

The
Girls' Guide
TO
CONQUERING LIFE

How to
ACE an Interview,
CHANGE a Tire, TALK to a Guy,
and 97 Other SKILLS You Need
to Thrive

ERICA AND JONATHAN CATHERMAN



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This book is dedicated to:

Linda & LaRelle

Two wonderful mothers.
You are our friends and the women who taught us
how to be strong, kind, loving, and adventurous.

Contents

Introduction 9

1 Guys & Dating 13

How to Talk with a Guy You Like •
How to Invite a Guy on a First Date •
How to Plan a Date • How to Decide
Who Pays on a Date • How to Meet
a Guy's Parents for the First Time •
How to Balance Time with Boyfriend
vs. Girlfriends • How to Respectfully
Break Up with a Guy

2 Social Skills & Manners 33

How to Shake Hands • How to
Introduce Yourself • How to
Introduce Other People • How to
Listen Well • How to Speak Up for
Yourself or Others • How to Open
the Door for Another Person • How
to Set a Table • How to Order from
a Menu • How to Leave a Tip • How
to Wrap a Gift • How to Clean a
Bathroom • How to Make a Bed

3 Work & Ethics 67

How to Apply for a Job • How to
Fill Out an Application • How to
Interview for a Job • How to Ask for
a Raise • How to Ask for a Promotion
• How to Resign • How to Ask for a
Reference

4 Wealth & Money Management 89

How to Create a Personal Budget
• How to Build a Savings Account
• How to Manage a Credit Card
Account • How to Invest in the
Future • How to Live Debt-Free

5 Health & Beauty 105

How to Properly Wash Your Hair •
How to Shave Your Legs • How to
Shave under Your Arms • How to
Apply Hair-Styling Product • How to
Wash Your Hands Properly • How to
Freshen Bad Breath • How to Wear
Perfume • How to Wash Your Face •
How to Trim Your Fingernails • How
to Care for Your Feet • How to Apply
Nail Polish

6 Clothes & Fashion 135

How to Wash Laundry • How to Dry Laundry • How to Iron a Button-Down Shirt • How to Iron Slacks/Pants • How to Care for Leather Shoes or Boots • How to Wear a Scarf • How to Sew On a Button • How to Spot Treat a Stain • How to Fold a Shirt • How to Shop for a Bra

7 Sports & Recreation 163

How to Kick a Soccer Ball • How to Set a Volleyball • How to Throw a Football • How to Shoot a Basketball • How to Pitch a Softball • How to Swing a Golf Club • How to Putt • How to Throw Darts • How to Hit a Cue Ball • How to Pitch Horseshoes

8 Cars & Driving 191

How to Shift a Manual Transmission • How to Change a Flat Tire • How to Jump-Start a Dead Battery • How to Check the Oil • How to Parallel Park • How to Behave after an Auto Accident • How to Behave during a Police Stop

9 Food & Cooking 215

How to Make a Grocery List and Stock a Pantry • How to Brew Coffee • How to Make Pancakes from Scratch • How to Scramble Eggs • How to Cook Bacon • How to Boil Pasta • How to Cook Rice • How to Make Mashed Potatoes • How to Oven-Bake a Whole Chicken • How to Broil Steak • How to Pan-Sear Fish • How to Light a Charcoal Grill • How to Grill Steak • How to Grill Pork Chops • How to Sharpen a Kitchen Knife

10 Tools & Fix-It 255

How to Stock a Tool Kit • How to Read a Tape Measure • How to Swing a Hammer • How to Cut with a Circular Saw • How to Use a Drill • How to Use a Crowbar • How to Use an Adjustable Wrench • How to Use a Level • How to Calculate Square Footage • How to Turn Off a Toilet Water Line • How to Unclog a Toilet • How to Clear a Clogged Sink Drain • How to Check the Circuit Breakers • How to Find a Stud in the Wall • How to Hang a Picture • How to Fix a Small Hole in a Wall

Notes 297

Introduction

Here's a question every girl wants the answer to: When exactly does a girl become a woman? If you are thinking the correct answer has something to do with age, cultural rites of passage, or changes in a girl's body, then you are on the right track.

Around the world, cultures celebrate the transition from girlhood to womanhood in unique and significant ways. Some wait for a specific age to mark the moment officially. In the US, adulthood is legally recognized on your 18th birthday. Yet in the UK, 16 is the magic number. In Japan and New Zealand you'll need to turn 20, and if you live in Zambia, waiting until you are 21 years old to be lawfully recognized as an adult may feel like an eternity.

Cultural traditions also play an important part in a girl's "coming of age." In many regions of Central and South America, girls celebrate their quinceañera at 15 by renewing their baptismal vows in a Catholic mass and hosting a fiesta for friends and family. In Japan, some girls still celebrate a 1,200-year-old tradition known as Seijin no Hi, recognizing a youth's age of maturity by dressing up in their finest traditional attire and celebrating with friends and family who shower them with gifts. In Malaysia, some Muslim girls consider their 11th birthday to be very special as it marks the time when they can celebrate Khatam Al Koran. In the southwestern US, some traditional Apache girls still complete the Na'ii'ees Sunrise Ceremony, also known as the coming-of-age or the puberty ceremony, in which female participants draw closer to the first woman, Esdzanadehe.

Some mothers wait with great anticipation for their daughters to have their first menstruation and then throw them an elaborate "period party."

Also known as *lady's days*, the arrival of *Aunt Flo*, and *her time of the month*, the reality is the onset of a girl's menstrual cycle indicates her body is quickly changing, and some moms feel that's worth celebrating.

Truth be told, it's difficult to mark the exact moment a girl becomes a woman. Perhaps the answer to the question includes more than her age, traditions, or physical body. Here is what I can tell you with certainty: Strong women know that personal maturity transforms them into women. Maturity is a practiced skill and is best demonstrated when a woman knows how to do the right thing, the right way, at the right time, for the right reason.

So, will knowing how to do stuff and behave "properly" actually make you a woman? Nope! Growing up takes time, practice, and some difficult trials. As you navigate the journey to womanhood, learn and grow not just your skills, but also your character. Character? Yes, *character* is who you are and what you do . . . even when nobody's watching. It's repeated patterns, decisions you make, and actions you take that develop the picture of who you are and who you will become. Strong women live by different standards—higher standards. Strong women don't believe that the type of clothes they wear, how much they spend, or the number of shoes they own are what makes them a woman. Strong women know that maturity, character, and being kind to themselves and others helps define them.

Give yourself the knowledge and tools to become a strong, confident, and capable woman too. This *Girls' Guide to Conquering Life* is packed full of real-life, useful how-to instructions that will make your journey to womanhood a little smoother. It's loaded with quotes, fun facts, and wisdom from women who are experts in their field—women who can fix stuff, can demonstrate good character, and can handle social situations with grace and confidence.

Now it's your turn!

I'm *strong* because I'm fearless.

I'm *fearless* because I'm confident.

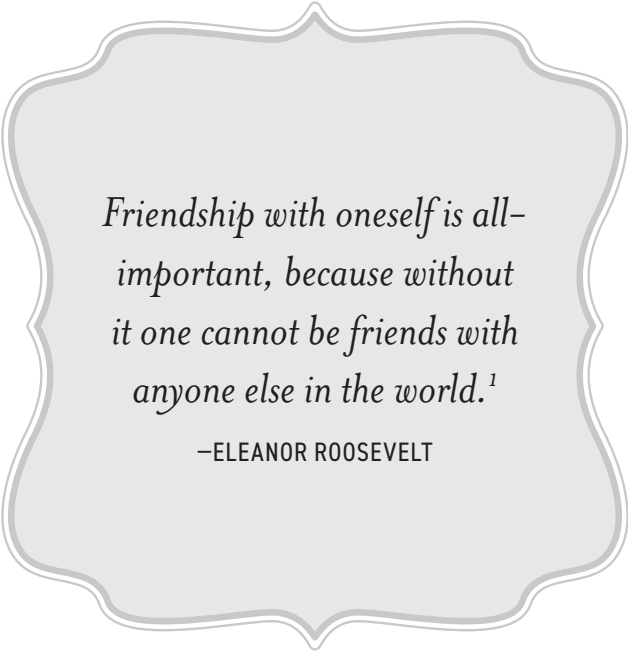
I'm *confident* because I am
capable of doing what is required
of me and what inspires me.

My *knowledge*, my *talents*,
my *strengths* are all practiced,
and practice makes me better.

Better at being *myself*,
better at being *kind* to all,
and better at *helping* others
become *strong* too.

1

Guys & Dating



*Friendship with oneself is all-
important, because without
it one cannot be friends with
anyone else in the world.¹*

—ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

You may find them to be overly annoying. You may catch yourself staring at them way too much. Loathe them or like them, guys make up about half of the earth's population, so there's no avoiding them. One thing is certain—before you consider who is “datable” or not, take the time to get to know the one person who will be in all your relationships: yourself.

Getting to know yourself is a lifelong adventure. Just a few years ago, you were a little girl with a little girl's thoughts and a little girl's body. In a few years you'll be a grown woman who thinks and looks much different. But now you're at the age when almost everything is changing, and changing fast. What you like to do is changing. Some of the people you like are changing. Who you want to become may be changing too. This is totally normal and an important part of the adventure and transformation between girlhood and womanhood. The truth is, the more you discover what matters most to you, the more you will enjoy the journey. To help you focus on the true you, complete these statements with confidence before starting any dating relationship.

- My goals are . . .
- My priorities are . . .
- My beliefs and values are . . .

You are 100% you and only 50% of any relationship, so knowing and owning these statements will help you be confident in yourself before somebody else enters the picture. Knowing your priorities will keep your vision clear; say yes to what is important and no to what is not. Staying true to your beliefs balances your heart, mind, body, and soul. This all adds up to you growing into a woman who does not limit or sacrifice herself for the sake of any relationship.

If you are confident in who you are, you'll be better prepared when “datable” does come along. Your standards are high, so his better be too. If you are going to become a 50/50 couple, you'll need to respect each other's

goals, priorities, beliefs, and values. If that isn't happening . . . neither is the relationship.

When you meet someone who honors you fully, you've found someone special. As in any relationship, communication is important and can make or break you as a couple. Communication is not just talk, talk, talking—it's also about truly listening to understand. What is communicated through tone of voice, eye contact, and body language also says a lot. Working on your communication skills is important at any stage of a relationship. Here are a few pointers about good communication:

1. **Say what you mean to say.** Work on your ability to use words properly, keeping in mind the tone and volume of your voice. Speech can be an amazing, powerful tool. It helps to have a good vocabulary, so pay closer attention in English class. It's been said that words can cut deep, so choose them wisely, especially if you like sarcasm. Too much or mistimed sarcasm can cause both you and others unintended pain. Remember, sometimes saying less is more. Like when a simple "yes" means "yes" and "no" means "no," you'll need to stand behind your words.
2. **Know your body language.** How you physically hold yourself while speaking provides clues to what you are feeling and thinking. For instance, slouch your shoulders and look down and you'll appear to lack confidence or maybe even look weak. Cross your arms and tap your foot and you look upset or impatient. Instead, stand tall and look people in the eyes when they talk. This tells them you are listening and interested in what they have to say.
3. **Listen to understand.** There is a big difference between hearing and listening. Hearing is easy, but listening to understand takes practice. You hear the words coming out of someone's mouth, but do you really understand what they are saying? Try paying attention to their body language and repeating a variation of what they said to confirm you understood what they meant. You're not "judging" their words, just affirming their intent and confirming you understand them correctly.

Do keep this not-so-fun fact in mind: More often than not, dating relationships end with a breakup. Yes, it's true, "datable" might prove to be less than remarkable. This is just one reason why good communication is so important. Go slow when you decide to start dating. Rushing into a relationship emotionally or physically rarely ends well. Building a relationship on the quality of your friendship makes the potential breakup statement "let's just be friends" less likely to actually happen.

Talk with a Guy You Like

YOU WILL NEED:

- A guy you like
- Courage
- Fresh breath

TIME REQUIRED:

As long as it takes

This is no big deal. Then again, sometimes it feels like it's the biggest deal in the world, right?! Talking to someone you like can make you more nervous than anything else imaginable. Just keep in mind, this kind of nervous is another way of knowing you are excited to talk with him. So, be confident and know you got this! Just go up to him and say something simple like "Hello" followed by a conversation-starting statement or open-ended question that gets him talking.



STEP 1

Breathe. Taking a couple deep breaths is a good idea anytime you need to relax, so take some now! The extra oxygen will help keep you calm, cool, and confident.

STEP 2

Check your breath. This is a first-impression thing—no need to leave him with an impression of the last meal you ate. Do a double check and maybe eat a mint to freshen up your introduction. (See “How to Freshen Bad Breath.”)

STEP 3

Approach with confidence. Stand tall with your shoulders back and your head held high.

STEP 4

Say something. Maybe start with a simple, “Hello, I’m [your name here].” It’s best to be yourself, so if you prefer a “Howdy,” “What’s up,” or “Hey,” that’s your call.

STEP 5

Ask open-ended questions. If you would like to spend more than ten seconds talking with someone, asking a few good questions is a good way to get a conversation going. A few yes/no questions will work if you don’t know them very well, but open-ended questions that require explanations are the best! If you ask the questions, make sure you are a good listener and that you are ready to answer if questions are asked of you.

You may need to think of a few open-ended questions before you say “hello” (or whatever). Here are some examples:


- ▶ “What kind of music do you like?” and “Have you ever seen them in concert?”
- ▶ “What’s your favorite class?” and “Why do you like that class so much?”
- ▶ “Watched any good movies lately?” and “Would you recommend I see it too?”

End the conversation well. Wrap things up with a positive statement like, “Good talking with you. See you again soon.” There’s nothing wrong with simple!



Did You Know?

Girls use their “sophisticated verbal talents” to bond in relationships. When engaging in meaningful discussions, girls often maintain eye contact, lean in, and enjoy lots of talking. This helps cement the bond they have with each other. This is rarely the case with boys.²



Invite a Guy on a First Date

YOU WILL NEED:

- A guy you want to ask on a date
- Confidence
- Fresh breath (see "How to Freshen Bad Breath")

TIME REQUIRED:

It may seem longer than it actually takes.

Prepare yourself. What you are about to attempt may end up ranking in the top 10 most memorable moments of your life. The first-date-invite story could be told for years to come and from two perspectives—yours and his. How you plan and undertake the asking determines if the story told will be epic or horrific.



STEP 1

Choose carefully. A date is about getting to know somebody better. Dating will help you learn what type of guy you are interested in and what type of guy is interested in you.

STEP 2

Pick an event. He is more likely to say yes to a date if you have a specific event in mind. Think of something fun that he would be interested in doing too.

STEP 3

Plan your transportation. Avoid long rides, as they are not usually first-date friendly.

STEP 4

Plan your ask. Give him at least two or three days between asking and when you plan on going out. If you want the date to be on Friday, ask him on Tuesday or Wednesday. He may need to ask his parents, arrange a ride, and maybe earn some money. And anticipation is half the fun of a good first date. (And before talking with him, see “How to Freshen Bad Breath.”)

STEP 5

Ask him out. Timing and approach is everything. With confidence, describe your plans and ask if he would like to join you. And remember, asking in person is always best!

Wise Woman

There is no guarantee he will say yes to a date with you.
What is guaranteed is if you never ask, he will never say yes.

Plan a Date

YOU WILL NEED:

- A guy who said yes to a date with you
- Confidence
- Pen and paper
- Money
- Transportation

TIME REQUIRED:

1 hour of planning

If you want a date to go great, you will need to put some thought and energy in before you two go out. The best way to ensure he brags to his buddies about your great date is to dedicate some T.I.M.E. to pre-planning and preparing. Here's how.

STEP 1

Think it. Try to think about the date from both your perspectives. What would he like to do too? What do you have in common?



STEP 2

Ink it. Write down your date ideas on a piece of paper. Brainstorming is a creative way to test an idea, see potential conflicts, and identify your best options. Consider costs, transportation, timing, and perhaps even getting the “okay” from both your parents.

STEP 3

Map it. Once you have your best idea written down, map out your plan.

- ▶ When is the date? Day, evening, night?
- ▶ When does the date begin? He needs a specific time.
- ▶ What is your budget? A date can get expensive, so set a budget and stick to it.
- ▶ Who is paying? Going “dutch” is good if you want to keep things simple. (See “How to Decide Who Pays on a Date.”)
- ▶ Where are you going? Be specific. For example, plan for dinner at a specific location vs. finding a place.
- ▶ How will you get there? Will you meet him there? Will you pick him up, or will he pick you up? Will you be driving?
- ▶ When does the date end? If you’re the one driving, have him home on time. Be specific and honor your commitment. This is one way you will gain the favor and trust of his parents.

STEP 4

Enjoy it. Have a fun date. Hopefully he will appreciate the effort.

Did You Know?

Many states have laws for new drivers restricting unrelated passengers and driving during certain hours. If you will be driving, know the laws before a police officer explains them to you—in front of your date.

Decide Who Pays on a Date

YOU WILL NEED:

- A planned date
- Money

TIME REQUIRED:

1-minute conversation

Dating etiquette established over a century ago has become ancient history. Back in the day, the guy paid for everything on a date. Today's modern woman often wants to pay for some or even all of a date. So who picks up the tab? She? He? We? Here is a simple and respectful way to decide who opens their purse/wallet without opening yourselves up to controversy.



STEP 1

Who asked who? Often, whoever did the inviting and planning of the date is the one who pays (unless it's talked about during the invite). Still, don't assume. It's a good idea to talk about it so there are no surprises when the bill comes. If you are doing the inviting, let him know up front if you will cover the date cost or if you want to split the bill.

STEP 2

Dates #3 and beyond. Sounds like you may be on your way to having an official boyfriend. If you are not sure yet, wait a few more dates, then think about having the DTR (Define The Relationship) talk. Once you have determined that, yep, he's your boyfriend, keep the money-spending lines of communication open. The word *boyfriend* is a compound word uniting "boy" with "friend." True friends complement each other in all areas, including money. Talk about it and work together to spend and pay appropriately while dating.

Fact or Fiction:

I can't afford to date.

Fiction. The fact is, you can't put a price on love, but you can on a date. You don't have to spend big CA\$H to show a guy you're creative, considerate, and worth going on date #2 with next week. Dates should be fun, not **defunding**.

Meet a Guy's Parents for the First Time

YOU WILL NEED:

- Confident handshake
- Smile
- Manners

TIME REQUIRED:

1-5 minutes

*M*eeeting the parents of the guy you like can be scary if you don't already know them. This is an official first-impression situation, and first impressions have a tendency to stick around in our memories. You want to make sure it's a good impression in the hopes they will be more likely to be happy with you spending time with their son.



STEP 1

Make eye contact. When greeting his parents, look them in the eyes. Comfortable eye contact is 4–5 seconds, pause by briefly looking away (to avoid staring), and then make eye contact again.

STEP 2

Smile. An authentic smile conveys optimism and high levels of confidence.

STEP 3

Speak with confidence. Start by saying something simple yet polite, like, “Nice to meet you, Mrs. [last name] and Mr. [last name].”

STEP 4

Shake hands. Follow the “How to Shake Hands” steps. By extending a friendly and traditional greeting, you show them you are respectful and know how to interact with adults.

STEP 5

Be yourself. Don’t put on a show.

STEP 6

Use your manners. Say “please” and “thank you,” “yes” rather than “yeah,” “no” rather than “nah,” and “excuse me?” rather than “huh?” Chew with your mouth closed, don’t talk about yourself too much, and by all means, control any socially awkward bodily functions.

Helpful Hint

Moms look out for their sons’ best interests. If you are interested in her son and her son is interested in you, you need to be looking out for his best interests too. When you do this and understand what the son’s mom cares about, she will possibly consider *you* to be in her son’s best interest, and you’ll be able to spend more time with him without scorn from his mama.

Balance Time with Boyfriend vs. Girlfriends

YOU WILL NEED:

- Friends
- Boyfriend

TIME REQUIRED:

Daily life

Good relationships take time. Spending too much time with your “boo” can be frustrating for your BFFs and even cause friendship failure. Take care not to tip the time balance so far that your friends start to feel like you abandoned them for him. The truth is, many dating relationships don’t last long, and your boo may soon be a ghost—while your truest girlfriends might be around for a lifetime!



STEP 1

Don't smother each other. The fastest way to drive a guy away is to take up all his free time. There is truth in the old saying, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder." Even if you have the same group of friends, it's good to spend some time apart.

STEP 2

Plan time together. Once a week take the time to plan a date, just the two of you. A date doesn't have to be grand or expensive. Think fun. (See "How to Plan a Date.")

STEP 3

Mix it up. You should be able to hang out with both your BFFs and your boyfriend at the same time. Equally sharing time within a group of friends is a sign of maturity.

Fact or Fiction:

BFFs before BFs.

Fact, if you are planning on living with your best friend forever. That is until your BFF and their BF becomes BFFs and they choose each other over you.

Fiction. The truth is, best friend are good both now and in the future, yet one day you and someone very special may choose to get married and put each other first, over all others.

Respectfully Break Up with a Guy

YOU WILL NEED:

- Empathy
- Quiet, semi-private or private location

TIME REQUIRED:

5–30 minutes

If you choose to date, a breakup is probably going to occur at some point. Maybe the guy you're dating now is proving not to be the one for you, and to keep the relationship going would be unfair. When this happens, be true to yourself and let the relationship go. Remember, breaking up doesn't have to be a big, dramatic, ugly thing. Keep your emotions calm and avoid saying things that will make the situation worse. Keep your words respectful and think of how you would feel if the same break-up words you say to him were said to you.



STEP 1

Consider your words. Know what you are going to say before you speak. Practice if you need to.

STEP 2

Pick the place. If possible, decide where you will talk in person, face-to-face, in a private enough space that embarrassment over possible tears can be avoided. Never break up via a text message or on social media.

IMPORTANT

If you ever feel that a breakup could become violent or emotionally harmful, seek help first.

STEP 3

Respect his feelings. He may respond with sadness, surprise, frustration, or he may even get mad and try to blame you. The only person you can control is you, so keep calm and confident in your decision.

STEP 4

Keep it positive. Following your breakup, only speak of the good aspects of your relationship. Hopefully you two shared some good times, so honor those memories and talk publicly only about the positive. If you don't have anything positive to say, don't say anything at all.

IMPORTANT

If you have been mistreated in any way, seek help from an adult you trust.

Did You Know?

Neil Sedaka's 1962 song "Breaking Up Is Hard to Do" hit #1 on the *Billboard* Hot 100. Since its debut last century, the heartbreak song has been rerecorded by more than 32 professional artists. It just goes to show that time doesn't change the fact that breaking up is hard to do.