



## CHAPTER 1

# KEEPING CONTROL

Nicole

The alarm clock beeps, dragging me out of a deep, heavy sleep. 7am. I reach over and hit the snooze button. I keep my eyes closed and lie there waiting for my thoughts to come flooding in, like they do every morning. Like a tidal wave, ready to drown me. But I'm ready, too. Ready to fight all my worries; control them and file them away into little boxes, so they can't all come at me at once.

I have so many worries, but I've learnt that it's no use trying to tackle them all together. It's easier to deal with them one at a time. My alarm beeps again. I switch it off properly and climb out of bed. As usual, my heart begins racing. I have a

vague sense that something bad might happen today, but I don't know what. Slowly, I breathe in and out, pushing back against the worries spinning around in my head. As I make my way to the shower, I force myself to focus on just one thought. What should I do about Alex's birthday party?

Alex is my boyfriend. I've been seeing him for a few months. It's his sixteenth birthday soon. He's having a big party, and has invited all his friends and lots of his family. I've met his mum a few times and she's lovely. But I don't know if I can cope with meeting everyone else in one go. I imagine being there with so many people I don't know well. I know I'll find it hard.

*Just be yourself*, I say to myself. There's nothing wrong with you. You can handle it. The party isn't even about you, it's about Alex, I tell myself sternly. A second later, a voice comes into my head taking me back to square one. *You won't be able to handle it*, the voice says. *I can handle it*, I tell myself. My thoughts about Alex's birthday party go round