

LISTS

Ten Things I've Been Meaning to Say to You

by [Jason Reynolds](#), May 28, 2018 9:19 AM



Dear Reader,

If you are a young person — by young person I mean 19 and younger, though young-at-hearters aren't excluded. Nor are older people. Or old people. But I'm speaking primarily to young people. Anyway, if you are a young person, the following are 10 things I've been meaning to say to you:

1. I don't believe social media is going to lead to the apocalypse. I know many people my age do, even though many of us are as caught up in its webbing as you. As a matter of fact, my generation is the generation that created it, and pushed it on you, almost force-feeding you avatars and touchscreens since you were born, only to criticize you for engaging with them, not as accessories, but as appendages. And the way we criticize is by saying (ad nauseam) that social media, and your obsession with it, will lead to the apocalypse. Well, I've never believed that. And quite frankly, I have other ideas about what will lead to the apocalypse, and it turns out it has more to do with people two or three times your age. What I do think, though, is that social media might, if we're not careful, turn an entire generation into a selfie. A generation that only looks at

itself, contrived, posed to present a false perfection, won't be able to avoid or learn from the mistakes of the generations that have come before it. So... sometimes, let me take a photo with you. Just sometimes. You can put a filter on it and everything. And if not, that's okay. Then just let me take it. Let me snap the picture. Let me be involved in framing you. Let me help capture you in your best light. Maybe even tag me in the post. But please, please, please don't force me to photobomb you, because I'll do it and all you'll do is hit delete.

2. There's no way you can want to do away with injustice unless you want to do away with all of it. Remember that. You can't be anti-racist, but tease people about their weight. You can't fight for women's rights, and talk about your classmates who learn differently. I know, I know, you can't fight every fight. Except... you can. Accept... you can.

3. There's a difference between being irreverent and irresponsible. Remember this forever.

4. There are no such things as safe spaces. I'm sorry. I wish there were. I really, really do. But the world won't always be kind. As a matter fact, a lot of you already know this. So, if you are fortunate to be in a space — school, team, etc. — that has created an emotional safeness for you, use it, not just as place to relax and be yourself, but also as a place to develop relationships and fortified friendships that can recreate that warmth and comfort when school and/or the season are over. When the wolves of the world are growling. I use my mother for this. She reminds me that I'm built for this. She reminds me that I'm a wolf trap.

5. Speaking of mothers, text yours. A simple "I love you" goes a long way. She's trying. She's always trying.

6. Continue to push back. Bang your fists. Scream until your throats are stripped. Cry out. Walk out. March. Fight, fight, fight what you don't agree with, even if adults don't agree with you. Even if adults call you crybabies. Because that kind of emotion, that kind of fearlessness and gumption, that kind of empathetic desire is a seed that will grow you into adults who actually care about the world. This is *true* "social media."

7. Sing your song, do your dance, talk your talk. I sure did. We sure did.

8. Remember courage is often less about what you do, and more about what you don't. I know, that's a little corny, but many of you know how difficult this is. When I was younger the conversation around peer pressure was such a snoozer. Like... *come on*. It was always, "If so-and-so jumps off a bridge, are you going to jump?" And of course I would always say, "Of course not! That don't even make no sense." But then... when I got to that bridge, and I saw so-and-so jump, I started to ask myself, "Well... did he live?" And, "Is there water down there? Because if so, why not jump?" Yeah... don't jump. Trust me. It ain't worth it.

9. But when it comes to your dreams, JUMP. Always jump!

10. I like you. A lot. I know, that's kind of a soft landing, but this thing was supposed to be 10 things I've been meaning to tell you, and I always tell you I love you, but I rarely tell you how much I like you. So... I like you. You're wild sometimes, and a little all over the place, but, hey, so am I. But that's easy for me to say, because, well, I'm not your teacher. So... let's start this one over.

10. Be gentle with your teachers. Especially the ones you know are in it for you. And I know you know who those teachers are, because one of the things I like most about you is your ability to discern which adults actually care. So, I'm talking about those teachers. The ones who acknowledge your presence and reward your trying. Remember, they too are trying. They really, *really* are. Sometimes more than you know.

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