

Dearest Talia,

Hi there, it's 19-year-old you. I know... that probably sounds ancient. You can't even imagine being this old yet, and honestly, that's kind of the point of it all. There is so much ahead of you that you can't see yet, and that's not something to rush through, it's something to be grateful for.

You think you understand a lot right now. Sometimes you feel like you know everything. But the truth is, you're just at the beginning of understanding how big and complex the world is. And that's not a bad thing, it's actually what makes everything exciting! Even in just the past year or so, I've learned more than I thought possible, not just facts from school, but about people, relationships, and myself. There's so much nuance in everything, and you'll start to see that things aren't just right or wrong, good or bad. Let yourself stay open to that complexity.

Academically, I want you to remember this: when people tell you, "you're lucky you're smart," don't let that define you. It's not just intelligence, it's your work ethic, your curiosity, and your willingness to keep trying when things feel hard. You don't give up easily, and that matters most and will carry you farther in life. But also, don't tie your worth so tightly to your achievements. You are allowed to struggle. You are allowed to not be the best at everything. Learning is not about proving something, it's about growing, listening and trying again when you don't immediately succeed.

Stay curious. Ask more questions than you think you should. Let yourself get excited about things, even if they seem small or "uncool." The more you lean into curiosity, the more the world will open up to you.

Socially, things might feel confusing sometimes. Friendships will change, people will leave, and you'll feel lonely in ways you didn't expect. That doesn't mean you did something wrong. It just means you're growing. Hold onto the people who make you feel like yourself, and don't chase the ones who make you question your worth.

You're also going to feel things really deeply, especially when it comes to relationships. You'll meet people who make you feel understood and alive in a way you didn't know was possible. And sometimes, those connections won't work out the way you hoped. That will hurt, but I promise you, it won't break you. In fact, it will teach you what you actually need, what you deserve, and what kind of love is worth holding onto. Not everyone who feels important is meant to stay in your life forever, and that's okay.

Personally, I want you to slow down. You're always looking ahead, thinking how awesome being grown-up will be. But don't forget to live where you are right now. These moments: your friends, your family, play-time, recess, or even the boring days, matter more than you realize. One day, you'll miss them. So, don't rush growing up. There will be moments where you wish you were older, more independent, more in control. And yes, those things will come, but so will responsibilities and pressures you or even I don't fully understand yet. Enjoy the stage you're in. There's something special about each phase of your life, even if you can't see it at the moment.

You don't need to have everything figured out. In fact, you won't. And that's normal. Life isn't about arriving somewhere where everything suddenly makes sense. It's about continuously learning, adjusting, and growing into yourself.

Be kinder to yourself. You are harder on yourself than anyone else ever could be. Chasing perfection will only make you feel like you're falling short. You're doing better than you think.

Lastly, trust yourself. You have good instincts. Even when you feel unsure, even when things don't go the way you planned, you will find your way forward. Don't be afraid of being wrong if you speak up. It's better to speak up than stay silent and suffer because of it.

I'm proud of you already. Not for what you've achieved, but for how much you care, how hard you try, and how deeply you feel.

You've got lots ahead of you. It's going to be more beautiful, complicated, and meaningful than you can imagine. And don't ever think you can tell your mom how much you love and appreciate her, too much. She's always gonna be there for you every step of the way. Make sure you thank her for it.