

How to Make Self-Affirmation Work, Based on Science

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For fans of “Saturday Night Live,” the word affirmation probably triggers memories of a character popular in the 1990s: [Stuart Smalley](#). With his carefully coifed blond hair and light-blue sweater, the host of “[Daily Affirmation With Stuart Smalley](#)” (played by comedian Al Franken) would gaze into a mirror and earnestly declare, “I’m good enough, I’m smart enough, and doggone it, people like me.” Though the depiction was satirical, viewers could be forgiven for considering the idea of self-affirmation with skepticism or dismissing it as “[too woo-woo](#).”

But psychologists and researchers who have examined self-affirmation say [numerous studies](#) have found that affirming yourself can produce wide-ranging benefits, including [stress-buffering effects](#). The trick, they say, is how you affirm yourself — particularly what you focus on.

“I would just jettison all that Stuart Smalley stuff,” said [Claude M. Steele](#), a social psychologist and professor emeritus at Stanford University who wrote a foundational paper on the [psychology of self-affirmation](#).

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