

This week's theme is GROWTH

We know during our school years we go through an immense growth period – physically, mentally and emotionally. The article below is entitled “A letter to my 5-year-old self” - it is a reflection on the journey this 17-year-old girl has been through and how she has grown, and what she has learnt.

As you listen, reflect on your own journey and how far you have come since you were 5. What have you been through and how have you grown?

Later on, you may wish to write a letter to your younger self as a reflective exercise.

Dear five-year-old me...

I hope you're well and soaking up all the happy memories that I still remember. We used to have so much fun, having friends over every weekend, playing in the garden, going to birthday parties, drawing - you love art right? Are all those paintings still up on the wall in the kitchen? I hope you're enjoying all the things I remember fondly.

You're in for a treat when you're older - you make amazing friends and have the most incredible experiences and opportunities (I'm not going to give anything away though!). You've got a lot to look forward to.

But I'll be honest, to get to the best bits you're going to have to go through some tough times as well.

You're going to face a lot of struggles. Some might come sooner than you think and some might come when you're least expecting them. There are going to be moments you feel you can't go on anymore, and you feel helpless and alone and scared. And it will get dark, but I want to tell you now that there is light at the end of the tunnel. I know there will be a time when that seems impossible, but I promise, please trust me, because I am living proof that you can and you will get through everything. Please don't give up, there's so much waiting for you at the other end. You are stronger than you think, even when you feel weak.

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Ask for help when you need it. It doesn't make you a weaker person. It really is okay not to be okay and it's okay to ask for help. No one can face everything on their own, and allowing people to help you is what gets you through. You'll want to push people away, but try not to make that mistake again. They're really only trying to help.

School gets worse but then gets better. There will be some people who give you a hard time and at the time their opinions of you might seem like the most important, but the best and most important thing I can tell you now is don't EVER let anyone try and change who you are. Always be you and stay true to yourself. Don't waste all the time I did trying to 'fit in', because when you start allowing yourself to be you, that's when you shine the brightest - and you deserve to shine.

You won't be able to stop the hard times creeping up, and you can't prevent the challenges that come. But when they come you can be kinder to yourself and you can choose how you let the challenges affect you. Don't give them the power to control how you feel. Keep your head up and remember that you deserve to feel happy. Shape every day that you have and make it your own.

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Follow your heart as much as possible. Stand up for yourself and others when you need to, do what you feel is right and trust your instincts.

Do what you love and what makes you happy. Please keep up the dancing, I know you love it right now. Don't let anything get in the way of that. Keep learning music and enjoy expressing yourself in the way I know you do. Those things are going to be so valuable to you in the future. Follow your dreams and follow your heart whenever possible, because you deserve to be happy.

I hope this helps with some things coming up. You are going to be okay, just remember that no matter what, **you're never alone.**

Good luck!

**Your friend,
Elsa (age 17)**