So, I'm going to go back to my toxic shell where we're going to be miserable together, and at least I'm comfortable here." And it just wasn't until, again, my friends and family came... Not kind of, they came to my rescue. They have been telling me the whole time, "You need to get out of this thing. You got to leave this person. You have to get out of this thing. You have to get out of this thing."

And I'm not entirely sure what the glimmer of hope was. I'm sure after this conversation, I'm going to realize what that glimmer of hope was, but I just remember being like, "I'm not doing this anymore. I'm sick of my own mess." So, I think I just got tired of my own mess. Oh, this is what happened. Okay, I got it. I used to do self-tapes for people. I used to do that before I became an actress. I would coach people because, by this time, I had already done a couple of roles. But the business was slow. I wasn't booking anymore.

And I had the skill because I had gone to all these acting courses and I had studied. So, I started coaching kids, people who are beginners, and trying to teach them how to mitigate acting and self-taping and all that stuff. And so, I started teaching these, it was kids and adults actually, how to do self-tapes and how to book work. And everyone started booking work. Everyone started booking work. I'm telling you, my resume, I probably still have the Instagram, but I would just post everyone I was so proud of them because I'm like, "Yes, you booked it and I helped you with that! I'm proud of that."

And then, I was like, "Wait, why am I not booking?" I was like, "Hold on a minute." And I really had to say, "Well, wait, wait, wait, wait a minute. Wait a minute. I'm happy for you. But also, I haven't booked anything. And I've helped so many people book work." And then, lo and behold, I said, "Oh, I'm sick of this." I said, "I have to figure out what is my problem and why I'm not booking work." And the truth was, I didn't feel self-worthy. I felt like everyone was worthy of working. And I felt like I wasn't.

I felt like everyone I had worked with had a gift. And I believed in them, and they had potential and I was able to pour into them. And I was able to say, you got this, I'm proud of you. You can do this thing. Okay, try it like this. Okay, let's play, let's do this. But when it came to my own work, I was hard on myself. I was very
hard on myself. I did not trust the instincts that I was teaching people to do. I wasn't trusting the gifts that I was telling people that they had. I wasn't trusting my own gifts.

And so, I do remember that. I remember that switch where I was like, "Hold on, I got to start believing in myself." Because I don't believe in myself. But at this point, I do remember my friend telling me to get out of the relationship. Get out of a relationship. I wasn't listening. I wasn't, I wasn't. “You don't understand. You don't understand what we have. Every relationship isn't perfect. Da, da, da, da.” I can tell you right now that is a lie. Because I am so happy in my relationship right now.

Amy Morin: Oh, we're glad to hear that. And I think that happens a lot. There are some times we cheer other people on to the point that we then forget to cheer ourselves on. What do you do now to make sure that you do cheer yourself on and you give yourself credit?

KJ Smith: Oh, I'm my number one fan. I am my number one fan. I am like premium gas. Like you've got this. You that girl, like I know what to do. Now, I'm well-versed in how to make myself feel better. I'm turning on my music. I'm listening to my affirmations. I'm falling asleep with my sleep consciousness. I'm meditating. I'm praying. I'm reading books. I just read Don Miguel's “Mastery of Love” book. I know how to keep myself at a high vibration. I'm just practiced at it now.

I believe that I went through all those things so that I can stay steady and be practiced in this because in this industry... in life, forget this industry. In life, life throws all these things at you. And frankly, it's life that really is this right now. And my career is fantastic. I'm so grateful for it. But it's the mastery of life and how to function in a space where you don't have control. And I think that's another thing that in my experience, it's like, I wanted control. I wanted to control the outcome.

I did this right, I did this right, I did this right, I did this right, I did this right. Why is the outcome not what I want it to be? Because I don't have control of that. I can only control the things I can control. So, yeah, that's where I'm at now. I do all the things. I work out. I make sure I eat the things that feed my body. I do all those things. Everything that makes me vibrate higher, I do it. If I have to honor myself and say, I can't be around people right now, I do it.

At the expense of sometimes friendships because people are like, "Well, why couldn't you come to my birthday party? This is the third time in a row you couldn't make it." I'm sorry. It just so happens that your birthday party is always after the holidays. After the holidays, I need to recharge by myself. Thank you,
ma'am. If that's going to affect our friendship, I don't know what to tell you. If you can't understand that, I don't know what to tell you.

I can't allow the boundaries to be crossed because of someone's feelings about something that is not going to matter in five years. A party? We have so many things that we can celebrate and that we do celebrate together. And it's interesting, and it's been interesting going on this journey because friendships have been lost and relationships have been affected.

And I'm very communicative as I said before, so I have no problem saying, “Hey, this is the deal. I went on three trips already and you're asking me about a birthday trip next month. I can't add that to my schedule. I got work. I got all kinds of other things.” A friend called me recently and was like, "Hey, I feel like we used to hang out a lot more, we don't anymore." I said, "Hey, I have other responsibilities. I'm a fiancé now."

“And it's not that I'm abandoning you. But I have added something else to my already stacked plate. So, we can try to work things out when we can. But I would appreciate grace. Because when your circumstances change, I'm going to give you the same grace. I'm going to honor you. When you go through something, I give you the grace that you need.” But people don't want to give grace because they make it about them. And it's not. It's not about you.

It's about us being on our own individual journeys. Then when can come together in a space that's organic and beautiful, then let's do that. But when it's coming from a place of control and manipulation, and I thought we were friends, and we're not friends anymore because friendship means we meet every Sunday at 12:00 at the brunch spot we used to 10 years ago. That's not how this works. That's not how that works.

Amy Morin: And so, I like that you talked about not just setting boundaries, but also about the importance of giving people grace, but it's okay to ask other people to give you grace too.

KJ Smith: Yeah, 100%.

Amy Morin: So, when you were mentioning some of the other things that you do to take care of yourself, something you said is affirmations. We know that Skyh said he listens to affirmations at bedtime. What do you specifically do when it comes to affirmations?

KJ Smith: I listen to them so that they can go into my subconscious unless I'm feeling really down then I scream them to the top of my lungs. Actually, I want to share this with your viewers. Because I discovered them and it's very melodic. It's a very
melodic YouTube affirmation, and it's music and it's by this group called... Here it is, here it is, by Beautiful Chorus. And the way they sing it is my love is your love. It's very melodic, and I just turn that on. And it's like my new playlist because I'm still listening to music but it's pouring into me positively.

For me anyway, all music is affirmations because it's going into your subconscious. And the more I become aware, like I listened to the music that I was... Like if I listened to something that I used to really bump 10 years ago, I'm like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, no wonder I was feeling down. That was bad music. It was making me feel down." It was talking negatively about self. It was talking about sadness and depression.

And sadness gives you a dopamine rush like everything else. Trauma gives you a dopamine rush like everything else. And so, I had to start getting addicted to the good dopamine rush, not the bad dopamine rush. So, I listen to it as often as I can. I've tried recently to just not have music on in the car and not have music on in the shower because I feel like that's when everything comes to me. I feel like that's when God speaks to me. But when I'm doing chores, that's my favorite time to listen to my affirmation music.

I think sometimes I freak people out when I'm like, "You got to download a new song and a new playlist," like Beyonce is positive affirmations when you're listening to “It feels so good to be alive.” She has a song called “It feels so good to be alive.” I couldn't hit that note because I need to drink water, but the song says, it feels so good to be alive. I got all my family by my side. DJ Khaled has some great songs that are positive affirmations. "I'm blessed."

So, I don't think that affirmations have to be this special song or tune that you have to search for and seek out. We hear it all the time. We hear it in our music all the time. And until your practice in keeping your elevations high and until your practice in keeping... and it doesn't have to be high but not low. We're not always on a high, right.

But until you're practicing keeping your elevation steady, to me I feel like you have to only listen to good feeling music, good things, things that make you want to dance, things that make you want to say good things about yourself. So, I think positive affirmations are essential, and I listen to them all the time, all the time.

Amy Morin: There's so much research about music too. And there's evidence that will show sometimes we're in a sad mood for feeling down or feeling depressed. We listen to music that keeps us in that state. And you have to be proactive about finding positive music even when you don't necessarily feel like listening to it because it can shift your emotional state after you listen to it for a while.
Another thing you mentioned was meditation. A lot of our listeners will say, I'm interested in meditation, but I don't really get it. I don't know what to do, or how to do it, or what I'm supposed to be doing when I meditate. How did you learn about it?

KJ Smith: Depression. Depression has taught me everything. I learned about it. I have a friend, Victoria Sanders. She started practicing meditation. And I was one of those people. I was like, "I don't get it." Again, addicted to the dopamine rush of stress, addicted to the dopamine rush of sounds and noise, and noise really. In 2022, we're all addicted to noise. What are you watching on TV? And that's my favorite type of noise. Okay. It's my medium, so I love it. But as much noise as we hear, we have to hear the silence. We have to listen to the silence, right?

We have to listen to the voice, the voice that's inside, so that we can make decisions so that we can be more in tune and more in alignment with source. I feel like the noise now is so loud. And it's peer pressure all over again. It's peer pressure times 100,000 trillion percent. Because when I was in school, I didn't have social media. When I was in school, you only have three people telling you what's cool, and what to do, and what to wear, and how to be, and what not to do, and da, da, da, da.

Now, people have 7 billion people influencing their decisions, influencing their ears and their brain and their thoughts. So, meditation is essential because you have to silence your thoughts to really hear what's true, what's true to you, what insights. I call it my God voice. People say, source, alignment, universe, but it's something that has been practiced for centuries now. It's an ancient practice. And it works.

And there is a way to operate in this society and still practice this ancient practice. And I have finally learned how to do that. It started with practicing how to do it for 10 seconds. Try to silence your mind for 10 seconds. It's so hard, right? But you have to start somewhere, right? Okay, let's silence our minds for five seconds. That wasn't so bad. And then, you try 10 seconds, and then that's not so bad. And then, you try one minute, and then that's not so bad. And then, you try five.

And so, I try to teach people to start small, just to start small, and then you start realizing, wow, I literally just sat for 20 minutes and listened to my God voice and didn't think about, I got to put gas in the car, I have to order groceries, I have to do all these things. You don't think about those things. So, before you know it, you're sitting for an hour and you're hearing your God voice or maybe you don't need an hour. Maybe you need two minutes every day. So, whatever people need for them, I think meditation is the easiest practice because you don't have to go to a temple.
You don't have to buy anything. You don't need any special garment. You don't need any tool. You don't need anything. Literally, you just sit. So, I really try to, I want to say teach but I didn't even want to say that. I try to walk in the practice so that I can lead by example. Because I find that when I try to tell people what to do, when I try to teach people what to do or try to persuade people what to do, they do the opposite just for the heck of it. They're just like, "Yeah, no, I'm going to go this way just because you told me to do it."

Amy Morin: Something we talk about on this podcast often is when we give people advice, we tell them what to do, they do tend to go in the opposite direction. One last question for you. Something I've heard you talk about is about making sure that you're not stretched too thin. What's your advice for people who maybe feel like they're stretched too thin, they're overwhelmed and they don't know what to do or where to get started?

KJ Smith: Take everything off your plate and say no for a week straight. That's the quickest way to relieve yourself of stress. Literally, take everything off your plate, call everyone and say, “Hi, I'm a little overwhelmed. I won't be able to make it tomorrow.” “Hi, I'm sorry, I have to push this appointment.” You don't have to say details. I talked to my publicist. [Bailey] knows I call my publicist and say, "Hey, I won't be ready by Friday. I need us to push this for a week and a half." "Yeah, okay, cool. It's no problem."

Most people are so understanding. And it's never an issue. And the people that you do want to be upfront with, be upfront with them like, "Hey, I'm a little overwhelmed. If you could just give me grace for a week, I can get back to you on this." "Oh, I'm sorry. I apologize. I didn't send the email. I need a week. I'm going through something." Everyone understands. Because why? Everyone has gone through something. And then, for that week, you say no to every freaking thing you can, everything.

If someone says, "Let's go to brunch." "No, thank you. I appreciate it. Let's try next month." "Hey, can I come over, watch a movie?" "No, no, thank you. Can we do something next week? I think next Friday would be better for me. Is that okay?" Most people are like, "Yeah, sure. Yeah, no problem. Okay." And if they're not like that, then that lets you know what type of person that is in your life. Right? So, the way people respond when you say no is how you really know their place, where you are in their life, and where they are in your life.

And obviously, I'm not saying call everyone and say, “Hell no, I ain't going.” Say it with grace and kindness again, but people have to understand that... Someone asked me, who is the most important. My financial advisor, actually, because we were coming up with a financial plan.
And he was like, "Who is the most important person to you?" I said, "Me, I am the most important person to me. Because if I don't take care of me, I can't take care of my future husband. I can't take care of my future kids. I can't take care of my mom, my grandma, my sister, all the people in my life who I love, I can't take care of them."

The future doesn't exist because I will ruin it. I will literally sabotage it. There is no future. And I've been there before. So, I know that to be true. So, the most important person to you has to be you. And people have to understand that.

Amy Morin: Great advice. Put yourself first and as an experiment for a whole week, turn down things that you might normally push yourself to do even though you don't feel like it and see what happens.

KJ Smith: Yeah, yeah. And I'm telling you, I really hope, like I want your viewers to hit me back and let me know if they try it, or comment. I want to know, like if someone actually tries it, how they feel, if they feel better. I do. I always do.

Amy Morin: Let's do that then. I will share your social media handle. Is Instagram okay if I tell people to hit you up and tell us if that works?

KJ Smith: Yeah, I really want to know. I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt. Go ahead.

Amy Morin: No, I was just going to say I'll link to your Instagram handle. And I want to know, too, so I hope they'll share with me.

KJ Smith: I'm super proactive on social media. I love it. I feel like my platform to share my testimony and help others. People are like, "Why do you love social media so much?" I'm like, "Because it's the way that I can help people. This is what people are doing." I can't say, "Hey, everyone, I have some advice." I can't go yell out and talk to people that way.

So, if people are coming to my social media, I want them to leave with a piece of something, wisdom, entertainment, anything, knowledge, or anything. So, I am super proactive on social media. Tell the people who are viewing this to hit me up, let me know if it works. Because it's a vacation without actually having to leave. It's a cost-free vacation. Thank me later.

Amy Morin: Absolutely. Well, KJ Smith, thank you so much for being on the Verywell Mind Podcast.

KJ Smith: Oh, this was so much fun. Thank you so much. I talked so much. I'm so sorry.
Amy Morin: That was all great. I appreciate all the things that you said so much, and I know our audience is going to love it too. So, thank you.

KJ Smith: Thank you so much. Have a great day.

Amy Morin: Thank you. You as well.

Amy Morin: Welcome to the Therapist's Take! This is a part of the show where I'll break down KJ's mental strength-building strategies and share how you can apply them to your own life. Here are three of KJ's strategies that I highly recommend.

**Number one: Feel your emotions.** I like that KJ talks a lot about feelings and allowing herself to experience a wide variety of emotions.

Quite often people say things like, “I shouldn't feel this bad about this,” or “I shouldn't be so anxious right now.” But your feelings aren't wrong. Whatever you feel is okay. And judging yourself for those feelings only makes things worse. You also don't have to believe other people who try to talk you out of your feelings. People who are uncomfortable with their own feelings might tell you not to get so upset or not to get so excited about something. But just like KJ said, you don’t have to allow other people to mute you.

Acknowledge and experience all your emotions even when they're uncomfortable. You can reach for healthy coping skills to deal with them or to manage them. But don't try to talk yourself out of feeling a certain way.

**Number two: Get proactive about what you allow into your life.** Your environment has a huge impact on your mental strength. So, I love that KJ talks about filling her mind with positive music and positive affirmations and setting boundaries when she needs to take care of herself.

It’s easy to be too passive about the things we fill our lives with. Everything from the TV shows that you keep on in the background to the people that you spend time with, might stem from habits. You like to do the same things every day without really thinking about how those things are impacting your mind. Get proactive about adding some healthy and positive things and people into your life. Listen to podcasts like this one, watch TV shows that are good for you, read books that inspire you, and spend time with good people.

**And number three: Create positive content on social media.** I hear a lot of people talk about the toll social media takes on their emotional well-being. And that can be true. If you're mindlessly scrolling through social media or you're
constantly reading negative news, it will affect your mental health. Your mental health will also be affected if you're fixated on how many followers you have or how many people like your content. That's why I appreciated that KJ said she creates positive content on purpose.

She wants to spread positive vibes into the world. That helps her worry less about what other people are posting and whether people like her stuff. Instead, she's focused on creating something that might help someone else. I love the idea of putting positive vibes into the world, and social media is a great way to do that. It can be good for your mental health and the mental health of the people who follow you.

That doesn't mean though that you can't ever share that you're going through a tough time, or you can't talk about your struggles. But it does mean that you can benefit from also talking about all the good things going on in your life and the lessons that you're learning along the way.

So those are three of KJ's strategies that I highly recommend. Feel your emotions. Get proactive about what you allow into your life. And put some positive vibes out there into the world on social media.

If you want to hear more from KJ, follow her on Instagram. Her Instagram handle is @kjsmithofficial.

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.

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, all you have to do is 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 for listening to The Verywell Mind Podcast! And as always, a big thank you to my show's producer (who introduced me to “Power Book III”), Nick Valentin.