



Life Actually By Kari Kampakis

10 thoughts for my 10-year-old daughter

There are certain people in this world who soften me when I look at them.

My daughter Marie Claire is one of them.

Maybe it's her rosy cheeks. Or her starry eyes. Or her lyrical voice as sweet as honey that reminds me of a fairy.

Then again, it could be what I know about Marie Claire that isn't readily apparent. Like how kind, tenderhearted and compassionate she is. How she knows what to say to a friend who's been hurt by another child. How she listens before she speaks and often makes remarks that make me think, "Wow, that's really wise."

Clearly, there are many qualities that I admire and love about my girl. But if I had to pick a favorite, I'd choose her joyful spirit. It doesn't take much to make Marie Claire happy. It really is the simple things — like having a dance party in the kitchen, or jumping on the trampoline with friends — that make her radiate.

I want her to keep that light. I want her confidence and self-esteem to last for years to come. Where Marie Claire is now, fast approaching her 10th birthday, is the sweet spot before adolescence. As I think about what typically happens to girls in adolescence — how their confidence and self-esteem often begin to erode starting around fifth grade — I want to hug my baby tight, reaffirm who she is, and point her to the truth.

Because only the truth can help her as she wrestles with life's big questions and finds her place in this world.

The first decade of Marie Claire's life was major, and this next decade will be, too. From age 10 to age 20, she'll evolve from childhood to womanhood. It's crazy and hard to fathom

that these changes are even normal, because in my eyes she'll always be the little girl who loves to dress up, play pranks and spray her bedroom with aromas from Bath & Body Works.

Following are 10 things I want Marie Claire to know as she enters this next decade.

1. It's OK to grow up at your own pace. It's good to take your time and do what's right for YOU. Our world pushes girls to the fast track. It wants you to paint your face with makeup, dress in revealing clothes and aim to look 20 when you're really 13.

Why? Because believing you need embellishments to look beautiful and desirable will make you buy whatever people sell. It's a selfish ploy, and I hope you see through it. I hope you trust your instincts and remember that the best part of your appearance — the one that ultimately sets you apart — is the light that shines from within. It costs nothing, yet it's worth everything. As Anne Lamott says, "Joy is the best makeup."

2. Being a leader sometimes means standing alone. It means making a brave choice nobody else is making, like sticking up for the kid being teased or avoiding a party where there's sure to be trouble.

3. Nothing ruins a friendship faster than jealousy and competition. So when you're jealous of a friend or secretly trying to one-up her, pray to get your heart in the right place. Remember that what's good for your friend is good for you because you're both on the same team.

4. Feeling different is completely normal. We all feel different because we are different. God created you uniquely so you can serve your generation like no one in the universe has ever served before. Rather than wish to be like

everyone else, look for ways in which your authenticity can be used for His purpose.

5. Every choice has a consequence, and the choices you make today impact the opportunities you'll have tomorrow. While making positive choices (like working hard in school) will open doors down the road, making negative choices (like failing to apply yourself) will close doors. Whatever choices you make, be prepared to live with them.

6. Be kind to everyone, but distance yourself from negativity. Trust your gut instincts when you feel like a friend or group you spend time with would drop you in a heartbeat or purposely leave you out, because these instincts are usually correct.

7. Knowing who is good for you — and who isn't good for you — is the key to healthy relationships. While good relationships give you the courage to be yourself, toxic relationships crush your spirit. They cause more stress, tears and drama than genuine joy, laughter and happiness. Learning to recognize when a relationship isn't working — and having the courage to walk away when the warning signs appear — is an important life skill to develop.

8. There's no such thing as a perfect friend or perfect relationship. While you should have standards for the people you allow in your innermost circle — expecting a certain level of trust and respect — you should also leave room for grace and forgiveness. All of us make mistakes and occasionally hurt the people we love. Don't give up on a friend just because they messed up or did one thing you don't agree with.

9. The best way to build confidence is to challenge yourself and accomplish a goal

outside your comfort zone that forces you to stretch, grow, and master new skills.


10. Not everyone deserves a voice in your life. Not everyone has opinions worth your time and attention. When deciding whether to listen to a person, ask yourself this: Do I respect this individual? Do they have a history of making good choices in their own life? Do they genuinely love me? Do they care about my future? If I had a big decision to make, would I seek their counsel? Do they draw me closer to God and enhance my relationship with Him? If you answer no to any question, then think twice before taking their words or advice to heart.

Most of all, Marie Claire, I hope you always remember how unconditionally loved you are. As much as your daddy and I love you, your heavenly Father loves you even more. He's the only true expert of you, for only God has known since the beginning of time who you are, why you exist and what you were born to do.

Happy 10th birthday, my little ray of sunshine, and thank you for your light. You're a joy to know and a joy to raise, a sweet blessing in my life for which I am so very, very grateful.

Kari Kubiszyn Kampakis is a Mountain Brook mom of four girls, columnist, and blogger for The Huffington Post. Her newest book, "LIKED: Whose Approval Are You Living For?" releases Nov. 15 and is available for pre-order on Amazon. Her first book, "10 Ultimate Truths Girls Should Know," is available everywhere books are sold. Join Kari's Facebook community at "Kari Kampakis, Writer," visit her blog at karikampakis.com or contact her at kari@karikampakis.com.

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