Here are some lessons I’ve learned during my half century on this planet:

1. Be kind. The benefits of being kind—or at the very least courteous—far outweigh the effort you put in. Do random acts of kindness. Compliment someone. If a retail or food-service worker makes a mistake, be understanding and patient. Kind people live longer than unkind people.
2. I know myself better than anyone else. I don’t let anyone else’s opinions control what I do, what I wear, or what I say. Other people’s opinions are suggestions—take them or leave them.
3. Everyone else is as worried and insecure as you are. Some people just hide it better. It doesn’t mean that they are any smarter or better than you.
4. Laugh it off. If you make a mistake, fall down, or do something dumb, just laugh it off. Other people (and you) will forget it a lot faster if you just let it roll off your back. EVERYONE makes dumb mistakes. Everyone. You aren’t alone, and you aren’t the biggest idiot in the world. Give yourself a break.
5. “Fitting in” is highly overrated. Be you. Confidence is sexy. Besides, great leaders didn’t get where they are by following the crowd.
6. Don’t stay in a bad relationship, even if it’s “for the kids.” Oftentimes, kids really thrive outside the bounds of a toxic relationship.
7. It’s just stuff. Sure, stuff gets broken—oftentimes accidentally by people you love—and that’s annoying. But your stuff can be replaced. You can never erase the hurtful words you say to the person you love, because they broke your stuff. Stuff is never, ever as important as those you love.
8. You’re probably a lot smarter than you give yourself credit for being.
9. Don’t judge. You don’t know all the facts. That lady speeding down the road with her toddler unbuckled in the back seat may be panicked, heading for the hospital for an emergency that you can’t see. That “big kid” having a “tantrum” in the store may be on the autism spectrum, and is having a melt down, which he/she hates as much as you do. The fat lady in the bikini may have lost 100 lbs so far, and she’s pretty darn proud of what she’s done. Don’t shame people for smoking, drinking, or being fat. We all have our faults and bad habits. As a pretty famous guy is alleged to have said, “let he who is without sin cast the first stone.”
10. Never lose your inner child. Dance. Sing. Skip. Tell poop jokes (not to strangers, though). Go down the slide. Bounce at the bouncy house, if the attendant says adults are welcome. This is an advantage to being older. When you’re 20, people often think you’re “too old” to do these things, but when a 50-something does them, it’s charming. And if people think it’s dumb, screw them. See #2 above.
11. Don’t make major life decisions to please other people. Maybe your parents expect you to go to college, but you just want to go to trade school and become an auto mechanic, because that’s where your heart is. Or maybe (as in my case) your parents don’t want you to go to college, but you really want to be an attorney. Live life for YOU. The world needs good auto mechanics and good attorneys. It’ll all work out.
12. Don’t beat yourself up about stuff. Do what you can to fix your mistakes, then move on. Guilt is only good for pushing you toward making things right again. After that, it becomes shame, and shame is a toxic substance which will eat you up inside. Same for worry.
13. Enjoy life. Literally, stop to smell and admire the flowers. Wonder. Smile at strangers and see how many you can get to smile back. Have fun.
14. Life goes by really, really fast. Live each day so that, at the end, you’re reveling in how amazing your life was, not regretting all the things you did or didn’t do.
15. Life is better after 50.

*This*[*article*](https://www.quora.com/What-do-50-year-olds-know-that-20-year-olds-often-dont/answer/Phyl-Bean)*first appeared at [Quora](http://quora.com/).*