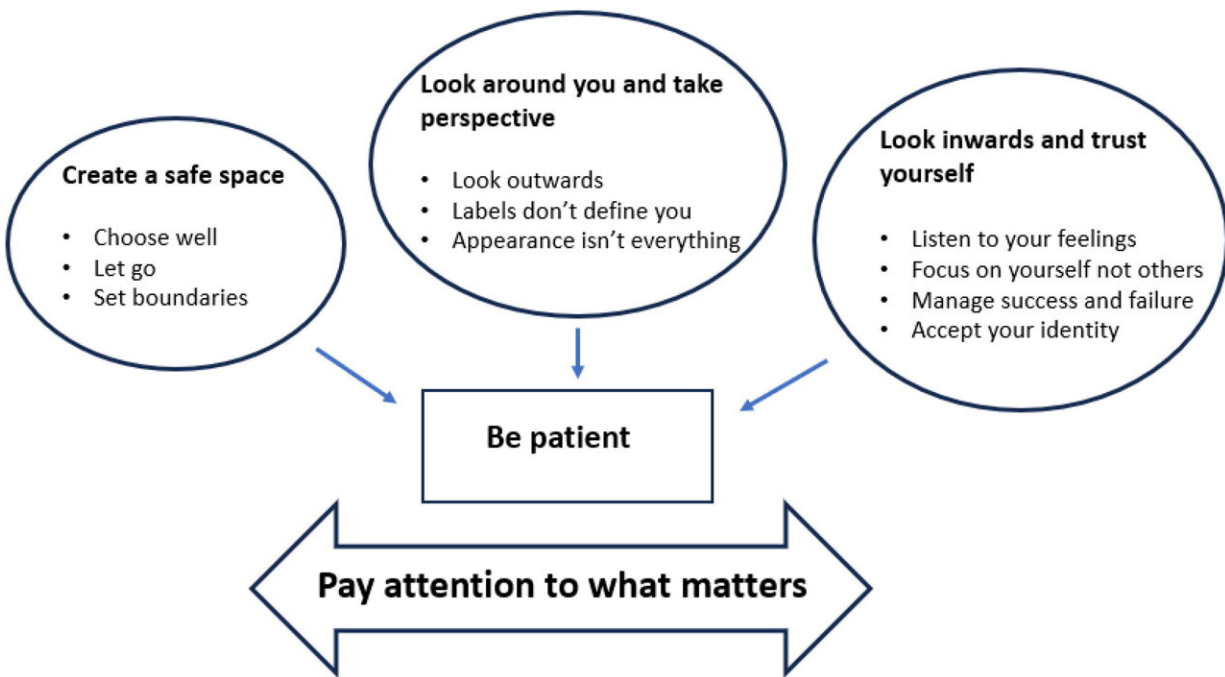


# Giving lessons to your teenage self could boost your well-being, say researchers

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A mind map illustrating the key themes from the study. The lessons learned looking back involved managing both internal factors and external factors, being patient and a need to pay attention to what matters and ignore what doesn't matter. Credit: *Cogent Psychology* (2024). DOI: 10.1080/23311908.2024.2352204

Asking young adults to advise their younger selves could have a positive impact on their self-esteem, resilience and mental health, according to a [new study](#) from the University of Surrey published in *Cogent Psychology*.

Researchers used a unique "photograph prompted think-aloud" method on 42 people aged 20–24 years old, where they reflected aloud while looking at a photo of themselves from their mid-teens.

Many of the participants told their younger selves to be patient and embrace change and uncertainty. Others told themselves to let go of bad relationships and set clear boundaries in future interactions.

Professor Jane Ogden, co-author of the study from the School of Psychology at the University of Surrey, said, "In a world quick to categorize young adults as fragile, our study reveals that they are, in fact, deeply complex individuals trying to navigate a rapidly changing landscape, often under the constant scrutiny of online exposure.

"Our [research](#) provides a crucial roadmap for the journey from adolescence to adulthood—offering actionable guidance that can empower young adults to strengthen their [social connections](#), solidify their [personal identity](#), and bolster their emotional health.

"These insights are invaluable not only for the young people themselves but also for educators, counselors, and [mental health](#) professionals who support them, pinpointing key areas where focused support and guidance can make a significant difference."

By reflecting on their teenage years, participants learned three key lessons:

- Create a safe space: Participants reflected on the importance of choosing supportive friends and letting go of harmful relationships to protect their well-being. They also highlighted the need to set clear boundaries and stand up for themselves, which is essential for maintaining mental health and self-respect.
- Look around and take perspective: Participants urged their younger selves to broaden their outlook, understanding that everyone faces challenges and that they are not alone in their struggles. They also discovered the importance of valuing themselves for their actions and character rather than their appearance and resisting societal labels that try to define them.
- Look inwards and trust yourself: Participants emphasized the importance of listening to their intuition and taking care of their emotional needs while focusing on [personal growth](#) without comparing themselves to others. They learned to see both successes and failures as opportunities for growth, persevering through challenges and embracing each experience as part of their development.

Professor Ogden continued, "There is real scope to expand our research into this type of intervention to include a wider range of voices from diverse backgrounds. This could be crucial for understanding the unique paths of [young adults](#)' development. Advocating for policies that embed these insights into educational and community programs will ensure more tailored and effective support for every young adult navigating the complexities of growth and change."

**More information:** Jane Ogden et al, "Dear younger self...': using a photograph think-aloud method to explore the lessons university students would pass on to their teenage selves, *Cogent Psychology* (2024). [DOI: 10.1080/23311908.2024.2352204](https://doi.org/10.1080/23311908.2024.2352204)

Provided by University of Surrey

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