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200 — 20 Mental Strength Lessons from the First 200 Episodes

Amy Morin:
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. You're listening to The Friday Fix. Every Friday, I share a quick mental strength strategy that can help fix the thoughts, feelings, and actions that can hold you back in life. And the fun part is we record the show from a sailboat in the Florida Keys! Don't forget to subscribe to us 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.

Today is our 200th episode! We started the podcast during the pandemic at a time when I was hearing from lots of people who wanted to know how to grow mentally stronger. At first, it was just Nick and I recording from a sailboat (which made for a lot of fun adventures). We interviewed Dan Harris during a tropical storm. And there was a time that we had to use a lasagna pan filled with ice to keep Nick's laptop from overheating when we talked to Bill Cartwright. But then we partnered with Verywell Mind (the biggest mental health site in the world) to expand the show, and we're thrilled to still be doing this 200 episodes later.

We've had some really cool guests, some interesting challenges recording from a boat, and lots of fun (even though we talk about some pretty serious things). One of the best things about hosting a podcast is I get to hear from you, our listeners. You shared with me stories and struggles and your ideas about this show, so I want to say thank you to
everyone who supports this show by listening, sharing, and leaving reviews. And today, to celebrate episode number 200, I'm going to share the top 20 mental strength lessons we've learned so far.

I picked 10 tips from our guest episodes (which air on Mondays) and 10 strategies from The Friday Fixes (which obviously air on Fridays). And while all of our guests have shared some really good mental strength-building tips, the ones I chose are the ones that you talk to me about the most. So they're the ones I think have resonated the most with our audience.

Here are the top 20 mental strength lessons from our first 200 episodes.

**Number one: find healthy ways to respond to inevitable hardships.** Every hardship or crisis you encounter can also be viewed as a challenge or an opportunity. In episode 108, Matthew McConaughey talked about the red lights and yellow lights we encounter in life and the opportunities we have to respond to them.

**Matthew McConaughey:**
But don't wallow this. Don't hang out in the red light, and we, myself, and I think everyone can have a tendency to stop at red lights in our life, crises, hardships, and all of a sudden find some comfort in the weight of things coming on us. And actually, all of a sudden we look up, and we're going like, "All right. I'm tired of this. I want to move on." We got too much on us because we've let too much come on, so it's partially dealing with red lights, yellow lights in our life is how we get to green lights.

Part of it is, as I say in the book, you hit some red, yellow lights, pauses in our life where we go, "Ooh." We shouldn't slow down for the red light. Sometimes we should put the pedal to the metal and blow through it and go, "I'm not giving that crisis credit." I'm not going to wallow in another, because I've done it before, I find myself wallowing in red lights and victimized under the weight. And when I was ready to get up and go, "Enough's enough." Damn it was hard to and get everything off of, to get out of it.

**Amy Morin:**

**Number two: write in a journal.** A lot of our guests have discussed journaling as a strategy that they use to grow mentally stronger. And in episode 114, Mötley Crüe crew member, Nikki Sixx, shared how writing in a journal helps him become more self-aware.

**Nikki Sixx:**
So one of the things that I do is I write down at the end of the day what my day was about and what I could have done better. So at the end of the day, I'll be like, "Yeah, I kind of lost it for no reason there, and I want to work on that. I want to look at that." So you can go back and look at your journaling and be like, "I'm making progress," or, "I'm not making progress." And then get in and roll. Get a little dirty. You're going to have good life. It's going to be all good.

Amy Morin:

**Number three: the “plus one rule.”** When you're doing something really hard, you need to do one extra positive thing to help manage your emotions. Psychotherapist, Mariel Buqué discussed this in episode 132. She talked about how to heal from intergenerational trauma.

Mariel Buqué:
There is this one skill called the plus one rule, right, where if you feel like a level of distress, if from one to five, it's at a four, then you have to do four things plus one other thing to help bring you into a leveled state or kind of down regulate those strong emotions. The same tends to go for a lot of these strategies that we have conceptualized as self care, right? Doing this one thing on the weekend with an entire week of chaos is really not going to do very much, right? You have to engage in an ongoing and intentional routine around how you take care of your mind, body, and spirit in order to see some leveling, some sort of a foundational effect on your mind, right? And then you also need to continue working on the trauma pieces, right? So that's only one piece of the puzzle.

Amy Morin:

**Number four: decide which thoughts to pay attention to.** You'll always have different thoughts inside your brain about what action to take. Some will show you the downside to every situation, other thoughts will be really hopeful about everything that you're about to do. So in episode 138, Dr. William Miller describes this as being an inner committee who meets inside your head, and it's your job to decide who to listen to.

William Miller:
Yeah, it's like we have a committee that's trying to make a decision, most often about whether to make a change or not, but it can be about all kinds of things, and there are different voices on that committee. So some of the members are in favor of making the change, some of them are absolutely opposed to it, some are kind of on the fence, and it's like they have a discussion around the table about this, and you hear it going in your head, and that's just a way of kind of saying this is part of the experience of
ambivalence. And again, nothing unusual about that. Every day, all of us experience ambivalence.

Amy Morin:

**Number five: write about something you regret.** If we're honest, we all have regrets, and we have choices in how we respond to those regrets. In episode 142, bestselling author, Daniel Pink, shared about how writing about a regret helps us work through our emotions.

Daniel Pink:

There's some really good research on this. I mean, James Pennebaker at Texas has done 30 years of research on the importance of just writing about things privately, so if you're skittish about disclosing it to other people, just writing about your regret for 15 minutes a day for three days can be real useful. Because again, it de-fangs the regret. It makes it less menacing, and it begins the sense making process.

Amy Morin:

**Number six: talk to a therapist.** Asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness, but it's tough to do. And in episode 144, Charlamagne Tha God explains how difficult it was for him to open up to a therapist, but why it was so important to do so, so that he could unpack his emotional baggage.

Charlamagne Tha God:

Yeah. I feel like it's like you're moving into, you're moving out of a old house and moving into a new house. So it's like when you're moving out, you start literally packing things away, and things that you don't want, you discard, right? You get rid of, or you give them to somebody else. The things you want to keep, you pack up, you want to bring them with you. And when you get to the new place, you're able to organize things better, and you got a lot less, so being that you got a lot less, it's a lot neater, right? and that's how it feels when you're in therapy. It's like you got all this mess, all this junk inside of our brains. And it's like we're unpacking this stuff, and we're looking at it, we're laying it out on the table for the first time. And you're like, "You know what? I don't need that anymore."

Amy Morin:

**Number seven: heal your childhood wounds.** In episode 165, actress Chrissy Metz talked about the importance of recognizing how our painful experiences in childhood impact us as adults, and while it's tough to go back and heal some of those old wounds, it's important to do so.
**Chrissy Metz:**

I mean, it's everything. From feeling like I wasn't heard or didn't feel important in the positioning of my childhood with my own siblings and being a chubby kid, and I remember the only thing I could wear from my friends was like necklaces and jewelry. We couldn't share clothes and how I was always hooking my friends up with boys even though I like them because they didn't like a chubby girl. And I mean, every single thing, every single thing is the way we walk through life I believe.

**Amy Morin:**

**Number eight: reframe your shame.** One of our most popular episodes of all time is episode 174 with actor and TV host Terry Crews. He shares how shame caused him to stay stuck in a self-destructive cycle that he couldn't break until he changed the way that he viewed himself.

**Terry Crews:**

Shame says that you are wrong. It doesn't say you did something wrong, it says you are wrong, and after years of therapy, I had come up with a technique for myself that I felt worked. There's a picture of myself, and I was six years old, and I had my two teeth missing, and they were growing in, the whole thing. And man, I get choked up when I think about it. But just looking at that, I put it on my desktop, and I was like, "Is that kid bad? Is that kid bad? No, he's not. There's nothing in him that's bad. And he may have done a bad thing, he may have messed up, he may have made some errors, he may have gotten angry, but he's still a good boy." And one thing that hit me is that, hey, at no time in my life did I ever stop being that little boy. He's still there.

**Amy Morin:**

**Number nine: you don't have to be the best to feel good enough about yourself.** In episode 191, Dr. Ronald Siegel talked about the extraordinary gift of being ordinary and accepting that you don't have to base your self worth on your achievement.

**Ronald Siegel:**

What's the timeframe we use to evaluate ourselves, right? We all go up and down. We feel good about ourselves or bad about ourselves, but what is it? Is this like a cumulative grade point average since we were born? How many good things have I done? How many accomplishments have I had? How many friends have I had? How many times have I felt that I was morally good or righteous? Or is it based on last month? Or last week? Or, as the example you shared that was in the book, sometimes it's just based on the last few minutes, right? We can go up and down constantly throughout the day based on this, and as we reflect on that, we start to realize, who made up the system? Where did we get the idea that we have to always be at the top of
our game and no matter what we may have done in the past really doesn't have a very much sticking power?

Amy Morin:

**Number 10: apologize to your kids.** Sometimes it's tempting to look perfect in front of your kids, and you might worry that apologizing makes you look weak, but acknowledging your mistake is a sign of strength that can improve any relationship, including your relationship with your kids. In episode 197, actress Cobie Smulders talked about how apologizing to kids actually helps them become more resilient.

Cobie Smulders:
The relationship I have with my kids is very honest, so I find myself apologizing a lot or saying, "I could do better in this moment," or, "I'm sorry I reacted that way." And I think that that's very different generationally because I don't remember ever having that kind of a conversation with one of my parents where it was like, "I was wrong." Because I don't think that I was allowed to see them make mistakes. So yeah, all of that to say I think that the way that we've been building resilience is just to be present in every moment whether it is a hard one or a good one.

Amy Morin:

So those are the top mental strength tips from our guests. Now let's talk about mental strength tips from our Friday Fixes. Here are the most talked about lessons from those episodes.

**Number 11: remember the tough times you've gotten through in the past, and you'll get through whatever it is you're going through now.** When you're going through a tough time, you'll doubt your ability to get through it, but one of the most helpful things you can do is recall how you've gotten through tough times in the past. Research shows that that will remind you of the inner strength you might have forgotten exists. It's a strategy I share more about back in episode 57.

**Number 12: write yourself a kind letter.** One of the strategies I hear most from listeners is about how powerful they found writing a kind letter to themselves can be. It's an exercise I talk about in episode 82 where I describe creating a letter that you can read to yourself whenever you're having a hard time.

**Number 13: quit often.** So many people say things like, "Never give up." But there are plenty of times when quitting makes sense. If the process it's going to take to reach your
goals isn't healthy, by all means, quit. Sometimes it takes more mental strength to quit than it does to keep going. In episode 95, I explain when it makes sense to quit.

**Number 14: get yourself in the best emotional state.** When you're faced with a tough task, like you're about to walk into a job interview, should you calm yourself down or should you pump yourself up? The answer is it all depends. It's important to know what state you'll perform the upcoming task best in. In episode 121, I explain how to discover which emotional state works best for you and how to get yourself into that state.

**Number 15: embrace self-doubt to perform better.** It's really easy to assume that everyone else is confident and that your lack of confidence puts you at a disadvantage, but research has found that embracing just a little bit of self doubt actually helps you perform better. In episode 126, I explain how to embrace your self doubt so that you can perform at your best.

**Number 16: fake a smile to boost your happiness.** Smiling sends a signal to your brain that you feel happy, and then your brain releases feel good chemicals which in turn help you feel even happier. But the good news is you don't have to wait until you feel happy to smile. Smile first even when you don't feel like it, and you'll boost your mood. I explain more in episode 139.

**Number 17: increase your willpower with temptation bundling.** Sometimes we think people either have willpower or they don't, but we all have the ability to increase our willpower by putting ourselves in an environment that helps us do our best. One strategy is by using temptation bundling, basically pair an activity you don't love to do like doing a laundry with something that you do love like listening to a podcast, and soon you'll find that you're more motivated to do that thing that you don't really want to do. To learn more about how to use this in your life, listen to episode 152.

**Number 18: put your face in cold water to feel better fast.** When you experience an intense emotion, putting your face in cold water calms your body's emotional response. Although the relief is only temporary, that much needed break from an intense feeling like anxiety can be really helpful even if it's only brief. I explain more in the episode where I talk about an acronym called TIP back in episode 172.

**Number 19: surround yourself with healthy people even if it's uncomfortable.** Studies show that you'll surround yourself with people who confirm your beliefs about
yourself. That's why people with low self-esteem choose friends and partners who put them down. It's something I discuss in episode 190 about the seven reasons you people to mistreat you. Being aware of that tendency can help you change who you call a friend.

**And Number 20: schedule time to worry.** If you worry all day, every day, research shows setting aside just 15 minutes a day as you're assigned worry time might transform your life. I've mentioned it on the show several times before, but most recently I talked about it in episode 196, the episode about how to declutter your mind.

So those are 20 of the top mental strength lessons from our first 200 episodes. If you want to learn more about any of those tips, go listen to the full episode that I mentioned. I'll share a list of all the episodes with links to the full version on our show notes which you can find on verywellmind.com/podcast.

We're looking forward to creating the next 200 episodes with you so that we can keep supporting one another in our efforts to become the strongest and best versions of ourselves. So thanks for listening to *The Verywell Mind Podcast!* If you know someone who could benefit from learning mental strength-building strategies, share this show with them. Simply sharing a link to this episode could help someone feel better and grow stronger.

Do you want free access to my online 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 or Spotify. Then, send us a screenshot of your review. Our email 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 corrects me when I put the emphasis on the wrong syllable), Nick Valentin.