

**'I love this book... it's like a friend taking you  
by the hand and showing you what to do'**

Andrea McLean

**Find**

**Your**

**Confidence**

**'A book needed in  
every household'**

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**The no-nonsense  
guide to self-belief**

*Holly Matthews*

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Dedicated to my two main girls, Brooke and Texas.  
It's all for you, my darlings.

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GREEN TREE  
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# Introduction

I have a secret that I'm going to share.

This may be a surprise, given the nature of the book, and it's something that might surprise even those closest to me. So gather round and huddle in:

I am not *always* confident. I do not *always* have belief in myself.

In fact, I've had many 'confidence dips' in my life. However, after trial and error, and lots of lessons learned from giving life a good go, I have developed systems and structures to put in place to support myself whenever I do experience these dips.

You will too.

You see, everyone is born with confidence. As a teeny tiny baby, you demanded with gusto that your needs be met and your first words were uttered without embarrassment. Maybe we forget this fact and maybe that confidence gets rocked from time to time, but the truth remains the same: inside you, running through you (like the writing in a stick of Blackpool rock) is a confident and self-assured badass. We just sometimes need to remind ourselves of this and find our confidence again.

Now, when we think of confidence and what it actually means, it will likely bring up different things for different people. Maybe you think confidence is delivering a flawless presentation at work or having the ability to be charismatic and witty while talking to someone you fancy. You might see

confidence as the ability to set clear boundaries in your life or stand up for yourself with friends. How we define what confidence is can be very personal. When you think of a confident person, what do you see? Take a moment to think about this now.

The origin of the word confidence is the Latin word *fidere*, which means ‘to trust’. Confidence therefore is ‘to trust’; to have faith in something (often before we know factually whether it can be done).

**‘Confidence** is not a state that is set in stone – it’s **absolutely something we can work on.**’

Self-confidence is something we may find we skate in and out of during our lifetimes or even in different areas of our lives. Perhaps you are a very confident parent but stick you in a work setting and you crumble. Or perhaps you might thrive in social situations but struggle to feel good when looking in the mirror. Confidence is not a state that is set in stone and it’s absolutely something we can work on.

It’s also worth noting that a lack of confidence and self-belief can sneak up on us over time. Perhaps you once did see yourself as confident and suddenly you’ve noticed that you don’t speak up in social settings any more or that you wouldn’t dream of wearing anything but black or grey (yet you used to head to the chip shop dressed like a pageant queen).

Maybe you used to be the Chatty Cathy at any event but years of living with a critical partner has chipped away at your self-worth and now just popping to the supermarket feels daunting. The eroding of the belief that you ‘can’ may take years to develop, but it really doesn’t need to take years to unpick. That’s where I come in.

I chose to write about confidence and self-belief because when you unlock this within yourself, life just becomes that bit easier. Having confidence will help you to have more connected relationships, a brighter outlook and, ultimately, a trust that even when things are tough YOU are going to work it out.

I chose to write about confidence because for so many people whom I work with, it's their lack of self-belief that is holding them back more than anything else in life. When they realise that they have the ability to work on their confidence and build it up like a muscle, it frees them up and we start to see positive change. I want that for you too.

In this book, I'm going to take your hand and guide you through some of life's testing moments. We are going to work together as a team to help you find your confidence. I promise I won't chuck you in at the deep end but I will certainly be making you jump in at points (with some armbands on at first). I will share with you the tools and ideas that will help you steer yourself through the chaos of being an adult, with poise and conviction and, of course, with confidence.

## Why me?

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Before we go any further, I'd like to offer a quick introduction to who I am (I probably should have begun with this, but I was eager to get started!). I am Holly, the woman who will be chatting to you throughout this book and someone who is utterly obsessed with you living a life that feels great to you.

I am a qualified NLP (neuro-linguistic programming) practitioner, life coach (although I prefer the name self-development coach, as it sounds less like I'm telling you how to live your life), intuitive psychology coach, hypnotherapist, former TV actress (who still dabbles in telly now and then) and mum to two awesome daughters, Brooke and Texas.

I am also the founder of The Happy Me Project, which is a community that consists of in-person events, a podcast, books and an online self-development membership. I will reference my membership throughout this book as it has become such an incredible community of like-minded people (for those who'd like to know a bit more, skip to [here](#), where I've put all the details).

Alongside my on-paper experience I also happen to be a human who has been through a whole heap of tough stuff (who hasn't, right?). Following the

death of my brilliant husband, Ross, to brain cancer in 2017, I immersed myself further in self-development.

After Ross's death it became way more important to me to find ways to help us all live a life that feels great. I (and all of Ross's loved ones) got chucked this massive painful reminder that life is short, and for me it also came with a drive to help people unlock what might be holding them back from living their lives to the fullest.

I have gone back through my history and revisited times when I made choices that didn't always support me, and I have been able to notice both what works and what doesn't. Embracing my flaws and laughing at my chaos has also helped me to foster more compassion for myself and find a confidence outside of the partnership that Ross and I shared.

I gave more details of Ross's death and the impact of this in my first book, *The Happy Me Project: The no-nonsense guide to self-development* (2022), but I will most definitely be sharing more of my personal anecdotes within this one too, all mixed in with a good dollop of scientific research, stories from my clients and tips from other experts.

Housekeeping note: I have put all links to any research references on my website – [www.iamhollymatthews.com/findyourconfidence](http://www.iamhollymatthews.com/findyourconfidence) – so as not to make this book the length of *War and Peace*.

## How to use this book

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Since we're all so different from each other and need different levels of support in different aspects of our lives (and at different times of our lives), each of the nine chapters will focus on boosting our confidence in a different common everyday scenario. We'll be looking at: public speaking, social situations, standing up for yourself, starting something new, the workplace, relationships, parenting, job interviews and your appearance.

A reminder though that this is *your* book and I want you to read it in a way that feels right for you. Some of you more traditional readers will work from

front to back in an orderly fashion, while others might prefer to head straight to the chapter that focuses on your personal area of difficulty. It's your choice. Jump in and feel free to use the book as you like: write in it, highlight your favourite bits and even fold those pages (I dare ya!).

Each chapter is divided into mini segments and packed with practical tips for you to play around with throughout. Each one ends with a selection of activities to bring everything together. These are split into work for the 'internal self' (how I feel on the inside) and the 'external self' (how I look on the outside).

Although the majority of our work will focus on the internal stuff, I wanted to include aspects of how we can look and present more confidently too. As a former TV actress, I am a professional pretender and so I'm well versed in this area; when instructed, I can act sad, scared, excited or like a confident woman who knows her worth. I'm the perfect person to share with you the skills to 'fake it till you make it'.

I appreciate that the 'fake it till you make it' method is a controversial one because often people assume it means 'fake it' without doing the deeper work on your internal self-development, too. But not here! Together, we're going to combine the two and recognise that the internal work and the external work sit side by side and impact each other, so the 'fake it till you make it' approach works as long as we're using it as a means of topping up the important internal stuff, and not on its own. If you're dubious about the external approach, let me share a quick example of what I mean.

One way actors find the emotion of a character is via their physical selves. If I were to play a sad and nervous character, for example, I could naturally begin to make myself look less confident by simply adopting a posture where my body was slumped, my shoulders rolled forward and my eyes avoided anyone's gaze. This unconfident pose can start to impact my internal world too.

Give it a try yourself now: begin with your shoulders back, your chin up and a broad smile and then shift to having your eyes down, shoulders forward, arms folded around your body and no smile on your face.

Feel the difference?

There will be descriptions of different body language techniques you can try throughout the book. Since this can sometimes be a tad more challenging to describe, I've put some extra visuals for you on my website too, if needed: <https://www.iamhollymatthews.com/findyourconfidence/>.

Given that I'm introducing myself, now is probably a good time to tell you that my brain is not neurotypical and I am a human with ADHD. I reference this at various points in the book and it means that I fully appreciate anything bite-size and chunked down, which lends itself very well to sharing tips with you, so I've structured the book in this way.

A huge caveat here, too, is that this book is in no way a replacement for therapy. I am not a doctor – I am a coach – and I am a huge believer in therapy in all its forms. This book can, however, sit alongside your therapy work (you can even share your thoughts *with* your therapist after reading this book) and if you've been thinking about reaching out to a counsellor or psychiatrist, this is your nudge to go do so (*see* 'Other resources' [here](#) if you'd like some ideas on where to begin.).

## Before we begin...

As with all my work, I want to make it clear from the outset that I'm not asking you to put any pressure on yourself when reading this book (there's enough pressure in the world at large, right?). So please be kind to yourself. This is all about helping you to feel better.

Let's throw perfection out of the window and first recognise that if you've picked this book up then it's already a huge win. The likelihood is that you want to feel more confident and build your self-esteem, so buying this book is the first brave step in doing this work.

I won't ram concepts down your throat as some gospel truth, but we will be talking through many different ideas that lots of people before us have found beneficial (and so perhaps you will too). Some of the things we'll discuss you

will discover that you like and others you may prefer to discard, but I'm confident you'll find what you need.

Choose ideas that speak to you to create your own personal action plan. You are unique and so your route to true self-belief will be as individual as your fingerprints (and I'll be here throughout, cheering loudly, whatever you decide!). Wherever you are with your confidence at the moment, you are at the perfect place to start, and I'm so glad you're here.

If any of you are already doubting yourself and convinced that this won't work for you, then I am here to call BS (with total love and support chucked in, of course). I know that if you approach this book with a willingness to learn and a student mindset – imagine it's your first day of school, if you will – then change and confidence are firmly within your grasp. I know this because I have had the pleasure of watching many of my clients turn into their most confident selves, so I know this is absolutely possible for you too.

## A promise

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Before we head on into the meat and bones of this book, I want to get a little commitment out of you. This isn't for me, it's for you. It's some accountability, a little nudge in the right direction, a commitment to yourself. You're here for positive change and to make your life feel great. So, let's start by you saying this promise to yourself, either in your head or out loud if possible.

(I feel like we should be standing or doing something symbolic right now, such as holding our hands on our hearts or looking wistfully into the distance. Although perhaps that's a bit dramatic, in which case perhaps just try to shut the door on your noisy family for 10 minutes so you can focus as you read the following...)

*I promise myself that I will read this book with an open mind.*

*I promise myself that I will read at least some of this book.*

*I promise myself that I will have a go at some action steps I read in the book.*

*I promise that I will be kind to myself when I feel challenged, triggered or it seems hard.*

*I promise myself that I will let go of old stories and be willing to make new, empowering ones.*

*I promise that I will give myself permission to step into this new confident version of me.*

Once you have said this to yourself (you may even want to write it down or snap a picture of the promise as a reminder) take a nice full breath in and a lovely big sigh out. Then let's get to work!

Holly x

# #1

## Public speaking

At around the age of 18 I was a guest at a friend's wedding. I knew a few people there and the best man was a good friend of my then boyfriend. They were all from a pretty small town in Cumbria, and this meant that a big chunk of the town was there on the day.

We took our seats for the speeches and, as the room silenced, the best man stood up to do his obligatory speech. All eyes were on him and each ticking second that he *didn't* speak felt like an eternity.

One second, two seconds, three seconds...

You could have heard a pin drop as his body language leaked his discomfort and a few people began to shift in their seats or clear their throats.

Four seconds, five seconds, six seconds...

He eventually began. 'I ... erm ... I' and then once more he went quiet and looked at his feet, while gripping a crumpled bit of paper in his hands. You could almost hear his heartbeat thumping in his chest, along with the collective awkwardness of the audience, who were quite literally holding their breath.

As a performer, I felt sick for him. I knew the stage fright he was living from personal experience, and I wanted to run up there and help him out. He

opened his mouth to speak once more and said, ‘I’ve, oh god, I’m so sorry, I’ve bottled it, I can’t do it’ to a stunned room.

Thankfully, the father of the bride took the wheel and allowed the best man to sit down (or slump down, which is what actually happened) and the rest of us breathed a sigh of relief that the ordeal we had all been part of was finally over.

It’s been about 20 years since I witnessed this scene and it’s stayed with me because I hated how stuck that man felt in the moment. I hated knowing that he would have felt he had let himself down and let his friends down, and I have always wondered if he ever did anything like that again or if he conquered his fear of public speaking. I guess I’ll never know, but one thing is for sure: I don’t want anyone to *ever* feel so suffocated by speaking up. So, in this chapter, I’m going to share the wisdom, the science and the tools that I really wanted to give to that terrified best man on that day.

## Why are we so scared of speaking in public?

A 2015 study at the Chapman University in California looked at ‘fears of the average American’ and discovered that 30 per cent of Americans felt ‘afraid’ or ‘very afraid’ of public speaking. This meant that public speaking was ranked by the test subjects as scarier than hurricanes, earthquakes, floods or even dying. (My non-scientific guess is that a number of you reading this now are nodding along with agreement at these results.)

The fear of public speaking is called glossophobia and, like most of our human behaviour, experts believe there is an evolutionary reason behind it.

Essentially, in the distant past, humans would have been at threat from large predators and so evolved to operate in groups for safety. (This makes sense because a lone human isn’t going to scare off a predator, but a group of people might.) Therefore, historically, humans’ ability to work collaboratively in a group, to keep an eye out for one another and to defend each other, was needed for our survival. Back in the cave-painting days, if a human was pushed out on their own, out of the group, that ostracism would

have probably meant they'd be dead meat very soon after. Public speaking – standing out alone – goes against this group mentality.

There is also the idea that during these prehistoric times, having eyes facing towards you (as happens when standing in front of an audience for public speaking) probably meant we were being watched by a predator. Our bodies would then have responded in the way they do in times of danger.

When we face a threat, perceived or otherwise, a signal is sent to the amygdala, which sits in the temporal lobe of the brain. When the amygdala receives this signal, it immediately sounds the alarm throughout the body to activate the fight, flight, freeze response. The adrenal glands (located on top of the kidneys) receive the signal to dump adrenaline into the blood, which begins the fight-or-flight feeling as the heart rate increases, blood pressure rises and the brain begins to receive more oxygen. The body is preparing to fight for its survival. This response happens instantly and without you needing to do anything.

Let us remind ourselves that although we feel far removed from our primitive ancestors, it wasn't *that* long ago in terms of human existence (the Neolithic or New Stone Age was roughly 6000 years ago), and evolution and our brains may still be responding to the primordial fears we've just discussed. So, let's be kind to ourselves – there's a lot going on under the surface!

It's worth noting, of course, that if you ask most people why they fear public speaking, evolutionary factors would certainly not be their answer. They would likely cite a previous bad experience of speaking in front of others or their fear of other people judging them. They would talk about their worry of messing up, making mistakes and looking stupid in front of an audience.

I'm going to share my own anecdotal 'looking stupid while public speaking' story because we're all friends here. This story takes us back to 10-year-old me standing up in front of the whole school during assembly. I have always loved the idea of giving back and at this time in my life I had spent my weekend selling to the neighbours on my street (and there's no better way of phrasing this than...) 'bits of crap' I had found around the house or had

made. I'd made a profit of £15 and was very proud to announce that I was donating this money to the Marie Curie cancer charity.

The headmistress of the school, Ms Curd, asked me up on stage and I stood proudly in front of my peers to explain what I had been up to. I chatted confidently about my 'shop' and how much I'd raised for charity. She then asked me which charity I was donating the money to and I stated, with the same confidence and vigour as before, that my donation was going to ... 'the Mariah Curry charity' (clearly a mix of one of my favourite artists and one of my favourite foods!). As laughter filled the room and my face flushed red, I thought, 'What have I said wrong, why are they laughing?' I sheepishly took my seat as I heard Ms Curd chuckle the correct name, 'Marie Curie'. I felt so embarrassed.

I think about that moment every time I see anything to do with the Marie Curie charity, even to this day. This is the unfortunate power of embarrassing public speaking moments: they can create a limiting belief about public speaking in our subconscious minds. Even if we aren't aware of these subconscious limiting beliefs forming, they can mean that our brains will instantly associate any new public speaking opportunities with the old negative ones. These limiting beliefs can be hard to shift.

You might imagine that with my background as an actress, standing up and talking in public would come easy to me. But for years I was highly confident when portraying a character on stage, but the idea of speaking as myself in public would have been as abhorrent to me as fighting a lion is to most sensible people. I had the fear and I had to learn how to just be me without the mask of a character. I discovered there was a major reason for my fear...

I struggled with public speaking because I kept telling myself that I wasn't good at public speaking.

## What you say creates the way

Think back to the last time you had to do any kind of speaking in public. This doesn't have to be an actual speech – perhaps you had to run a training session with your team or do one of those awkward introductions at a new