

SAMPLE
CHAPTER
INSIDE!

A Guide to Life,
Relationships and
Speaking Up

IT'S A

BRAVE
YOUNG
WORLD

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Contents

My Story.....	6
Chapter 1 – Identity	8
Chapter 2 – Family	32
Chapter 3 – Friendships	46
Chapter 4 – Relationships and Self-love	60
Chapter 5 – Mind, Mood and Feelings	84
Chapter 6 – School	116
Chapter 7 – Beliefs	136
Chapter 8 – The Internet	170
Chapter 9 – Your Safety	186
Chapter 10 – Future You	204
Useful Resources.....	214
Acknowledgements.....	216



Welcome

Hello! I am so glad you decided to pick up this book. It was written for you, to be an honest companion as you work through the complexities of finding yourself and growing up in today's world. You might be wondering a bit about who I am and why I decided to write this book . . .

My name is Anu Adebogun, and I am an author, youth practitioner and PhD researcher at the University of Oxford looking at issues of gender, justice and crime. Over the years, I have had the immense privilege of delivering sessions to thousands of young people to promote safety, wellbeing and access to education. I also work with several charities and community projects that empower young people.

To say that I am committed to youth development is putting it lightly. I want to see you thrive, step into your power and light up our world. Through my work, I have listened to young people share their struggles with social media, families, friends, school, relationships and so much more. I believe YOU are the future and that is why I wrote this book.

Think of these pages as a journey to get to know yourself better and uncover the power of being brave. Each section covers a different topic, from values and beliefs to healthy boundaries and coping with challenging feelings. You'll find tips on relationships and consent, talking about cancel culture, navigating school and staying safe online – no conversation is off the table.

This book is for you if anything we cover feels relevant, regardless of your gender, age or race. We address some difficult topics but aim to equip you with the information and language to call out unsafe situations. This book will help you stand up for yourself and for others. Use it to become a global citizen and the best version of yourself. I am rooting for you!

ANU x





My Story

I was certainly one of the 'early bloomers', and by early I mean really early (I started my period at nine years old). So while my friends were still playing 'it' in the playground, I had more pressing issues on my mind, like trying not to leak out of my school skirt . . . It felt like I went from Reception to training bra without much space just to be a child.

I still remember my first 'talk' with my Nigerian parents after starting my period. They meant well, but the responsibility was placed on me to

'protect myself' from harm. I was told to avoid boys at all costs because if one of them even mistakenly poked my shoulder, I could fall pregnant (not true of course!). I had to act like nothing different was going on in my body and to keep 'hormonal reactions' at bay. There was a lot of shame attached to how 'grown-up' I was becoming. I am Nigerian, and culturally it is believed that if a girl is 'growing too fast', it is probably because she is 'messing around' – if her breasts are 'too big for her age', it is because she is allowing someone to touch them. I was always confused and hurt by this untrue assumption. It felt like there was no understanding



that my body was just on its own unique journey. More importantly, if someone had actually been taking advantage of me as a child, suggesting I was to blame would have caused huge emotional damage. No one should ever be blamed or made to feel ashamed for someone else's inappropriate actions.

From Year Seven onwards, I remember holding my breath as I rushed past the barbershop because the older men inside would almost always make crude remarks. Often, one of the men would come out and follow me down the road, pestering me for my number. When I refused, I would be sworn at for being stuck up.

At this stage, I was none the wiser that this was verbal assault and I could report it. I wish someone had said, "Anu, it's not your responsibility to

diminish yourself to stay safe from predators, bullies or abusers." Instead, I was told to hide my growing hips in layers of baggy clothing, to be good enough, quiet enough and to avoid unwanted attention. Rather than being silenced, I wish I had been told about trust and boundaries and taught how to spot the signs of someone violating them.

The responsibility should not be on anyone to make themselves noticeable, play it small, avoid the internet or give up the places and activities they enjoy to avoid predators; this only gives more power to abusers. Instead, all of us can be equipped with knowledge and understanding so that we can advocate for ourselves and others. I wish I'd had this guide during my school years and beyond. I hope it is useful to you.





*"Want nothing but the best
for your friends, because
when your friends are
happy and successful,
it's probably going to be easier
for you to be happy."*

Roxane Gay



Chapter 3

Friendships



Let's explore . . .
friendship labels and values,
frenemies, fallouts, peer
pressure and breakups.

In ancient times, survival was dependent on fitting in with the rest of the tribe in order to gain food, shelter, protection and companionship. We still have this evolutionary need to find our community and a sense of belonging. This is one of the many reasons that having friends and fitting in can feel like such a big deal at times. Whether you have a massive squad of besties or a small, tight circle, great friendships can make life a little easier.

Friends share our interests and allow us to be ourselves. They make us laugh when we're feeling glum, listen to our worries, think of wild solutions and always remind us that we matter. You might feel like you don't have any friends now but that doesn't mean you won't have any in the future. There may even be someone already waiting to be your friend.

Female friendships

In books, films and music, female friendships are given a bad rap – full of gossiping, jealousy and competing for dates. But this is such a tired and false idea. Society puts so much emphasis on romantic relationships and ignores the beauty and strength in female friendships.

"My friends are my backbone, I can always count on them to be there for me."

Jemima (15)

JOURNAL TIME

1. Draw your friendship circle

Come up with an avatar or doodle of yourself and your closest friends.

Friendship labels

Did you know that there are different levels of friendship?

Best or close friends

These are the people whose friendship matters most – you can confide in them about anything and everything. Some people might have one best friend; others might have a handful of close friends. They are going through the THICK of it with you.

Acquaintances

An acquaintance is someone you know or see around who has not become a proper friend. You might say hello to them but that's as far as it goes.

"They're really good fun, I am always laughing around them."

lizzy (13)

2. What do friendships mean to you?

Have a think about why you love doing life with your best friends. Take a moment to write some of these reasons down as a little bit of encouragement for difficult times.

If you hang around in a large group, it might be tempting to think EVERYONE is your friend. But if you pay attention, there are some people in the group who you really connect with and others not so much. Understanding friendship labels can be helpful in shaping your expectations of people.

Group friends

These people share a friendship circle with you. They are fun to hang out with but you probably won't call them when you're upset. You hang with them when you're in the mood to socialise, have a laugh and a good time.

"My friends have made the story of my life. In a thousand ways they have turned my limitations into beautiful privileges."

Helen Keller

Choosing friends

With adolescence comes more independence and the ability to CHOOSE who your friends are. But have you ever thought about why certain friends are in your life? It might be helpful to keep this phrase in mind:

"You are the company you keep."

I know. You have probably heard this statement a hundred times but it is true. The people you hang out with can influence your behaviour and there are loads of studies to show how powerful this can be.

One of my closest friends growing up used to complain a lot and talk about other people. I noticed that whenever I spent time with her, I would complain too and just feel down and cynical about the world; her attitude really affected me. I have since built friendships with confident, kind and ambitious women, and this has spurred me on to believe in myself and my abilities. Choose friends who inspire you and motivate you to be better.

**"If you want friends, be a friend.
If you want good friends,
be a good friend."
Anonymous**

Friends with similar values

There's nothing more draining than pretending to be someone you are not just to keep a friend around. Earlier on, we discussed the values, morals and beliefs that matter to us. This knowledge is powerful – if someone criticises you for your beliefs or way of life, they probably aren't a good friend. Surround yourself with people who share or respect and accept your values.



They make me laugh.

They respect my beliefs and choices.



They are honest about how they feel.

Activity time

My best friend . . .

If you have a best or close friend, think about what makes them so amazing. Share this with your bestie, then ask them to say what it's like to be your friend. Check out the examples in the bubbles.

Are you a good friend?

Being a good friend does not mean being a perfect person – no one is perfect. But friends should make us feel positive about ourselves and our future. It is important that you reflect on whether you match up to the friendship standards you set for everyone else. Here are some of the attributes of a good friend.

Accepts

They recognise that we are all different and embrace what makes their friends unique.

Cares

They create the space for you to let your guard down and be vulnerable. They show they care for you in your weakest moments.

Celebrates

They big up the people around them. They don't compete with their friends or feel intimidated by their wins.

Apologises

We all have bad days and don't always say the right thing. A good friend will apologise when they get things wrong.

Shine theory

Two incredible women – Aminatou Sow and Ann Friedman – came up with 'shine theory', which states that if we pour our best selves into our friendships, we can become allies and not competitors.

A good friend knows that helping someone else's light to shine brightly will not diminish their own light but instead reflect it.



JOURNAL TIME

Create your 'friendworthy' wish list

List all the things that would make someone a good friend to you and you to them.

BEST FRIEND

Friendship fallouts

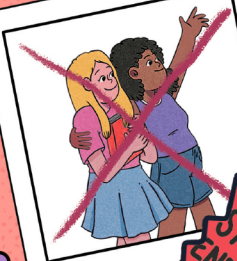
It is inevitable; even the best of buds will clash. Falling out with a friend is totally normal. No matter how much you adore them or have in common, there will be areas of conflict and disagreement and that's okay. Fallouts do not have to mean a friendship has failed; in fact, having healthy conflict and disagreements with your friends can actually strengthen your relationships.

If you had a big argument or feel really hurt, you will need to ask yourself a few questions. Is this friendship worth saving? Are you prepared to make up with them if they don't make the move? Being the first to say sorry is difficult. It takes bravery and maturity because there is that stomach-turning fear that your friend could dismiss your apology. If this happens, stay calm. If you need to, you can walk away with closure and dignity knowing that you tried to make amends.



"My friend and I had a horrible argument; now she ignores me every time we see each other and we just don't talk anymore."

Leila (12)



Frenemies and toxic friends

Friendships, just like romantic relationships, can turn toxic and harmful or become damaging. We sometimes choose to be friends with people who we know aren't really there for us. When things are going well they are great, but when things are bad they can go cold on us until the cycle repeats itself and we see their good side again.

Activity time Toxic friendships

Unsure whether it's a toxic friendship? Ask yourself these questions:

When you don't want to join in, do they make fun of you?

Does it feel like the end of the world if you don't do what your friend says?

After putting you down, do they make you doubt yourself by saying it was all a joke?

Do you sometimes feel forced to do things you're uncomfortable with to fit in?

Who are they?

Frenemies are people who were kinda-sorta your friends once. On the surface, they appear to be your friends but they do not support you. It might be that they try to have 'one up' on you all the time, and you may feel uncomfortable sharing your success with them. The very worst kind of frenemy puts you down, lets you down and tries to keep you down there in the dumps.





Story time

I attended three different primary schools, so I had to go through the cycle of making new friends and leaving them again multiple times. It was really difficult. At the last primary school I went to, I joined in Year Six. I was quite nervous, but I felt this school would be different because I already knew someone – I'll call her Bisi. She went to my church and we were on quite friendly terms, or so I thought . . .

Before starting, I visited the school to meet the teachers and students. Bisi made quite a big show of us knowing each other and that made me feel happy. That summer, I actually started to look forward to starting at this new school, so imagine my shock when September came and everyone ignored me. I thought at first that maybe they were just shy but it was more than that.

Bisi smiled at me occasionally but kept her distance. For the first few months, I spent break and lunch alone and was completely perplexed. After Christmas, the teachers announced a residential trip. Initially, I did not want to go – I literally had no friends – but my parents weren't having it.



Bisi was not on this trip and I finally realised why everyone had been ignoring me. Bisi had told them that I was rude and two-faced, and because we knew each other from church, they all believed her. However, without Bisi around, the class got to see me for who I really was and make their own decisions about me. Let's just say that their perception of me changed, and Bisi revealed herself as an unreliable person and a frenemy indeed.



REFLECTION

There are many reasons why Bisi may have chosen to behave this way – insecurity, jealousy or home-life problems. While we can recognise that people may be having difficulties, this should never excuse or normalise harmful behaviour. We all have unfavourable qualities or weaknesses, but that does not make it okay to cause others to feel hurt, shame or fear.

Peer pressure

Peer pressure is real, and wanting to fit in can mean we push our boundaries to keep friendships going. If toxic friends put pressure on you, it can be hard to stand up to them. There are also times when you might put pressure on yourself to please them.

Maybe there's a group of people that you really want to chill with, but they are doing something that is completely out of your comfort zone. You might worry that walking away or saying no risks the group seeing you as odd or babyish, so instead you put pressure on yourself to conform, thinking that maybe they will like you better. But there's no guarantee they will. Be brave; let the group know what you believe. It's not easy, but your safety and peace of mind is the most important thing.

"Sometimes it just feels easier to go along with what my friends are doing, even though it makes me feel really bad afterwards."

Kiran (13)

Activity time Toxic group

Questions to ask yourself when you feel under pressure from people:

- Do I actually fit into this group?
- Do I want to be a part of this group?
- Why does being a part of it mean this much to me?

When friendships change

As you go through changes in life, your friendship circle will begin to look a bit different. Starting secondary school or moving house sometimes means leaving old friends behind, which can feel daunting. But your best friends don't have to disappear just because you're not at the same school. In some cases, you might mature quicker than your friends or vice versa. Growing apart and having different interests does not have to mean that the friendship is over, but it can present a natural opportunity to ask yourself if you still want this person in your life.

"The thought of no longer knowing the friends I grew up with is so scary. It'll be like losing a part of my childhood."

Miriam (13)

"My best friend is a boy; he always gives me jokes and is so easy to talk to. It's annoying how everyone thinks we like each other though. I think it's been getting to him because we don't talk as much any more."

Bolu (10)

"We used to be so close in primary school – now it's awkward any time I see her."

Stacey (13)

JOURNAL TIME

Changing friendships

Write about any changes you have noticed in your friendships and how they make you feel.

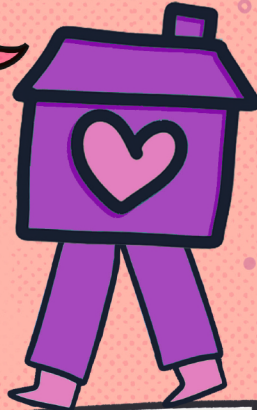


Friendship breakups

A friendship breakup happens when either you or someone else decides that your friendship has run its course and it is time to move on. It might involve confronting a frenemy and telling them how their behaviour makes you feel. This could allow them to acknowledge the pain they are causing, apologise and change for the better. However, it is important to know that some frenemies will not change. Be prepared to let those people go.

"You can't make homes out of human beings; someone should have already told you that."

Warsan Shire

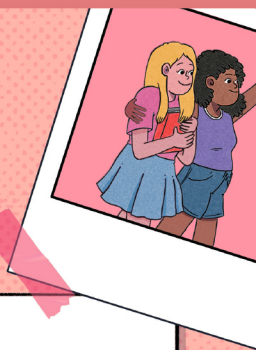


The truth is no one is guaranteed to stay in your life forever. Following a friendship breakup, a part of your grieving process will be finding the joy in doing things for yourself and by yourself. Think about some activities you could do to enjoy your own company.

JOURNAL TIME

Write a friendship breakup letter

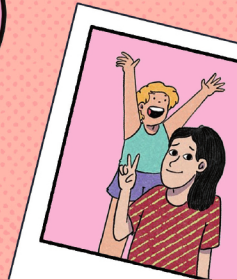
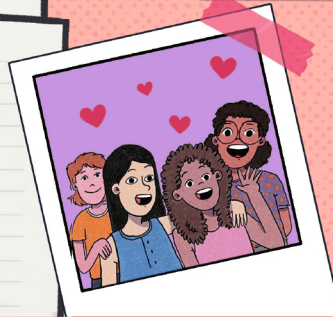
Is there someone you need to be honest with? Include all your thoughts and feelings in the letter. Name the wrongs and issues you encountered. Be honest and open. No one is going to read this letter, so don't hold back. Once you've written it, you can choose either to rip it up into a million little pieces or bury it. This could help release any anger and bitterness you might be feeling.



Friendship matters

In order to navigate this world bravely, you need a community of people who have got your back. Friends matter, and who you choose to surround yourself with is not a decision to take lightly. It is important to celebrate the power of female friendships and reject the myth that girls cannot get along. That said, friendships can be complicated. Understanding the different levels of friendships can empower you to set healthy boundaries with people and understand the role they play in your life. It is normal for friends to drift apart or even fall out, but they can come back together and rebuild trust. Your friendships will change as you evolve; there might be bumps and breakups along the way, but do not let that discourage you from opening up to new people. There is an anonymous saying that I firmly believe in:

"You still have not met all the people who are going to love you."





We are
BRAVE around here!
Being **BOLD** and
AUDACIOUS is our way.

No subject is off limits in this brilliant guide to life. From frenemies, crushes and consent to mental health, family dynamics and online addiction, this book will be the big sister you wish you had – answering all your most pressing questions, offering reassurances and helping you to understand your rights. Be empowered to put your safety first and gain the confidence to speak up and live your best life!



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BEST
FRIENDS

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