

Your Turn

What's in it for me? An empowering approach to adulthood.

Avocado-toast fiends. Irresponsible with finances. Lazy. Over the past decade, a lot's been said about young adults and their hesitance to grow up. But what does it even mean to be an adult? Well, twentieth-century psychologists came up with five supposedly concrete markers: finish your education, get a job, leave home, marry, and have children. We've been taught to live according to that definition, and yet so much has changed about the world since it was formulated. One size doesn't fit all – but many of us still go through the prescribed motions. Underneath, we're battling stress, anxiety, and the malaise that we're just playing the part of an adult. These blinks offer a different perspective: through psychological insights, the author's personal experience, and practical strategies, you'll learn to clear a path to a more authentic, fulfilling adulthood. In these blinks, you'll learn

how to “get out of neutral”; what marshmallows have to do with money; and how three superpowers can help you turn around a shitty day.

Fending for yourself means playing the game of life instead of watching from the bleachers.

The first time the author truly realized she was an adult was when all her belongings went up in flames. At the time, she and her husband were in their 20s, and they'd decided to move to California. So they packed all their belongings into a moving truck and went to stay with the author's parents while the truck made its way across the country. One night, at dinner, the author got a call: the truck had caught on fire. All their belongings – furniture, keepsakes, romantic letters – had burnt to a crisp. She hadn't felt like an adult at her wedding a few years earlier; that was just a big party involving a big dress. Adulthood hadn't happened at her bar exam; that was just another test. But in this moment, she knew she couldn't rely on anyone else to take care of the situation – and she didn't want them to. She somehow knew she could handle it. She was fending for herself. And that felt good. The key message here is: Fending for yourself means playing the game of life instead of watching from the bleachers. If you haven't already had your fending-for-yourself moment, don't worry – it's coming. It'll feel scary. You might look around for an adult. And then, suddenly, you'll realize that adult is you! Stepping up to face life's challenges is both terrifying and empowering. And every time you do it, you'll feel more capable of facing the next obstacle. You'll see that life is like a game you're playing. Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose. But at least you're not watching from the sidelines. There are a few basics of fending: learning how to cook, practicing good hygiene, scheduling doctor and dental visits. Fending also means finding work to pay your bills, making your own decisions, and replying and showing up. It can seem hard to take care of these orders of business if someone else has always done the tasks for you – that's what psychologists call learned helplessness. But you need to take charge; it's your life, not anyone else's! In any given situation, fending means putting together some kind of solution based on your options, capabilities, and resources. It means creating a path forward. It doesn't mean being

perfect – which we'll explore in the next blink.

Being an adult involves being OK with imperfection, learning from failure, and moving forward.

Many of us have an unhealthy relationship with the word perfect, often because of cultural or parental pressures. But perfect is a mirage; it's an impossible demand, the pursuit of which is guaranteed to breed misery. There's only one course of action here: break up with perfection. Your dream life won't happen because you're "perfect"; it'll happen through learning and growth. The key message here is: Being an adult involves being OK with imperfection, learning from failure, and moving forward. Society tells us the f-word is bad. No, not that one – failing. We're also taught to avoid falling, faltering, flailing, floundering, and fumbling. But the author calls these the "Beautiful F's." When you release your idea of being perfect, along with your fear of shame or inadequacy, you're free to fail – and can then figure out what you want to do next and move in that direction. Take it from the show Game of Thrones. When Jon Snow told his mentor Ser Davos he'd failed, what did Ser Davos say? "Good. Now go fail again." That's because a "disastrous" experience like failing yields another f-word: feedback. Feedback teaches and enables us to move out of our comfort zone and into our stretch zone. If you hadn't fallen – and gotten up – over and over, how would you have learned how to walk? Stay in your comfort zone and, yes, you'll be comfy – and bored and listless as you crawl on all fours through life. In your stretch zone, you might feel wobbly. You might not know exactly what you're doing. But that's OK; you'll be cultivating a growth mindset – and thus opening life's opportunities and your relation to them – as opposed to limiting yourself with a fixed mindset. To start fostering a growth mindset, there are five simple mental shifts you can make: First, instead of "I'm perfect," say, "I'm trying to get better at this." Second, change "I'm smart" to "When I work hard at things, it pays off." Third, "This is hard" becomes "I do hard things." Fourth, don't say "I can't." Instead, try, "I can take the first step, and see what happens." Finally, swap out "I suck" for "I haven't learned how to do this yet." These hacks are applicable to personal, as well as work, situations. So breathe in, and out. Tell yourself you don't need to feel "perfect" or "comfortable" to know you're fine. You can only control your own actions and reactions. And that includes letting go.

It's important to be good – until it gets in the way of your happiness.

Think about the most wonderful people you know. What are their characteristics? Maybe they're loving? Caring? Kind? You can reason, then, that being loving, caring, and kind is important to others. In short, it's good to be good. You also know it's impossible to be perfect; at times, you might find yourself being inconsiderate or an outright asshole. But adulting means you're not complacent about it. So, how do you be "good?" First, acknowledge that the world doesn't just revolve around one person (you); it revolves around all 7.7 billion of us. That is, your wants and needs aren't above anyone else's. Next, pitch in: enter a situation with the mindset of, How can I help? Be compassionate toward others, tell the truth – and when you make a mistake, apologize.

The key message here is: It's important to be good – until it gets in the way of your happiness. Be loving to others – but don't please them at the expense of your own well-being. Your family or community might think they have success all figured out. They might think they know what's good for you in terms of your school, job, and relationship. But the only person who truly knows you and what you want . . . is you. What if you woke up one day and realized all your decisions were made from a place of wanting to impress, or not wanting to disappoint, others? At 27, the author was sobbing on her porch in Menlo Park, California. She was a corporate lawyer, successful on every front but her own happiness. Now, at 53, things are different: she left corporate law, became a dean at Stanford, and then an author and speaker – which she loves! That might sound like a roundabout career route. But sometimes, you need to veer way off course to discover a path that really makes you happy. There are three steps to reaching your path. First up? Listen to your voice. Ask yourself who you are, what you're good at, and what you value. What type of work lies at the intersection of those things? Start experimenting – some things will excite you, some you'll hate. Take note, and then take your second step: stop judging your voice. Your feelings are valid; don't let yourself believe that anything you really want to do is “beneath” you. Third, go in the direction your voice is telling you to go. An informational interview can be really useful here. Email someone in your desired field and set up a 20-minute call to ask about her work, how she got into it, and what advice she has for you. This isn't about landing a job – but you will gain insight and motivation!

Adulthood is an action that creates its own momentum.

This is your adulthood. Someday, you'll die, and it'll be over. So there's no use in trying to put it off until you're “better” at it, or “ready” for it, or “capable” of enjoying it. The time to embrace being an adult is now. The things you practice and try out now are providing your future self with knowledge and expertise. It's not important where you start, but that you start. The key message here is: Adulthood is an action that creates its own momentum. Lighting your proverbial fire doesn't mean “keeping your options open”; all that does is keep you in limbo. You probably know this from dating apps; endless swiping often results in anxiety, overwhelm, and indifference – not the deep bond you might be seeking. To “get out of neutral” and propel yourself forward, you need to be intentional rather than let your mind wander. According to research, a wandering mind is an unhappy one; it's free to spiral into self-centered reflection and worry. A focused mind, on the other hand, ushers in more peace, happiness, and success. The way you frame your intentions is important. Imagine you're holding a flashlight. Its beam is your attention, and where you aim it is your intention. If your intention is “not to fail,” for example, then your beam is about what failure resembles. What the flashlight illuminates is your awareness: in this case, that might be fear or inadequacy. But if you aim your flashlight at “success,” then your beam – attention – involves opportunities and strategies, and you illuminate an awareness of excitement and achievement. Getting unstuck is challenging, both in terms of effort – to disrupt dating patterns, switch careers, or move to a new city – and emotional work. It starts with being curious about what motivates you to stay stuck rather than move forward. Are you keeping options open? Afraid of change? Daunted by the enormity of the task ahead? To pinpoint the reason, and get to know yourself better, you need to spend time alone. As one of the author's friends says, “In silence is where we start to hear ourselves.” (You really can get your best ideas in the shower!) In this process, it's OK –

even good – to feel discomfort. Because once you’ve recognized your discomfort, you can do something about it. Any new action will lead to new experiences and insights, while sitting around doing the same thing will result in the same old outcomes. So open the car door, get in the driver’s seat, put yourself in gear, and go!

Understanding how money works – and making it work for you – will help build your dream life.

In 1972, a group of children at Bing Nursery School were given one marshmallow each. If they waited 15 minutes to eat it, they were told, they'd receive a second. Some of the kids immediately devoured their treat, while others waited and got two. The professor conducting the study went on to track the kids for years; he discovered that those who'd waited for the second marshmallow went on to achieve more “success” on standardized tests, in school, and in their careers. Money is like the marshmallows. If you conserve some now rather than consuming it all at once, a bigger payoff awaits you down the line. Money isn't all there is to life. But it does help you lead the life you want to live – and it helps you support people and issues that are close to your heart. The key message here is: Understanding how money works – and making it work for you – will help build your dream life. Learning how to handle money might seem scary – but it's not that complicated. Let's start with the basics. First, you need to make enough money to cover your living expenses. That number differs for each of us, but a good rule to remember is this: don't spend more than a third of your gross monthly income – that's your pay before taxes – on housing. That way, you'll have enough left over for essentials like food and utilities. Next, pay off your credit card balances each month – in full if you can – so you avoid interest fees and ensure a good credit score. Always pay yourself first. That is, make your savings your most important expense. Set money aside to save, and put the rest of your earnings toward your other expenses – rent, food, fun, and so on. Set up a Roth IRA to invest your savings. This is the fun part: where you make your money work for you! It all comes down to the magic of compound interest. Let the numbers speak. Say you're 22, and you put \$1,000 into your Roth IRA account every year – that's \$83.33 per month, or just \$2.77 a day – until you retire at 65. Assuming a 7 percent net average annual return, you'll have over \$283,000 at retirement. Or maybe you're 32 – if you start saving that same \$1,000 now, you'll end up with \$136,000 at retirement. That's a lot less than the 22-year-old – but that's not the point! The point is, it's a lot more money than you'd have if you hadn't started investing at all. Now imagine saving not just \$2.77, but \$10 a day. The 32-year-old would have over \$498,000 available at retirement. And the 22-year-old? Over \$1,034,000! Talk about savoring your marshmallows . . .

Taking care of your body and mind will make adulthood more enjoyable.

So you've started to figure out what you love, and what you're good at, and how to get there – great! Now, keep in mind that you can do those things longer, and better, if you're taking care of your physical and mental well-being. Many of us deal with depression, racism, sexism, trauma, or self-destructive behaviors on a daily basis. No

wonder the sitcom BoJack Horseman is so popular. Getting to know yourself and practicing self-care so you can function well is arguably the most personal, adult thing you can do. The key message here is: Taking care of your body and mind will make adulthood more enjoyable. Practicing self-care might mean seeing a therapist or psychiatrist to work through deep-rooted issues. There are also many behaviors you can implement into your daily routine that'll help you flourish. Some are obvious: get good sleep, drink more water, move your body, and eat healthily. Let's go a little deeper. Keeping things bottled up inside of you isn't good for your blood pressure or stress levels, so release any anger or grudges you may be harboring. Even if you don't feel ready to forgive, do it for you! After all, forgiving isn't the same as condoning. Let go of any fights that happened in the past - especially ones with your parents. This is important when it comes to forming a new, horizontal relationship with them. Along the same lines, claim your agency - the knowledge that you're capable of doing the task at hand. Taking good care of yourself means telling well-meaning but overbearing loved ones that you appreciate the intention - but you got it (or will try your hardest)! This will help delineate healthy boundaries that allow you to function as an adult. Human connection is fundamental to your survival as well as to your mental well-being. So get together with friends and go hiking, cook together, shoot some hoops, go to a rave - whatever floats your boat. Instead of seeing a colleague and blithely saying, "We should get coffee sometime!" ask whether they'd be down to get a coffee right now. Catch up, and maybe discuss a few deeper issues you've been thinking about. But it doesn't all have to be deep. Research shows that even interactions with strangers, like a barista or someone you pass on the street, can significantly boost your mood. Laughing releases feel-good endorphins, as does hugging - even if it's just cuddling a stuffed animal. And orgasms do, too. So toss any taboos to the curb, and embrace the sensations of pleasure and trust these activities yield!

Use resilience to make sense of, and get through, difficult times.

You've just gotten fired. Someone you love isn't doing well. Or maybe you're going through a painful breakup. In other words, shit has hit the fan. When bad things - inevitably - happen in life, feeling better might not be as simple as getting a kiss and a Band-Aid from a parent. But there are myriad productive ways to cope. The '60s TV show Mister Rogers' Neighborhood instructed children to "look for the helpers" if they were having trouble. The same holds true now that you're an adult. Hearing others' stories of struggle can buoy you during tough times, which is why support groups are so effective. If you're in shock, call someone to give you perspective - even if it's the middle of the night. Actively reflect on how you got through other difficult situations. You might have felt like the world was ending, but then something changed - what was it? Knowing that feelings and circumstances have shifted in the past can instill reassurance that this time, too, the wind will eventually blow in a different direction. The key message here is: Use resilience to make sense of, and get through, difficult times. You can also draw on an emotional muscle called resilience - one of the hallmarks of being an adult. Resilience means being able to bounce back, no matter what hits you. It's "making meaning" of the situation. This idea comes from positive psychology, an approach that focuses on what's right - instead of what's wrong - in order to foster well-being. Ask yourself, What will I do with this experience to move forward? One of the best steps you can take is to pour your grief into nurturing others. You've learned the lessons the hard way; now you can support the next person who goes through

something awful. You could also help on a larger scale by trying to make the world a better place. Tune into the issues that make you tense up and think, That's not right! Try not to be deterred by the magnitude or intractability of problems that need addressing. To make things better, you don't have to single-handedly take on toxic corporate culture, global warming, or universal basic income. You can vastly improve your surroundings just by spending your money more consciously, volunteering, or being empathetic. You can register to vote – and vote! You can read the news, be aware of biases, and fact-check – PolitiFact and Snopes are good online sources for that. Ultimately, engaging in life and being part of something bigger than yourself will help you heal.

Cultivating mindfulness, kindness, and gratitude will bring meaning to your life.

What's the purpose of human existence? Well, according to spiritual guru Ram Dass, "We're all just walking each other home." Life can sometimes feel like a burden, but we're all on this journey together – and mindfulness, kindness, and gratitude can make it a whole lot easier. The key message here is: Cultivating mindfulness, kindness, and gratitude will bring meaning to your life. Mindfulness is the practice of getting in tune with yourself so you can deliberately respond instead of reflexively react in any given situation. To get mindful, sit quietly. Start to notice and name your thoughts; you'll find your mind winding down. Now, slowly scan your body. Really see this vessel that carries you through life. Is there pain or discomfort anywhere? Notice and acknowledge – but don't judge. After being mindful for a few minutes, record your observations to keep track of how things change over time. Practice mindfulness daily so it becomes a habit. Eventually, take your practice out into the world. According to chaos theory, a butterfly's flutter can trigger a tornado. The butterfly effect also applies to kindness. When treated kindly, you're more apt to act kind to someone else. Acting kind to someone else will make you feel better – again. And someone who witnessed the kindness is more likely to be kind in turn. Kindness is hard to pinpoint, but "you know it when you see it." It's asking your partner or coworkers what you can do to make their day better, and then doing it – within reason, of course! It's helping lost strangers find their way – even if it's just in a grocery store. It's being an ally when you see someone struggling. It's being discerning about whether to fix someone's problem – or just listen. Finally, there's gratitude. Research shows that paying attention to what you're grateful for helps you amplify those things. It's like learning a new word – and then suddenly seeing it everywhere. Write down what you're grateful for. Maybe it's your existence, the feeling of sun on your skin, your pet turtle – even the qualities of someone you disagree with. And, of course, your people. We're all busy, but it's crucial to press pause and appreciate the ones walking you home. Be specific. Instead of "I love you," say, "I love how you" Or swap out a generic "It's great working with you," for a thoughtful "I appreciate when you" Adulthood can feel tough – and the global pandemic didn't make things any easier. But keep going. History's had its fair share of troubles: wars, famine, natural disasters. You're a testament to those who triumphed long enough to grant you life. It's your turn now.

Final summary

The key message in these blinks is that: Adulting in the twenty-first century has less to do with cultural standards and more with being able to experience the journey on your own terms. To do this, you first need to know yourself and treat yourself well. You can't control everything, but you can arm yourself with an empowering toolbox; this includes understanding how to fend for yourself, get unstuck, and handle money. And when the going gets tough, harnessing mindfulness, kindness, and gratitude can help turn things around. Ultimately, you'll see that adulthood isn't just about being able to effectively face life's challenges; it's also about designing a future you're excited to be a part of. And here's some more actionable advice: Be an elf. Adulting can sometimes feel like a grind. But, as you've learned, being kind can have a mutually uplifting effect on the doer and receiver - so why not cut the struggle with a little spontaneous cheer? If you're feeling down, become an elf. That is, perform a small, magical act of kindness - like anonymously paying for someone's dinner, surprising a friend with coffee, sending a letter to a relative via snail mail, or helping carry a struggling parent's stroller up the stairs. It shows others you care and is sure to make you smile. And anyway, the world could use a little more magic!