

Program Name: Choices: Mantras (or Mantrams) and Affirmations

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Program Evaluation Template - This template is to be used as an evaluation tool during our program investigation. The questions are designed to assist in determining what elements of each program we want to consider for incorporation into our programs. Feel free to add additional notes as you use the template. This template is the foundation for your presentation about the program you have researched. (Version #4)

Program or Concept Purpose or Mission Statement:

I have grouped some practices having common elements. The concept is threefold. First, mental repetition of one or more syllables (having overt spiritual content or not, in a known language or not) calms the mind. Second, the material that is mentally repeated can be uplifting and strengthening both because of its content (For example, "Every day I am getting better and better," which is an affirmation) and because, according to some, it has become "charged" through repeated use over the centuries by thousands or millions of people ("Om mani padme hum," used by Buddhists, "Lord Jesus have mercy on me," used by Christians, are examples of "charged" syllables). Third, although the practice sounds easy, it is challenging to remember to do the mental repetition and to actually choose to do it. By choosing again and again to remember and repeat the syllables, one gains practice choosing, forgetting to choose, and remembering to choose again—all with low stakes and in a no-lose setting. One gets practice making decisions, and gains something I call task persistence, the ability to keep on task, and to return to task when focus is lost. One might say that one's decision making "muscle" is strengthened this way.

Principles or Values: (implicit or expressed)

Here is a quote from Eknath Easwaran about the use of the mantra or mantram. He is speaking about it from a spiritual perspective. "A *mantram* is a powerful spiritual formula which, when repeated silently in the mind, has the capacity to transform consciousness. There is nothing magical about this. It is simply a matter of practice. The mantram is a short, powerful spiritual formula for the highest power we can conceive of - whether we call it God, or the ultimate reality, or the Self within. Whatever name we use, with the mantram we are calling up what is best and deepest in ourselves. The mantram has appeared in every major spiritual tradition, West and East, because it fills a deep, universal need in the human heart."

The benefit of the use of the mantra can also be explained psychologically. As the Buddha said, "All that we are is the result of what we have thought. Our minds are formed and molded by our thoughts." By changing our thoughts, we literally can change our minds. We have the power to shape ourselves in this way.

With regard to the use of affirmations, consider the following: "Words saturated with sincerity, conviction, faith, and intuition," writes Paramahansa Yogananda, "are like highly explosive vibration bombs, which, when set off, shatter the rocks of difficulties. In his writing, he shows how entrenched "idea-habits" of disease or failure can be uprooted and replaced by the mental power to change one's life at will.

Program Structure or Key Points:

Here is an excerpt from *The Relaxation Response*, by Herbert Benson, MD. He genericized and secularized the spiritual practice of the use of a mantra (also called repetition of The Holy Name). He also did research that demonstrated many benefits to the body and mind from the reduction of stress that

comes from this practice. One practices 10 or 20 minutes a day. The following is the technique taken word for word from his book, which was published in the mid-70s (in a subsequent book, he revealed that although he had taken the spiritual element out of the use of a mantra with his generic technique, subsequent investigation had shown him that there can be added benefit from using a mantra that comes from a spiritual tradition).

1.

Sit quietly in a comfortable position.

2.

Close your eyes.

3.

Deeply relax all your muscles, beginning at your feet and progressing up to your face. Keep them relaxed.

4.

Breathe through your nose. Become aware of your breathing. As you breathe out, say the word, "ONE", silently to yourself. For example, breathe IN ... OUT, "ONE",- IN .. OUT, "ONE", etc. Breathe easily and naturally.

5.

Continue for 10 to 20 minutes. You may open your eyes to check the time, but do not use an alarm. When you finish, sit quietly for several minutes, at first with your eyes closed and later with your eyes opened. Do not stand up for a few minutes.

6.

Do not worry about whether you are successful in achieving a deep level of relaxation. Maintain a passive attitude and permit relaxation to occur at its own pace. When distracting thoughts occur, try to ignore them by not dwelling upon them and return to repeating "ONE." With practice, the response should come with little effort. Practice the technique once or twice daily, but not within two hours after any meal, since the digestive processes seem to interfere with the elicitation of the Relaxation Response.

Affirmations can be used in a similar manner. Here are examples of affirmations used by an artist. We can easily see how these could be adapted for our setting.

Affirmations

I am a brilliant and successful artist.

I am allowed to nurture my artist.

I am confident and competent in my creative work.

I am tolerant of the ambiguity in problems.

I am willing to be of service through my creativity.

I am willing to create

I am willing to experience my creative energy.

I am willing to learn to let myself create

I am willing to use my creative talents.

I begin every task by thinking of new and better ways to accomplish it.
I consider many possible solutions from many diverse sources.
I deserve a rewarding creative life.
I have a constant flow of new and interesting ideas.
I have an adventurous mind and see new experiences regularly.
I have an unusual ability to reach creative decisions and to find creative solutions for problems.
I have rich creative talents.
I have the courage and self-confidence necessary to put my solutions into practice.
I have the strength and persistence necessary to work ideas through to solutions.
I maintain a complexity of outlook on life.
I play with partial, incomplete and sometimes foolish ideas.
I recognize the task of making mistakes but learn from my failures.
I spend ten minutes each morning and evening, thinking over problems.
I treat each new problem I encounter as a new door to be opened, and an opportunity to be creative.
I trust my feelings and unconscious thoughts.
My creativity always leads me to truth and love
My creativity heals myself and others
My creativity leads me to forgiveness and self-forgiveness.

How does the program define or measure success? (What evidence does the program provide to show success?)

Dr. Benson's research, and plenty of other research, demonstrates that the relaxation response, which he regards as a counterpart of the "fight or flight" response, can be evoked in the manner described, and has numerous benefits. There probably is evidence that affirmations also work. To address this from an intuitive level, imagine spending 10 minutes a day mentally repeating "Hate, hate, hate..." That certainly would have an impact, so it's reasonable to assume that more positive expressions also would have an effect.

Describe a successful participant.

A successful participant may be calmer, more reflective, less likely to get off balance emotionally, and more easily able to regain their balance when disturbed. Such a person is more able to make choices/decisions and to stick to them. A person using affirmations successfully has to an extent reprogrammed their outlook, with corresponding changes in their behavior.

At what level would a participant enter the program?

People of almost any level of accomplishment can use these techniques.

Complete the table below.

| Program Approach (Application) | Method (How it's used?) | Outcome (What would it look at COTS?) | Measurement (How do we measure success?) |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Human Growth & Transformation | One sits quietly, as described above, and practices for 10-20 minutes/day. One can also practice the technique while doing anything that doesn't require full attention. | Clients would be calmer, make better decisions, and would be more likely to follow through on their decisions. | Tests of before and after stress levels, and ability to set and attain goals. |
| Staff Interaction with Clients | There is no specific component for this. | Staff, too, could use and benefit from these practices. Overall, the shared practice would provide common ground and a calmer environment. | |
| Client-to-Client Interaction | There is no specific component for this. | Overall, the shared practice would provide common ground and a calmer environment. | |

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|-------------------------|--|--|--|
| <p>Client Self-Help</p> | <p>This is a superb tool for self-help. I have shared it with hundreds of people, many of whom suffered from serious chronic illness, and who benefited from it.</p> | <p>Clients would add another tool to their toolbox which would help them deal with stress.</p> | <p>Tests of before and after stress levels, and ability to set and attain goals.</p> |
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Does this promote a responsible and accountable lifestyle? How?

Not intrinsically. But those who use these practices tend to become more responsible and accountable, because their minds are quieter and they are more stable.

What are the client decision points in this program? (Are they clear and identifiable?)

Entry. Too, continuing use of the tool requires repeated decisions.

What would you change to make the program or concept more useful in our setting?

The relaxation response and the use of affirmations could easily be incorporated into our life skills classes. We probably are not permitted to teach the spiritual version of these practices.

Additional Issues:

- **Staffing Requirements** (Any additional staff? Any staff training requirements?)

No additional staff. Minimal training requirements for staff; volunteers who are proficient in the practices could be found to teach them.

Additional Comments (Tell us what you really think.)

What makes you like this program or concept? What makes it appealing or motivating to the clients? How would you sell this to the clients?

How would community support be generated for this program?

I've used these kinds of practices since the mid-70s. They work. The subset presented here can be used by anyone to cope better with stress, which is the selling point. The strengthening of the "decision muscle" might be viewed as a side effect, but it would be very important in our work.

What makes you feel uneasy about this program or concept?

I'm comfortable with it. Religious or spiritual content is something we need to walk carefully on.

Sources:

The Mantram Handbook, Eknath Easwaran (see http://www.nilgiri.org/Html/Learn_to_Meditate/mantram.html for very useful excerpts)

The Relaxation Response, Herbert Benson, M.D.

Scientific Healing Affirmations, Paramahansa Yogananda