

Hey Young Me,

Yes, this is older you. How are you? Wait, don't tell me, you're probably hung up on some boy at the moment. I know all about that, because I was you, a sucker for cute boys and sweet words. I know you just can't help but see the good in everyone. You don't realise it yet, but because you see light in everyone, you often ignore the red flags. Not just in romantic, lovey dovey relationships, but in other relationships too.

I played it cool to fit in. I let things slide until I found myself in situations I never imagined. I know you believe your friends would never steer you down wrong paths and your boyfriends would never take advantage, but that naive trust led me to stop saying "No" to things I should have, until I became someone I didn't recognise.

I'm sorry to say, but you will get your heart broken. Not only by the boys you think you like but the friends you think you love. I let myself take the blame. I let self-loathing take root in my heart and I started to dread being alone. My confidence was drained to the point where I started to question every decision and the future didn't seem so bright anymore. Daydreaming about life outside of school and the safety net of friends didn't bring hope or relief, but terror, so I kept those thoughts tucked away too.

Not sure how to change, I forced myself to accept this dark reality and trimmed down version of myself.

I worked to convince myself that there was nothing wrong with not wanting to go places without friends. I told myself I would eventually feel happy and worthy. In the meantime, I kept ignoring the conflicts that arose — Surely they'd blow over? I let the lies from old 'friends' wash over me — How could I hope for something different when I agreed with what they said?

It wasn't until a bad breakup that I realised I'd cut away pieces of myself that I loved, leaving me completely hollowed out. This version of myself I'd created, which wasn't really me, wasn't what I wanted anymore. I stood back and saw all the moments that lead to this place of feeling lost. I saw how I'd let myself get so unhappy and then stayed there so long.

The hole I dug was deep. It felt like the sky was far out of reach and I was surrounded by dirt and worms. For someone who used to see light all around her, it had become hard to find the bright side of things. I realised change doesn't happen overnight. Change is a risk that for years I haven't been brave enough to take. But I could choose differently. I could at least try!

I remembered a promise I made to myself way back — you know the one — that I would trust in something bigger, believe that things will be OK, and keep going, even if it gets dark along the way. I slowly learnt how to do things and go places on my own. I practised saying “No” to things and people who aren't good for me. It was tough, but I've since made honest friends who like me for me. I've grown and am discovering what it means to flourish and be happy along the way.

I got out of the hole I dug and have even planted a cute little apple tree in there. And maybe I wouldn't change what I went through, because I've learnt so much, but maybe you could learn from this here letter, and start enjoying your apples earlier on, because they're sweet and juicy and worth the work (and tears) it took to grow 'em. You are stronger than you know. Of course, things can still be stressful and heartbreaking and confusing at times, but things are also amazing and fun and worthwhile.

You're probably searching for the answers on how to avoid all the sadness and disappointment, but I'm sorry, that isn't why I'm writing. I didn't write to tell you how to avoid all the mistakes I made; I wrote so you might understand that life is messy but beautiful.

Yes, mistakes happen, and they can be painful, but mistakes are often catalysts for growth — and growth is good!

So don't focus on trying to never make mistakes. Everyone makes mistakes but they don't have to define you. Focus on growing through the mistakes, and living a vibrant, meaningful life. Remember you are courageous, funny, and loved, and nothing can change that.

Much love, Cielo Klass