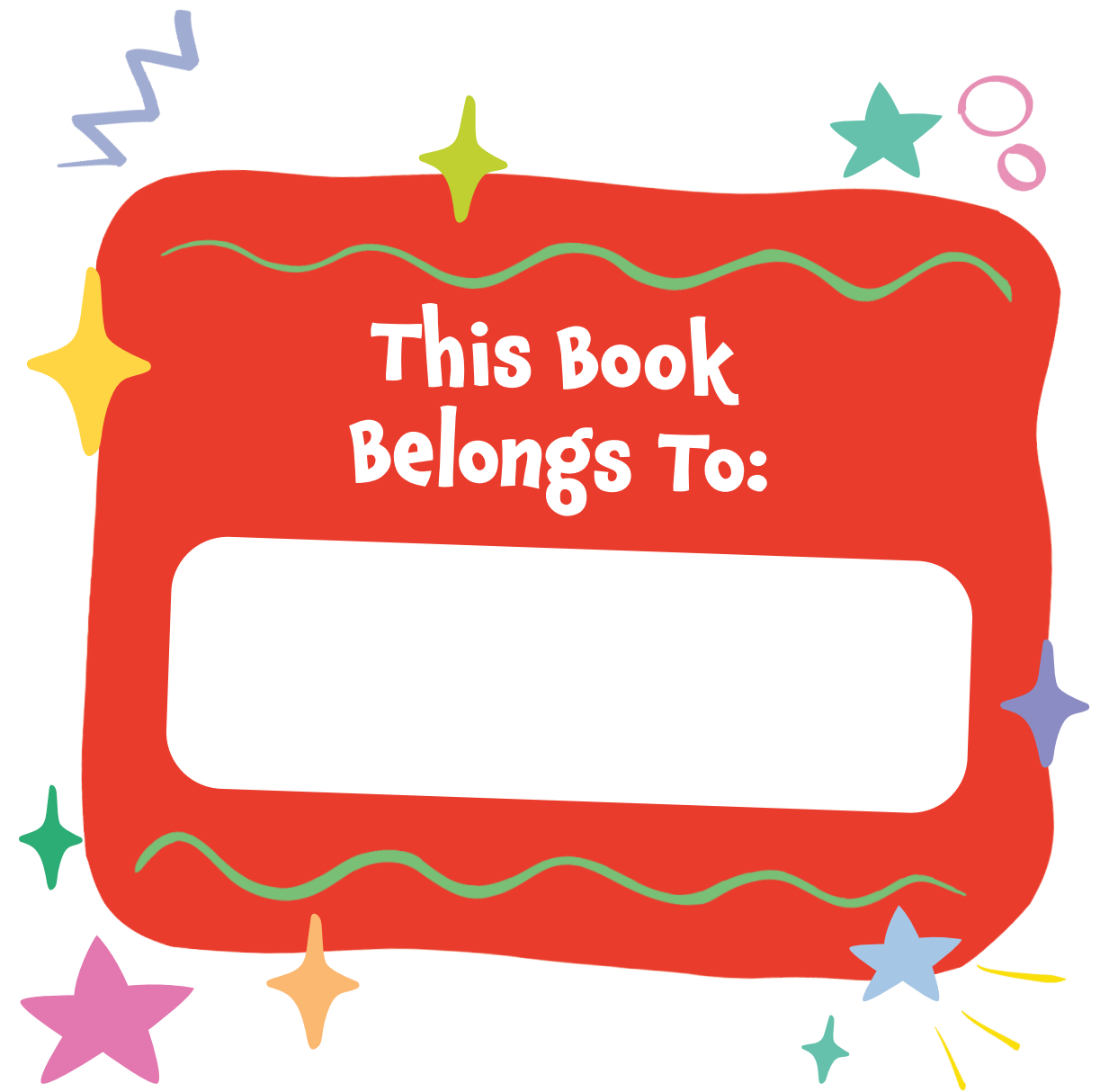




Your Best Life!
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**Stories & Activities to
Understand & Celebrate
Your Worth!**

A HUGE HEARTFELT "THANK YOU" TO MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS THAT HAVE LISTENED, ASKED, AND ENCOURAGED ME ON THIS JOURNEY. I APPRECIATE EACH OF THE HEROES WHO SHARED THEIR STORIES TO HELP OFFER A CONNECTION TO THOSE OF US THAT NEED TO HEAR AND UNDERSTAND. I DEDICATE THIS BOOK TO ALL OF THEM AND ALL OF YOU WHO ARE CREATING STORIES OF YOUR OWN.

EVERY DAY WHEN I VISITED MY MOM, SHE WOULD ASK ME WHAT I HAD BEEN DOING. EACH DAY I WOULD SHARE WITH HER I WAS WRITING MY BOOK TO HELP KIDS AND OTHERS BETTER UNDERSTAND LIFE'S JOURNEY. EACH TIME SHE WOULD RESPOND, "IT'S GOING TO BE INCREDIBLE!" MOM WAS ALWAYS MY BIGGEST CHEERLEADER! SHARE YOUR WINGS, MOM. TAKE THIS BOOK WHERE IT NEEDS TO BE!



Vicki Merryweather
author

TO MY HUSBAND, MY FAMILY, AND FRIENDS, WHO CHEERED ME ON THROUGH EVERY DOODLE AND SKETCH—THANK YOU FOR BELIEVING IN MY ART AND IN ME. YOUR LOVE HELPED BRING THESE PAGES TO LIFE.

TO THE KIDS HOLDING THIS BOOK: MAY THESE ILLUSTRATIONS INSPIRE YOU TO DREAM BIG, COLOR OUTSIDE THE LINES, AND DISCOVER THE WONDER IN YOUR OWN "BEST LIFE."

Staci Alexander
illustrator

A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO NATURAL LIFE FOR ALLOWING US TO FEATURE THEIR QUOTES IN THESE PAGES.

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give.love.laugh.

What Everyone's Saying About Your Best Life!

Each of the prompts walks you through understanding yourself and your feelings in addition to other life issues. Each prompt is presented in a relatable and engaging manner as you discover strength and resilience. Readers are encouraged to nurture themselves as the miracles they are. This activity journal is a tremendous guide to finding your path despite life problems or the trauma we may face.

—Jacqueline Whitaker, Educator

You are incredible! What an amazing resource that will bless the lives of so many children, teens, and adults. It's like a guidebook for navigating life! I love that it is interactive and has space after each topic for kids to write and be creative. I love the real-life examples and experiences shared.

As a mother and elementary educator, I wish I could get this book into the hands of every child I know! More and more in this world we need a little more light and a little more hope! Thank you for sharing your light.

—KayDee Shaffer,
Elementary School Teacher

I love that this book is an activity journal with so much wisdom and positivity! Kids need to know their value and have an internal toolbox to help navigate the complexities of life. This book is a great resource that is kid friendly and parent approved!

—Ashley Powell

This book will help make kids more aware of themselves and the world around them!

—Beckett, Age 11

This book teaches amazing life skills. It will teach teens so much information with the prompts it contains to help them find themselves and be the best they can be! It's an amazing reminder that our best is enough!

—Sawyer, Age 13

"Two worlds are being combined in the book by Vicki Merryweather with her love of art, creativity and her mission for every child to feel important and see their worth. It is an amazing melding of creative artistry in the activities and social emotional learning. I wish I had one when I was a kid and want one for every child I teach! I encourage you to get more than one copy of this book and give it to everyone you know."

—Marcia Wilson,
Elementary School Counselor

I would recommend this journal to my friends. I like that it has fun activities, and it helps me build self-confidence. I am excited to use it! It's easy to read, understand and relate!

—Klayr, Age 11

I believe this book will be a great tool that will help many on their path to self-discovery. It helps to understand setting and achieving goals as well as guidelines for working through the good and bad of life. Every tween/teen and adult would also benefit from this book and what it teaches.

—Megan Thornley

Kids and Grown-Ups Love This Journal

start

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you Can Do This!

Introduction

Before you begin...

Every child must know that they are a miracle! Since the beginning of the world, there hasn't been or until the end of the world, there will not be another child like him!

—Pablo Casals

Everyone has a story. Everything you experience, say, and do each day is writing your story. There is someone who needs to hear your words who will be inspired by them. What is your story?

For the past several years of my life, I have tried to become the best version of myself. There is no way I could have imagined my life along the way or how it is now! There have been lots of mistakes and an unbelievable amount of speed bumps! Astonishingly, I haven't had more cuts and bruises! But it was all part of the path to where I am today.

Creating this book has helped me understand this better, plus lots of other lessons I had no idea I needed to learn. There is no instruction book for life. This makes sense, as everyone and their needs are unique and different. This book has been written as a guide for you. It was created to help you to begin to understand things about life and to help you make your choices.

If you choose to work towards being a better version of yourself, understand from the beginning that your life will not change overnight.

Working to improve yourself requires a series of choices, an overall plan, and the steps necessary to be where you would like to be. Try not to become discouraged along the way. Good things take time, and the best things take even longer. Every bit of progress should be celebrated. You are awesome and are going to become more awesome every day! You will never be the same!

Let's get started. You can write in your journal or grab your favorite notebook and a pen or pencil. Let's work through these pages to change your life forever! I know you can do this! I will be one of your biggest cheerleaders!

Keep in mind that YOU are the HERO in YOUR story!

One day you will look back and realize that you worried too much about things that don't really matter!
—Natural Life

YOU ARE AMAZING AND UNSTOPPABLE!
YOU'VE GOT THIS!

Section 1

Let's Get to Know You!

 **BE YOU.** It takes  courage to be yourself in a world where you  are constantly told that who you are isn't enough. Being yourself  is the biggest gift you can offer yourself & others. Be brave  enough to show the world who you are without an apology. 



—ASHLEY ALVES

Getting to Know You

Understand who you are
and just BE YOU.

When I was younger, I thought that if someone wasn't happy, it was my fault. I thought I was doing something wrong or that I wasn't doing enough. I thought something was wrong with me. At that time, I had no idea who "me" was. I finally figured out who "me" was and that things were not my fault. When I realized that it is okay to be me, everything in my life completely changed.

Let's figure out who YOU are! Begin to write your story as you think about this list of questions. What makes you unique? What makes you who you are?

"Your greatest quality isn't fitting in,
it's just being yourself!"
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Draw or paste a picture of yourself.



Telling Your Story

This is your story. Be you! You're the only one who can. Write a few things about yourself!



Pick up your favorite pencil or pen and begin by answering the following questions. If you struggle with your answer, ask someone that loves you for help. They will know the answers!

What physical features do you love and why?

What are your favorite personality traits?

How do they help you?

Make a list of what you enjoy spending your time doing:

Consider things you can change over time. Be realistic. I have always wanted to be taller, which is not an option for me! I can change how I dress so it flatters my height. I can change the length, style, and the color of my hair.

What would you change in your appearance and why?

What personality trait could you improve?

Why would that be better?

What new skills would you like to learn or become better at?

Is there something you would like to spend more time doing? What could you do to make that happen?

Review your list. You are pretty impressive, aren't you! If you are happy with yourself, carry on. If you would like to improve anything about yourself, please continue!

Make a list of those things you can change and the steps you can take to change them.

✦

✦

✦

Then make a realistic timeline to make those changes.

Understanding Your Feelings

Be aware of your feelings, acknowledge them and be kind and patient with yourself as you learn to understand and work through them.

I get angry when someone does something to someone I care about. I take a deep breath and figure out what I am feeling. I don't like feeling angry. I remind myself that I can't change what someone else does, but I DON'T want to be like them. Life isn't always fair. There are lots of things we cannot change nor do anything about.

While at my grandson's elementary school, a student was brought into the office by a friend to see the counselor. He was sobbing and upset. She softly guided him to remember to practice his breathing, and sit there for a bit until he felt like he could return to class.

Hoping to help, I started to talk to him. I asked him what his favorite animal was. Of course, anyone wearing a dinosaur hoodie was going to love dinosaurs! He started to share with me, things about dinosaurs and that his favorite dinosaur was T Rex. He said he wanted to be a paleontologist when he grew up. I asked him why he was sad. He said his teacher raised her voice in class and it scared him. I assured him that even a T-Rex got scared once in a while. When this dinosaur sat quiet and took big breaths, T-Rex stopped being scared and thought about being strong and brave.

The following week a dinosaur book featuring a brave T-Rex was dropped off at the office for the student to keep in his cubby. Inside the cover was a note that said,

"BREATHE. Remember even T-Rex sometimes gets scared!"

We all experience different emotions at different times. We need to recognize which emotion we are feeling, understand why we are feeling it and how to calm ourselves. YOU can handle your emotions.

Our primary emotions are **HAPPINESS, SADNESS, FEAR** and **ANGER. ANXIETY** and **FEAR** are cousins but not the same emotion. **FEAR** is our reaction to a threat. **ANXIETY** is our brain worrying about the possibilities of what **COULD** happen or that something might go wrong.

If you recognize and understand each of your feelings, that's fabulous! Be brave and move ahead to the next prompt. If you would like to better understand any of your emotions, keep reading.



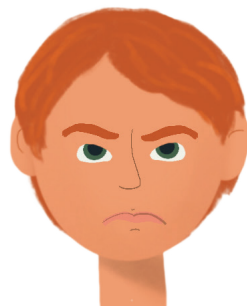
Understanding Your Feelings

Use these examples for reference and draw your feelings.
Or you may take selfies of YOUR emotions and paste to express each of the feelings.

examples!



happy



angry



sad

your turn!



happy



angry



sad

Notice what you are feeling. Name it so you understand what it is and why and how it makes you uncomfortable.

Make a list of each of your feelings:

★	★
★	★
★	★

Understand what you are feeling. Write down why you are feeling it.

Write down what each feeling is like.

★	★
★	★
★	★

Why do they feel that way?

You can handle your emotions. Learn to recognize and understand which emotion you are feeling, understand why, and how to process emotions. Try different ways and see which one works best for you.

Learn More About Your Feelings...

Feelings are messages from your brain and your body. They help you understand what's happening inside you. When you understand what you are feeling, it becomes easier to talk about them. It's important that you **EAT** regularly, **DRINK** enough and get enough **SLEEP**! Write down what you are feeling, including why. It always helps to talk to someone that cares about you. **IT'S OKAY TO ASK FOR HELP!**
You can't be your best without taking care of **YOU FIRST!**

Try this: Write in the note pages of your journal or circle the words that you've felt before!

HAPPINESS

synonyms:
joyful • hopeful • confident • loving

Share your smile. Be positive.
Do kind things for others.

SADNESS

synonyms:
bored • tired • lonely • upset

Take a walk. Turn on happy music. Cry!
Share your feelings.

ANGER

synonyms:
frustrated • irritated • embarrassed

Walk away. Count to 10.
Take deep breaths.

FEAR

synonyms:
scared • worried • insecure

Tell yourself I'm OKAY. I can do this!
Think of your safe place.

ANXIETY

synonyms:
worried • overwhelmed • uneasy

TAKE DEEP BREATHS. YOU CAN DO THIS!
Prioritize. Organize.



Circle healthy ways to handle negative emotions

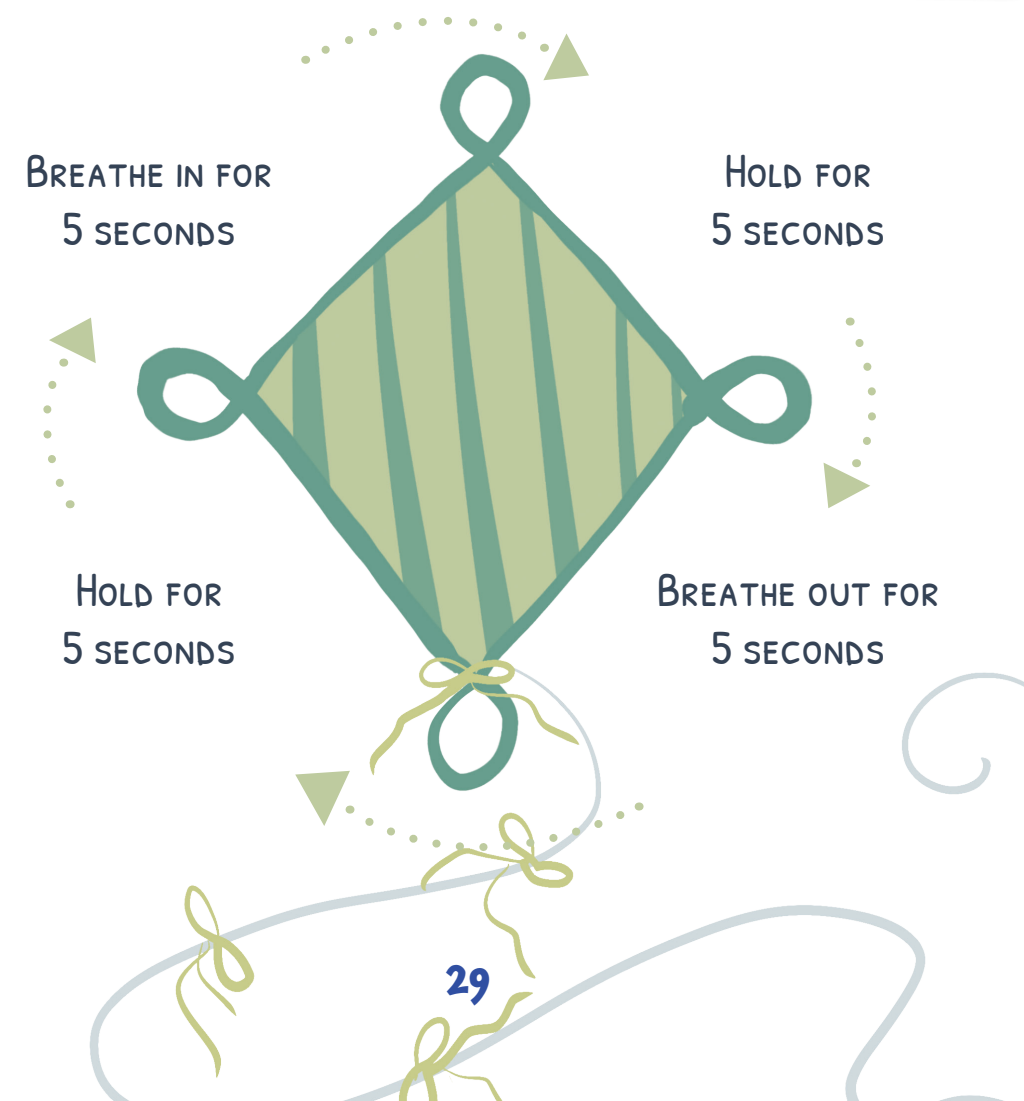
Deep breathing	Get good sleep
Name calling	Shutting down
Blaming others	Negative social media
Destroying property	Listen to music
Count from 1 to 100	Hurting others
Go for a run	Dancing
Self-harm	Aggression and violence
Alcohol or drug use	Creating arts or crafts
Positive self-talk	Spend time in nature

Breathing & Mindfulness

Breathing helps calm our minds and brings us back to being present in the moment. Relax and be present with your senses.

A simple way to do this is:

1. Take a deep breath, completely filling your belly first, then your chest as you COUNT to 5.
2. HOLD your breath for 5 counts then EXHALE, as you count to 5.
3. EXHALE like you are blowing out a bunch of candles. Continue to EXHALE completely as you count to 5 once more.
4. Begin the cycle again. Repeat as needed.



Music

My music choices change with what's happening in my world. I love music that is upbeat, positive, and happy. It's an eclectic mix of oldies, country and pop with a sprinkling of Jelly Roll, Post Malone or Michael Buble'. Choose what feels good to you. It's YOUR choosing day!

Today I will not stress over things I cannot control!
Take a deep breath in, hold, exhale and LET IT GO!

Music is medicine. Gather a playlist of YOUR favorite songs or artists.

1.

2.

3.



Write down what you like about each of them.

Write down how each of them makes you feel.

If there are lyrics that speak to you, write those down too!

**It's okay to: NOT have all the answers.
Feel all the emotions. Have bad days. Let yourself cry
whenever you need to. Ask for help. Make mistakes.
IT'S ALL PART OF LIFE!**

Finding Your Happy Place

**Find a safe place that
feels good to you!**

We each need a place we can go and just be, that allows our SOUL to speak or to listen. We need a safe place where we can go to relax and be.

Everyone needs a place where they feel completely safe and content. My happy place is my studio. It is filled with things that I love and which make me happy—pictures of my favorite people, art and children's books, art supplies, and treasures from my global travels. I have a speaker to play my favorite songs. The colors are soft pastels to set the tone for a soothing, calm place.

If I allow my happy place to become messy or cluttered, it doesn't feel as good. When this happens, I take the time to clean and reorganize my space so it feels amazing again.

Do you already have a "Happy Place"? If you would like to share what's in your happy place, describe it and how each item in there makes you feel. Perhaps you have two, one inside and one outdoors. If you aren't interested, turn the page and move on.

**"If it makes you happy it doesn't have to
make sense to others!"**

—Natural Life

Write down where your place to go is when you just need to BE.

Describe in detail what your happy place is filled with. Include the colors that are there and why you chose them.

Write down how it makes you feel when you are there.

What kind of music is your favorite to play while you are there?

Do you have an indoor and outdoor happy place?

Does it ever feel uncomfortable?

What can you do when this happens?



outdoor happy place

Describe, draw or paste pictures of where you like to be outdoors, with whom, and what would feel good for you to be doing in your outdoor "Happy Places".



indoor happy place

Describe, draw, or paste pictures, of things that would feel good for you to have in your "Happy Place."



Taking Care of You

**Make yourself a priority.
Take care of yourself FIRST!**

The most important person to take care of is YOU! It isn't selfish. It's as necessary as breathing, eating and sleeping. Remember to take care of YOU first! No one is going to do that for you!

—Vicki Merryweather

One of my all-time favorite students and friends has this advice to share to help and encourage others. "Self-care can look different to each of us. Taking care of you is extremely important. For myself, if I feel like I have bottled-up emotions or frustrations that I cannot express, I find a night, a sad movie, snuggle with my dog, eat popcorn, and cry it out. It may sound weird, but scheduling time allows me to be strong until I can take time for my emotional release. Other forms of release that I enjoy are journaling, taking a walk, having a special treat, or simply taking a shower and appreciating how all of these feel wonderful. Bad days happen; they always will. The biggest gift you can give yourself is to pick yourself up and remember to take good care of yourself!"

—Lisa Anderson

I allow my life to be crazy busy. I want to do it all. I have finally come to realize that I can do it all, but not all at once. If I don't take care of myself, my energy goes away. Finally, I recognize the things I need to do to be my best self. Sometimes it is hard to realize you need to take care of yourself first! No one else is going to do it for you.

The following are examples of things I do each day for a better me:

- **Drink lots of water.** I have a special cup for water and I take it wherever I go.
- **Eat nourishing food.** Do not skip meals, especially breakfast. Find something good for you. You can't drive a car without gas!
- **Get some exercise,** even if it's just a few minutes. A brisk walk outside is the best. It is not hard to exercise for fifteen minutes.
- **Consistent Sleep.** Get ready for bed before it's time to go to sleep. Wind down and get ready to go sleep. Brush your teeth, wash your face, and put on your favorite pajamas. Unplug and relax.
- **Spend time with family and friends** who love and support you and want you to be the best you can be. Cuddling with a pet is also a good way to spend time.

Do you already have good habits to be your best self? If you do and are happy with how you feel, jump to the next prompt.

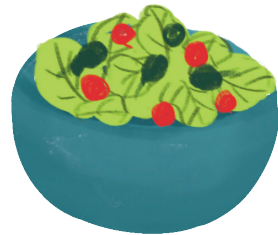


Pick Your Habits

For each of the following examples, write down the habits that you already have to take care of yourself.

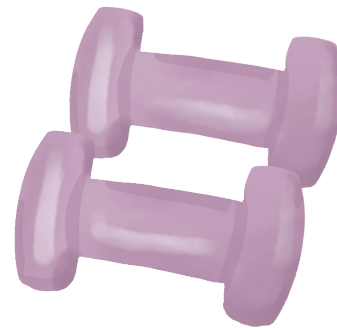
Drinking water

What is your favorite way to drink water?
(crushed ice, special cup, etc.)



Nourishing Food

What food could you eat to better
nourish yourself?
(yogurt, fresh fruit, nuts, etc.)



Exercise

What are your favorite ways to move your body?
What new ways of moving are you interested in
trying? (dance, hiking, etc.)



Sleep

What do you like to do to get
ready for bed?
(read, listen to soft music, etc.)



Family & Friends

Who are your favorite people in your
life? How does each of them make you
feel? (Love, encouragement, etc.) What do
they love most about you? (Thoughtfulness,
kindness, etc.)

Use this space to list some habits you could
begin to feel even better!

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Section 2

Your People Matter

People are either
like the warmth
& positive energy
of a warm sunny day
or the cold, dark,
heaviness of
negativity
that can drain your
energy & drag
you down.
Choose wisely.

—VICKI MERRYWEATHER

Your Favorite People

In order to have good friends,
you need to be a good friend.

Here are some qualities that are important to being a good friend.

Positive
Kind
Honest
Respectful
Polite

Grateful
Dependable
Trustworthy
Responsible
Encouraging

Here are qualities to avoid so that you do not become a bad friend. Being aware will make them easier to recognize.

Negative
Critical
Judgmental
Argumentative
Jealous

Rude
Disrespectful
Mean
Entitled

If you are like sunshine and only have people that are like a sunny day in your life, continue to the next prompt. If you are uncertain, complete the questions in this section to recognize the difference between the sunshine and the darkness.

Each bead shows something that makes a great friend. Color in the beads you'd want on your friendship bracelet!



Make a...

**Friendship
bracelet!**



What makes you a good friend?

Make a list of the people in your life.

What good qualities make each of them a good friend?

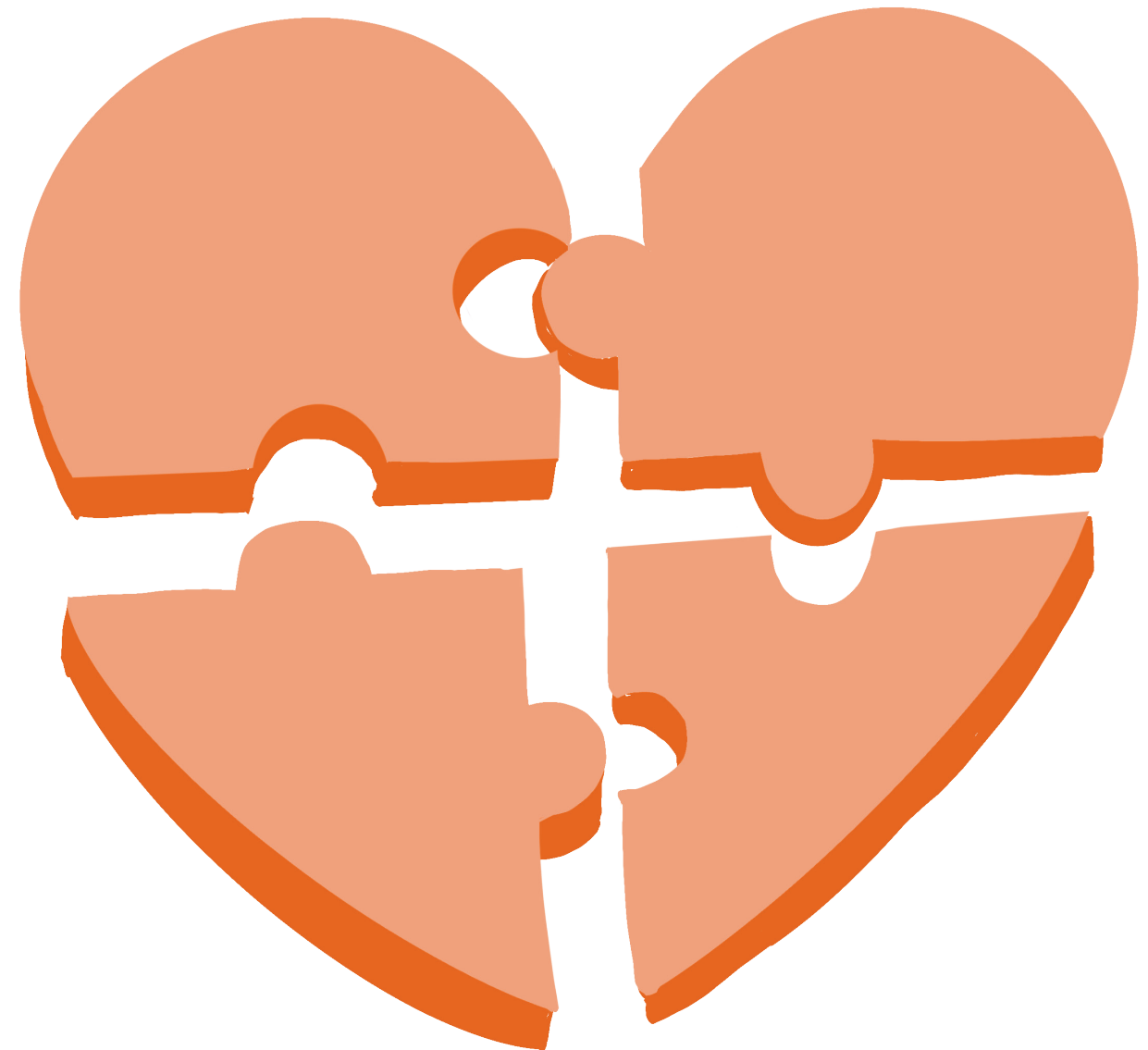
Why do you enjoy having them in your life?

Are there people in your life who drain your energy
and are difficult to spend time with?

Is there a pet included in your “Favorite Peeps”?

Your Favorite People (or creatures!)

Draw or write the names of your favorite people
(or creatures!) inside each heart piece.
These are the ones who fill your heart with love!



“Some people just make you feel better when you are around them.
They are sunshine to your soul and medicine for your mind.”

—Natural Life

Who You Are Important To

Who loves YOU most?

Good friends are like stars.

You don't always see them but you know they're always there.

—Natural Life

I have the most amazing people in my life. I know they are there for me and I am there for them NO MATTER WHAT! I appreciate their love and support.

Everyone needs to belong and be a part of something. We all need people in our lives to love and support us. These people may be family or they may be the friends that we have chosen.

Supportive: They listen to me and are truly interested in what's going on in my life. They check in and check up on me to make certain I'm OK.

Kind: They say only nice things about me. They stand up for me if someone is saying negative or mean things about me or they walk away from those conversations.

Honest: Sometimes it's a brief pop in the forehead, but they are always honest: even if it's hard to hear what they are saying. They only have your best interest at heart!

Connected: Even when you don't see them, you know they are there for you. Your relationship picks up where it left off even if it's been a while since you talked or spent time together.

Who do you have in YOUR fan club and that are YOUR biggest cheerleaders? These are the people that you can always count on!

You Are Important!



How do people who love you show they care?

A large rectangular area with a dotted blue border, intended for writing answers to the question above.

Who Are Your Cheerleaders?

Make a list of the people in your life who love and support you. Next to their names, write their relationship to you and write an example of what they do to support you.











Having a friend with a good heart and positive energy is a blessing.
—Natural Life

Dear

Send these people a text or a note, letting them know how much you love and appreciate them being part of your life!



Your Trusted Adult

Have someone you can confide in. Be prepared if YOU need someone, or if you need to help SOMEONE you care about.

One day during class, we were discussing the importance of having a trusted adult. One of the students shared that her best friend's mother's boyfriend was doing things that she was not comfortable with. It started as touching her in ways that made her uncomfortable. When her best friend shared her feelings with my student, she wasn't certain who to talk to about it. She was nervous that her mother wouldn't believe her and would be upset with her.

My student immediately suggested she discuss it with her mother. She was confident there would be no judgment and her mother would help her figure out what to do. Even though it was very hard for her, she was brave enough to reach out for advice and help. The problem was not easy to face and overcome, but it was resolved because she was able to confide and trust in her best friend and her mother. Had the girl not received help, the problem could have escalated into a bigger problem, upsetting and hurting her (and possibly her younger sisters) even more.

We all need someone in our lives who we can talk to about anything, someone who will be there no matter what! Some things are difficult to talk to your parents about. You need to know who that someone is if a difficult situation were to arise. It may be your Mom's best friend or your best friend's Mom. It could be a neighbor, one of your teachers, or a counselor at school. Hopefully you will never need them, but just in case, you need to choose someone you feel comfortable and safe talking with.

Each of us should create a list of possible trusted friends or adults even if we may never need someone to listen to our concerns or feelings.

Make a list of possible trusted friends or adults and add their contact information, which should include a phone number and address.

NOTE: If a situation arises and you prefer to speak to someone you DON'T know, there is someone available 24/7. You can simply text or call 988. Everyone should have this in their phone in case of emergencies, for yourself or someone else.

Please be aware of this information and that these people are there to help you!



Write the names of your trusted adults and why you chose them on the awards.

#1

#2

#3

#4

#5

Every kid should have at least five trusted adults they can rely on to support them when needed. Write the names and phone numbers of your trusted adults.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Pick
5

Gratitude

Express gratitude every day. Always be thankful for every little thing and everyone you have in your life.

One of my students arrives every week with a tale of woes. Her week has been horrible, her mom won't buy her everything she thinks she desperately needs, and a feral cat has been taunting her chickens. If I don't steer her away from the negative path, the others join in, as it is contagious. Positive words, such as how good her hair looks today or how awesome her artwork is turning out, move the conversation to positive things.

Do you have someone in your life who is focused on negative things? When you see them coming, do you brace yourself for the pity party? Life isn't fair to them. They wallow in and enjoy the negative things that have happened to them, even from their past.

When your brain is fed negative thoughts, they multiply and consume our minds. Like a dirt bike trail that has been ridden on often while its wet, leaving deep ruts that are difficult to get out of and ride through! Our thoughts follow that difficult path and the ruts or grooves become deeper and deeper in your brain.

Changing your thoughts to positive ones is not difficult. Start by thinking about positive things and all of the things you are grateful for. Take time to examine the little things, not just the big things. Start with one each morning or night and see how many you have at the end of the week.

I am grateful everyday for the people in my life, especially my delightful art students. I learn more from them than I could have imagined. One student taught me to rub my finger inside of the cap of an acorn. It truly is the softest soft I have ever felt! I share this every fall by gathering acorns to give to others. I never would have imagined discovering that myself!

An "attitude of gratitude" is one of the simplest ways to improve satisfaction with our lives. Simply focus on what you have instead of complaining about what you don't have or think you deserve. Grateful people are kinder, more sensitive, and have empathy for others.

Gratitude increases our mental strength, increases happiness, and reduces depression. Gratitude makes us feel better. Try using words like "thank you" and see how they lift you up as you recognize kind things people do for you.

If you would like to make a gratitude list now, that's fabulous. If you don't have time at the moment, remember that making your list will uplift your mood if you are having a bad day!

The following are a few suggestions of some of the things we should be grateful for.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Being alive | A cozy bed and favorite quilt |
| Memories | The warmth of the sun on your face |
| Favorite friends and family | The beautiful colors of a butterfly |
| Spending time outdoors | Laughter |
| Fresh air | Mistakes that have helped us learn |
| Water with crushed ice to drink | The colors in the sky as the sun sets |
| Snuggles with a pet | A contagious giggle or laugh of a baby |
| Hugs that don't let go | The shapes and colors of the clouds |
| Warm bubble baths | |

Happiness will never come to those who fail to appreciate what they already have.
—Buddha

Make a Gratitude List

You may wish to write them down in a journal, possibly with a date.
THIS IS A GREAT DAILY HABIT

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Gratitude is the healthiest of all human emotions.
The more you are grateful for, the more you will
find you have to be grateful for!

Kindness

Be kind and thoughtful to others.

Kindness is a selfless action practiced and valued throughout the world. Kindness is defined in the dictionary as "Wanting and liking to do things that bring happiness to others." It is a behavioral trait. Kindness is a choice to continually do good for others!

When returning home at night during a terrible rainstorm, I noticed a group of kids gathered under the tree in our front yard. I opened my front door and invited them to come inside my house until the storm lightened or passed. They said they didn't live far and would be okay. I watched from the window as they headed down the street.

A few weeks later during another stormy evening, there was a knock on my front door. When I opened the door, one of the kids that I remembered from under the tree was standing there, soaking wet and sobbing. I found her a place to sit, dry off and get warm, and asked her what I could do to help her. She had been told to leave her house by her stepdad and had no place to go. She left with nothing; no coat, no phone, no place to go. She said she remembered my kindness, so she came to my door. I invited her in to dry off and get warm. I gave her a drink, something to eat, and my phone to find someone to help. She was able to call someone to pick her up until her dad could come from out of town.

You never know who needs or will be touched by your kindness. Kindness can be like a light to brighten someone's day. Hopefully it will inspire them to share that light and brighten someone else's day!

One kind word or gesture can change someone's entire day, possibly their life! It's your choosing day! Choose each day to be kind and thoughtful!

IN A WORLD
WHERE YOU
CAN BE
ANYTHING...

Bee
Kind



Kindness is loaning someone your **STRENGTH** instead of reminding them of their **WEAKNESS**.

—Natural Life

How does it make you feel when you are kind to other people?

How can you show kindness to people that you don't know?

How did it make YOU feel when someone was kind to you?

Make a list of qualities that contribute to being kind.
Here are some suggestions:

Positive attitude
Thoughtful
Caring
Gentle

Honest
Supportive
Responsible
Considerate

Friendly
Encouraging
Respectful
Helpful



Every act of kindness adds a drop to your bucket!
Write ideas for ways to be kind this week, and see how full
your bucket can get.

Section 3

What's Inside You

It's never too
late to be the
person you
want to be.



— NATURAL LIFE



Your Comfort Zone

Sometimes you have to be uncomfortable to grow and change.

Be brave enough to suck at something new!
—Natural Life

I have always wanted to illustrate a book for children. To help me understand what I needed to know, I joined the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. The first year, I attended their annual meeting as a spectator. I was a student there to learn as much as I could about how to accomplish this goal.

The next year, I designed and submitted a book cover for feedback at the annual meeting. As the panel of publishers and illustrators began to review my artwork, featured on a huge screen in front of the entire group attending, I began to feel uneasy and sick to my stomach. One of the panelists asked what my princess slippers in the picture were. She thought they were mushrooms! I was embarrassed and could not muster an answer. I chose to remain anonymous and did not respond. I felt like someone had punched me in the stomach.

When I was able to catch my breath and regroup, I realized that the suggestions I received were just what I needed to hear to find the direction I needed and improve my illustration.

Our **COMFORT ZONE** is where we are good at doing things and we feel confident, safe, and comfortable. This happens no matter how old we are! When we begin to step out of our **COMFORT ZONE**, we become agitated and afraid. We doubt ourselves and our self-confidence wavers. This is when we enter the **FEAR ZONE**.

If we ignore this uncomfortable feeling, we are able to move forward and venture cautiously into our **LEARNING ZONE**. This is where we are open to learn and master new skills. This begins our journey toward new opportunities and growth. Once in the **GROWTH ZONE**, we can make plans that include each step to reach new goals. This allows us to follow and fulfill our dreams on our paths to **OUR PURPOSE IN LIFE!**

REMINDER: "Do what you fear and the fear disappears."
—Natural Life

If you understand your comfort zone and how to move forward to complete your goals, skip on to the next prompt.
If not, please continue.

"REMINDER: Do what you fear and the fear disappears."
— Natural Life

Growth Journey

Make a list of things that you are good at and that you are confident in doing.

Describe in detail what it feels like when you step out of your comfort zone and into your fear zone.

Comfort Zone

Fear Zone

What are some of the things you can do to MOVE out of your FEAR ZONE?

Make a list of things you would like to learn and master when you move into your...

Learning Zone

Make a list of your dreams and your wish for your purpose in life.

Your Purpose Zone

Make Friends With Your Inner Critic

Recognize what is happening and understand how to overcome it!

Our inner critic is there as our mind's way to protect us from failure. It NEVER GOES AWAY but we can figure out how to STOP it and move forward to get things done! Ignore its excuses and DO IT NOW!

Some of my students occasionally struggle with their inner critics, the voice in their heads which constantly says "You didn't do that good enough." When this happens, they are given a timer. They must focus on their current project for a minimum of five minutes before the timer goes off. The countdown to start the timer is counting backwards; 5,4,3,2,1 START! This is enough for them to begin.

When I begin to move out of my comfort zone to try something new or different, it often makes me uncomfortable. I begin to get nervous and even scared. Something inside my head tells me I can't do it. I gather excuses, like "I don't have time right now," or I move on to doing something I know I can do. The inner critic is actually our brain's way of protecting us from failure or being hurt.

I recognize what's happening and take steps to quiet my inner critic. The more I move forward, the louder and more agitated it becomes. I can choose to ignore it and start the task, or listen, worry, and procrastinate. That second choice is allowing my inner critic to frustrate me and stop my efforts.

It NEVER GOES AWAY but we CAN learn to recognize it and figure out how to STOP it, allowing us to move forward and get things done! Ignore its excuses. 3-2-1, DO IT NOW!

Understanding and silencing our inner critic is a huge step in overcoming and quieting it. It never goes away! If you have already figured this out, good for you! If not, let's get this figured out immediately.



**"If you think you can or you think you can't, you are right!"
—Henry Ford**

How do you feel when you begin to leave your comfort zone?

Do you recognize your inner critic?

What excuses do you make not to start?

What can you do to silence it?

Making Friends With your Inner Critic

Add phrases from your Inner Critic, and responses to your Inner Critic.

when inner critic says...

you can't
do that

you don't have
time!

you have to
do it perfect
the first
time!



I can reply...

3-2-1 Start!
DO IT NOW!

i've got this!

i love
myself!

It feels fabulous when you understand and can silence your inner critic! You will accomplish big and wonderful things. There is no end to what you can do!

DO IT NOW! Time is your most precious resource! There is a sense of urgency to get things done and NOT WASTE your time. The only way you can fail is if you don't try. You will never grow if you stay where you are comfortable. What you focus your mind on, is where your energy will go. If you procrastinate, staying inside your swirling head, it drains your energy. If you move forward and do things, it will give you a jolt of more energy so you can do more! You will be amazed at the life changing differences it makes. **UNBELIEVABLE!**

Goals And Accomplishments

Plan and make steps to reach your goals.
Be a goal setter and achiever.

YOU deserve everything you dream about!

—Natural Life

A **GOAL** without a **PLAN** is just a **DREAM** or **FANTASY** which will never happen anywhere but inside your head. A **GOAL** requires a **PLAN** and **ACTION** that includes writing down the steps you need to reach your **GOAL**. To achieve your goal you should have timelines for completing each of those steps. Celebrate every move forward. Speed bumps and changes along the way are expected. You must be consistent and disciplined as you work towards reaching your **GOAL**!

One of my favorite people in the world is my granddaughter. She is an amazing example of quiet strength in setting and accomplishing her goals. She has always loved dancing. She danced several days a week and is now on the high school drill team. She decided at the beginning of summer to trap shoot with her parents. She wanted to practice, get better, win a belt buckle, and earn letters in each of the three events. With practice, discipline, and the support of her family, she did just that! We were thrilled when her dad sent a picture of her beautiful proud smile and her first-place buckle.

My granddaughter graduated in the top of her class in 2025. She continued her competitive shooting and won 4 buckles at the Utah State Championship Shoot. She will be traveling to Texas for the National Shooting Competition.

She's attending college in the fall to pursue the training required to have a career in the medical field. She is my hero and I am so proud of her!

Everyone has talents and things they are good at. It is part of who we are. Sometimes we try lots of different things to find out which one we love most. Just because we aren't good at everything doesn't mean we are failures at those things. All the things that we try help us to learn and give us experience. This makes our lives more interesting.

You don't get what you wish for; You get what you **WORK** for.
—Natural Life

If you understand commitment and the steps you need to achieve your goals and dreams, flip forward to the next page. If not, let's figure it out and do this together!

First, we imagine...

Then, we work toward it!



Write down the things that you are good at or curious about.

Pick one or two you would like to try or accomplish and set a goal.
You may want to include why this was what you chose.

Make a list of each small step you need to accomplish each goal.

Create a flexible timeline or schedule to complete each step.



**MAIN
GOAL**

STEP 5

STEP 4

STEP 3

STEP 2

STEP 1

Build Your Goal Ladder

Always be proud of how hard you are trying! Small steps are important in completing your journey! If you have to adjust your schedule, that's okay. Just continue to move forward! Sometimes you will hit a speed bump or decide to change directions. That's awesome. Be flexible.

Have a vision; set goals and work hard to achieve those goals. Imagine and visualize how you will feel when you get there!

There's no need to rush. What's meant for you will always arrive in time.
—Natural Life



Hope

Be filled with HOPE and optimism.

Be happy...not because everything is good, but because you can see the good in everything.

—Natural Life

One of the most important qualities to embrace is hope. Hope is the belief that something or someone will get better. Hope is not an emotion, but a way of thinking or a state of being. Hope requires taking action toward the end result. It is distinctly different from a wish, as with wishes we take no action nor do we have any control. Anyone can learn to be more hopeful.

My favorite story of hope comes from a brutal study performed at Harvard in the 1950's. Dr. Curt Richter placed rats in a pool of water to test how long they could tread water. On average, they'd give up and sink after fifteen minutes. Right before they gave up due to exhaustion, the researchers would pluck them out of the water, dry them off, and let them rest a few minutes. Then they would return them for the second round.

How long do you think they lasted? Keep in mind that just a few minutes before, they had been swimming until they could swim no more. Another five minutes? Maybe, ten more minutes? Possibly, fifteen minutes? Sixty hours of additional swimming. That's not an error. The conclusion drawn was that since the rats believed they would eventually be rescued, they pushed their bodies beyond what anyone thought possible.

Optimism is expecting everything will turn out well. Optimism means believing that positive results are possible. Be optimistic. Believe things will get better and good things will happen. Hope requires optimism, motivation, and strategy.

Make certain that the steps to reach your goals are realistic. Remember, every small step is still moving forward toward reaching your goal. Expect speed bumps and road blocks as they will always arise. You can do this! When your hope fades, find inspiration and strength from others and their stories and struggles.

If hope can cause exhausted rats to continue to swim for that long, what could belief in yourself and your abilities do for you? Remember what you are capable of. Remember why you are here!

If you understand hope and how to gather strength and inspiration from others when you need it, move forward to the next prompt. If not, please continue to read so you understand and can share optimism and hope!

Write down the things you are hoping for. Brainstorm and be creative. What will you need to achieve your goals and vision?

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Make a list or notes of your ideas with different plans in case your direction needs to change.

What are your strengths that will help you?

What experiences have you had when you felt hopeful?

The sunflower symbolizes hope, resilience and optimism by seeking light, even in difficult times.



Hope Notes

Let others know you believe in them. Write down examples of how you could share hope. Could you do this every day?



Share your hopes! Encourage others to share their hopes with you! Small acts of kindness, as simple as a smile, help others feel hope. When others seem without hope, share your hope. Let others know that you believe in them! Try it and see how good it feels and how easy it becomes. Wake up each day and fill it with hope and courage. It's even better when you share it with others!

**Everyone wants to be the sun to lighten up someone's life
but why not be the moon to brighten the darkest hour?
– Natural Life**

Your Superpowers

**You can do anything!
You are unstoppable!**

No one is YOU and that is your SUPERPOWER.

On the airport shuttle returning from my trip to France, there was a young boy with his mom sitting in a seat next to us. He was obviously scared as he was huddled tight against his mom. When he looked at me, I smiled and noticed he was wearing a superhero T-shirt. I asked him which superhero was his favorite. He was excited to tell me that it was Spider-Man.

I asked him what his superpower was. He lit up like a bolt of lightning! He jumped off his mother's lap and ran up to the end of the aisle and back! "I can run really fast!" He boasted. He repeated his lightning speed again! His mom, startled at first, smiled at his performance as he asked me what my superpower was.

Everyone has a superpower. I know that mine is the ability to make friends easily. "What is your superpower?" This has become my favorite conversation starter. I am amazed at the answers I receive.

If you are aware of what makes you different and each of your superpowers, lucky you! If not, complete the following questions to begin to figure them out!



What are your superpowers? If it's difficult for you to know, think about it and ask someone who cares about you. THEY will be able to tell you what they are.

Make a list of everything you can think of that makes you different or unique.

How can you use your superpowers to help yourself or others?

Create Your Own Superhero!

Now that you are aware of your superpowers, let's figure out how you can embrace them and discover the things you are here to achieve. Copy, cut and paste or draw things that will help you along your journey. If you are fast, how about awesome running shoes? If you have a curious mind and are creative, how about the titles of books to read, test tubes for experiments or list of inventions you would like to invent. How about a sewing machine if you would like to be a clothing designer? If drawing or painting is your passion, why not draw tubes of paint or your favorite brush and palette? If you have a hero, or mentor, consider including a picture of them!

Do things that feed your soul not your ego and you will be happy!
-Natural Life

Section 4

Tough Stuff, Real Talk

That which we
persist in doing
becomes easier
to do, not that
the nature of the
thing has changed
but your power
has increased.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Perfectionism

**There is NO such thing as perfect.
Be content with doing your best.**

That which we persist in doing becomes easier to do, not that the nature of the thing has changed but your power has increased.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

The biggest mistake we can make is thinking everything has to be just right, before we can begin something. None of us can do things perfectly the first time we try them. Probably not ever because there is no such thing as perfect! We need to try different things and learn each time we try them. The only way we fail is by NOT trying! Don't wait! BEGIN NOW!

One of my favorite quotes on perfection is **"Live imperfectly with great delight!"**

Quit trying to be perfect, as perfect doesn't exist. You were born to be real, not to be perfect. If you think it has to be perfect, you may never start. Procrastination may prevail . . . that inner critic is protecting you!

Perfection is exhausting and takes the fun out of everything. Just do your best—passion over perfection. Some people are better at some things. You are better than others at some things. Do not be afraid to fail. You will love yourself even more for trying. Those who love you will love you no matter what. Be kind to yourself if you fail or succeed.

Often the only difference between success and failure is trying one more time!

Be happy with the effort you made and the result. Mistakes are okay; they show that you are trying. Our mistakes can teach us how to make things better with what we have learned.

NOTHING IS PERFECT. Nothing is finished. Nothing is forever.

This is the dictionary definition of a Japanese concept of the "art of imperfect beauty!" They embrace broken things by fixing them and then beautifying the cracks with gold to emphasize their importance as part of the item's story and history.

If you understand that perfect isn't possible. If you can be happy doing your best and understand mistakes are necessary to learn and improve, YOU ARE AWESOME! If not, let's work on this together to change.

Do you think, or have you ever thought, that there was something you needed to be perfect at? If so, make a list of those things.

What made you think it needed to be perfect?

**There is no such thing as perfect, just the best you can do.
How does that feel?**

Does it become easier?

Does what you do get better each time you do it?

Just like the Japanese art of Wabi-Sabi, we can turn our “cracks” (mistakes, struggles, or hard moments) into something beautiful.

Imagine this mug is like you—it’s been through a lot, and it’s still standing! Inside each crack, write something you’ve struggled with or a mistake you’ve made.

Then, trace over the cracks with a gold or yellow pencil or crayon to show how those things helped you grow stronger or kinder.



Accountability

You are accountable!

Everything YOU do is based on your choices. It's not your parents, your friends, your age, the teacher, or anyone else that is to blame. YOU and only YOU are responsible for every decision and choice that YOU make. Just YOU. Look no further.

One of my students came to art class with a friend. I could tell he didn't love art but was trying to figure out what he did love. He would run around the classroom and tease the other students for attention. I repeatedly reminded him that he was there to learn, create art, and to stay in his seat. He was told if he wasn't there to learn, he needed to find somewhere else to spend his time. He always made the excuse that it was someone else's fault that he was doing what he did. It wasn't fair to the other students that he was noisy and distracting.

I reminded him frequently about the rules and if he didn't follow them, he couldn't be there. The final straw was when he darted out of his seat to beat someone to the paper shredder. Getting there first, he slammed open the door into the television monitor and put the door stop through the door. Game over. The hole remains as a reminder that we all must follow the rules and be accountable.

We all make mistakes. I have made some doozers! The most awesome of people and the coolest of friends and family own up to their mistakes. When they recognize their mistake, they offer a sincere apology to the person they have wronged. Then they take steps to make it better. Are you powerful or powerless? Accountability helps us to not give in to living the life of a victim. Recognize what you are and, if necessary, leave the victim mindset behind.

It is important to accept responsibility for mistakes and things that you have done wrong. It can be very difficult to apologize to someone. You may be embarrassed or feel bad about your actions, but it is much more important to be sincere and apologize.

If you are powerful and know the steps for an apology, I am excited for you! If not, below are the steps to become powerful and leave being the victim behind.

Here are the steps for an apology.

Say what you are sorry for.

Explain why it was wrong.

Accept responsibility.

Ask how you can make it right.

Make a commitment not to do it again.

Ask to be forgiven.

These are **NOT** apologies.

I'm sorry you feel that way.

I'm sorry but . . .

What about . . .

I think you are wrong.



"Good decisions come from experience.
Experience comes from making bad decisions."
—Natural Life

Apology Detective!

Circle the real apologies and cross out the fake ones.

I APOLOGIZE
FOR MY
ACTIONS

I'M SORRY FOR
WHAT I SAID.
IT WAS UNKIND

I'M SORRY YOU FEEL
THAT WAY

I'M SORRY IF THAT
OFFENDED YOU

I UNDERSTAND
HOW I HURT YOU,
AND I'M SORRY

I'M SORRY I
DIDN'T LISTEN
TO YOU

I WAS
WRONG

I'LL APOLOGIZE IF
YOU APOLOGIZE
TOO

WHATEVER.
SORRY, I GUESS

I'M SORRY
BUT YOU
STARTED IT

SORRY, BUT
I WAS JUST
JOKING!

I ONLY SAID THAT
BECAUSE YOU
MADE ME MAD

I TAKE FULL
RESPONSIBILITY

Follow your heart, but take your brain
with you.
—Alfred Adler

Oops! Time Machine

Reflect on past mistakes with curiosity and courage

Everyone makes mistakes—big, small, and funny ones too. Let's go back in time and fix one using your Time Machine! Choose a moment when you made a mistake or hurt someone's feelings.

WHAT HAPPENED? (DRAW OR WRITE)

HOW DID YOU FEEL AFTER IT HAPPENED?

HOW DID THE OTHER PERSON FEEL?

WHAT WOULD YOU DO DIFFERENTLY IF YOU COULD GO BACK IN TIME?



Resilience: Bad Days Happen

**Everyone has bad days.
Be resilient and unstoppable.**

The average person has over 70,000 thoughts each day. Many of those thoughts can be negative. One negative thought can overpower you so that you dwell on that one bad thought or comment over all of the positive ones.

I received a text from a student's mother that my artist had fallen and broken his wrist. Of course, it was his right hand, the one he used for doing everything. I suggested she bring him and we would try to do things with his left hand. When he arrived, I took him aside and told him this was an amazing opportunity for him. I shared that I was a dental assistant and learned to use my left hand as much, if not more than, my right hand. Because of that, I can do things with both hands that I could never have imagined. I assured him I was there to help him through any struggles, but with practice I knew he could do it!

Each week he did more and got better with his work and his left hand. A few weeks later, after having his cast removed, he proudly told me, "Sometimes I forget which I am, right-handed or left!"

Look at the **positive** side of whatever is happening to you or in your thoughts. The more **positive** things you find, the better you will feel and the more **positive** you will be.

Positive always feels better, and soon it becomes who you are and how you handle things. There will be cloudy days when you may need hip boots and a magnifying glass to find the positive, but there always is positive!

Feelings are not facts, but they are valid, real, and definitely important. Worrying about things we cannot change won't change them. Know that you can do this. There will be days when you struggle to find the sunshine. Be kind and gentle to yourself. Gather your strength and be confident that you will be okay!

Here are some things that will help get out of your funk and find your light.



Self-care: Take a long bubble bath or shower.



Music: Turn on your favorite upbeat music.



Friends or family: Call or text someone who always makes you smile.



Eat something that is good for you, or not! Maybe you just need your favorite treat.



Go to bed: Things always look better after a good night's sleep.

Be kind and gentle to yourself. Focus on the things you can change or control, like how you feel.

If you are able to recognize and separate your positive and negative thoughts, bring on the sunshine! If not, find your happy place and let's learn how to do just that!

Every day may not be good but there's something good every day!
—Alice Morse Earle

What's in Your Sky?

What are some thoughts or moments that feel stormy or hard?

Make a list of things that have happened to you that were difficult.

Make a list of things you worried about which never ended up happening at all.

What are you worrying about that may not happen?

Not all storms come to disrupt your life.
Some come to clear your path.
—Natural Life

What helps you feel better? What are your happy, hopeful, or brave thoughts?"

Write down what you did to get through this time

Make a list of things that you can do that always seem to help you feel better!



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Just say YIKES and move on.
—Natural Life

Bullies and Other Mean People

Don't allow anyone to be mean to YOU or anyone else. When you have a chance, be someone's hero.

No one has the right to be mean to someone. Don't stand by! Gather your strength. Stand up for yourself, stand up for others and above all let's stand together!

—Vicki Merryweather

One of my students arrived at school and was putting her supplies in her cubby when a boy looked at her and said, "My least favorite part of the day is seeing your ugly face!" This beautiful young lady was shocked! Sad and hurt, she slowly sat down at her desk. She didn't talk to anyone until she went home. Distraught, she didn't want to go back to school or talk to anyone ever again. She pretended to be sick for the next few days, but finally decided to tell her parents.

With her parents' help, the boy apologized, but it didn't change how terrible she felt. He had shattered her self-confidence! Finally, she missed her friends and decided not to let one person saying a few mean words ruin her life. She realized that life was going to be full of speed bumps and she was going to be okay no matter what.

Mean people like to be mean, and some of them will never change. Those people often have someone being mean to them. They are looking for attention and a reaction.

Today, several years after this incident, this young lady is amazing! I am so proud of her and who she has become and where she is going in life.

Bullying is:

- Someone purposely being mean to someone.
- It is done again and again.
- Bullies try to make themselves feel big by making someone else feel small.

Types of bullying:

- Physical: hurts someone's body
- Verbal: mean words that hurt someone
- Social: turns peers or others against someone
- Cyber: uses texting or the Internet to be hurtful

Bullying can include:

- **Pushing**
- **Hitting**
- **Gossiping**
- **Rumors**
- **Name calling**
- **Teasing**
- **Lies**
- **Mean words**
- **Threats**

If you or someone else is being bullied:

Stand up for yourself

Seek help from a friend, parent, teacher, or trusted adult.

If you see someone being bullied, here are some suggestions:

Create a distraction. Invite the bully or the person being bullied to come with you.

Confront the bully. Tell them to back off. If you are nervous, have a friend or two go with you.

Comment on their actions. Ask if there's a problem that you can help with.

Get help. Know when it's best to get help before it gets worse. Tell a friend, parent, teacher, or another trusted adult.

If you understand bullies and are even strong enough to stand up for someone being bullied, you are my hero! If not, let's work together to understand bullying better.

Have you ever been bullied?



Write down what happened

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Write down how it made you feel

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Write down what you did to work through it and get over it.

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The strongest, most amazing people watch out for themselves and others when they are bullied or see someone being bullied.

Diversity

Treat everyone equal

“Love your neighbor that doesn’t: Look like you, think like you, love like you, speak like you, pray like you, vote like you. Love your neighbor. (No exceptions!)

–Natural Life

When we are around people who are different from us, we may feel uncomfortable, possibly not knowing how to act. As my dear friend’s daughter left for college to dance, her dad was diagnosed with a disease called ALS. While he was losing movement one limb at a time, she was dancing six days a week. She noticed that as his movement decreased, and he needed to be in a wheelchair, he also became more and more invisible to others. This deeply affected her. Megan, her family, and everyone whose lives he had touched lost this amazing man in 2005.

Being dissatisfied with the wide separation of abilities in dance, she started a non-profit dance studio company for people of all ages, with disabilities like her dad and without any disabilities. She wanted every-one to feel included and to experience the freedom of movement and creative expression. She wanted others to look closer and see the beauty that people of all ages and abilities could create together. Her goals were to share her love of dance in helping ordinary people do extraordinary things.

Megan Brandell is the founding artist director of Open Arms, an inclusive and multi-generational dance company in Boise, Idaho. She uses various methods to create movement with each of her dancers.

The resulting choreography is often performed up to six times throughout their dance session. Then, in the spring they have a culminating annual performance. Through their performances and outreach programs, they share their mission to create greater joy and compassion with dance that opens hearts, minds, and arms. Check out their website www.openarmsdance.org for dance films that offer an amazing look at everything they do.

Even just a small gesture, such as a nod or smile to acknowledge someone you are uncomfortable around, is the perfect place to start.

Here are tips for interacting respectfully with people who have disabilities.

- **Look them in the eyes when talking to them. Kneel down if they are in a wheelchair.**
- **Talk to a disabled person directly, not just the person they are with.**
- **Ask before helping someone with a disability; they may not want or need help.**
- **Use a respectful tone of voice and assume the person is able to understand what you are saying. Do not use baby talk.**

If you are comfortable around others not exactly like you, continue to the next prompt. If not, let’s figure out why this happens and what we can do to handle this better!

WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER!
–Natural Life

Let's Celebrate Our Differences

In each name tag, write the name of someone you know who fits the description! You can even decorate the name tags if you want.

Is there someone you know who stands up for others?

What makes someone in your life beautifully unique?

Is there someone you know who communicates or learns in a different way than you?

Have you met someone who uses a wheelchair or a cane?

Who inspires you with their creativity, music, or talent?

Do you know someone who wears something special for their culture or religion?

Do you have a friend who speaks more than one language?

Who makes you feel seen and accepted just the way you are?

As always, treat everyone as you would like to be treated!
Each letter in diversity can remind you:



Different
Individuals
Valuing
Each other
Regardless of
physical abilities
Skin Color
Intellect
Talents or
Years



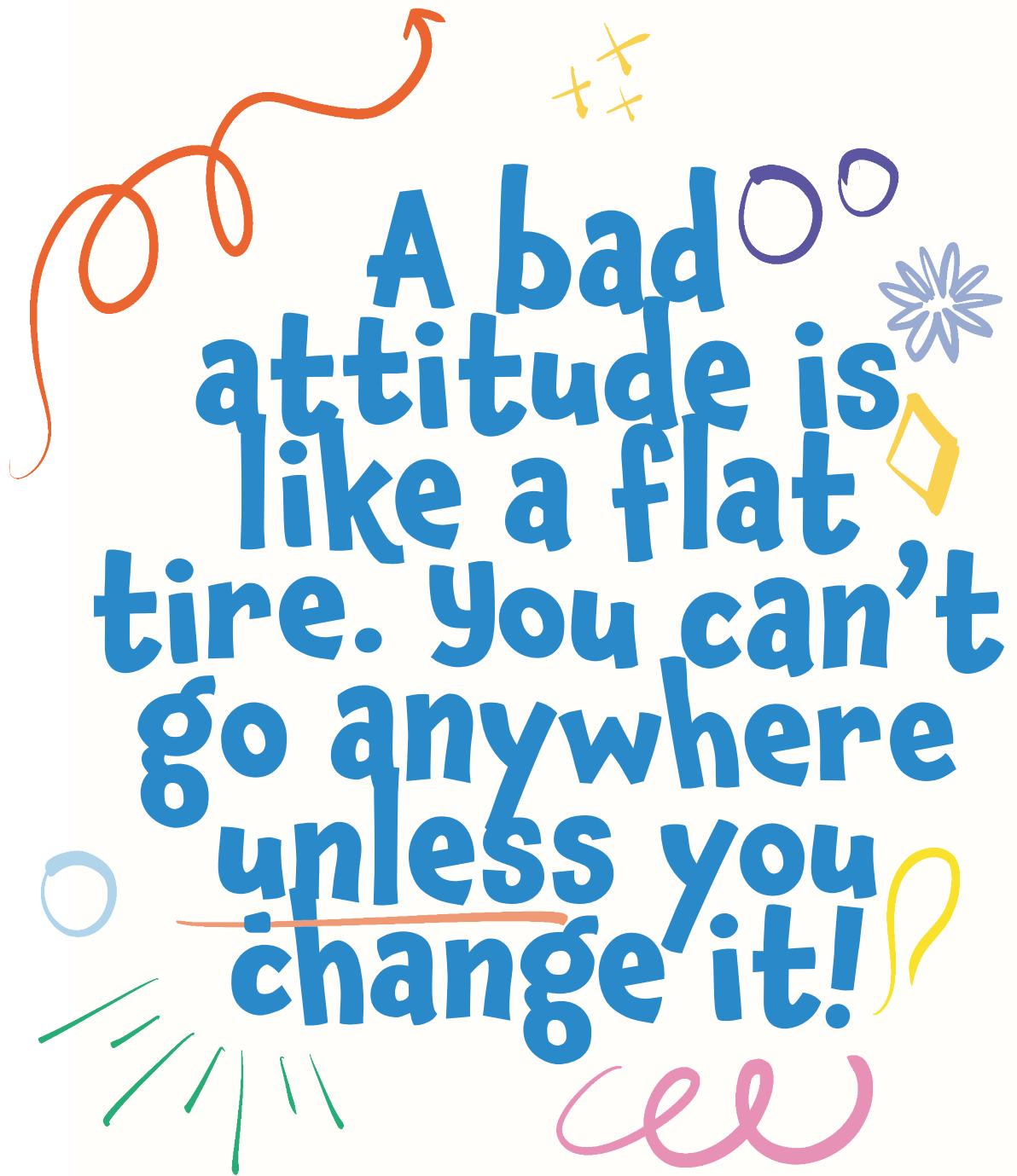
Describe what makes you feel uncomfortable when you are around someone with a disability.

Why do you feel uncomfortable?

What steps can you take to overcome this feeling?

Section 5

Growing & Changing



A bad attitude is like a flat tire. You can't go anywhere unless you change it!

—ZIG ZIGLAR

Intuition

**Listen to your gut feelings.
Proceed with caution!**

**Gut feelings are your guardian angels sending you messages.
—Natural Life**

Intuition is a feeling or that small voice that tells you something is not quite right. Don't just ignore it as it could be the most important advice you could receive!

My husband and grandson were driving down the canyon from delivering his motorcycle for repairs. As he entered the freeway, he noticed the tank truck on the left of him and felt uncomfortable about how fast it was going. As he stepped on the gas, the tank truck began to sway. My husband's intuition was to speed up quickly to get ahead of it. As my husband looked in the rearview mirror seconds after speeding forward, he saw the truck hit the concrete wall, tip over on its side, and slide down the road sideways down both lanes until it hit the edge of the road on the opposite side. Immediately the contents of the propane tanks began to release.

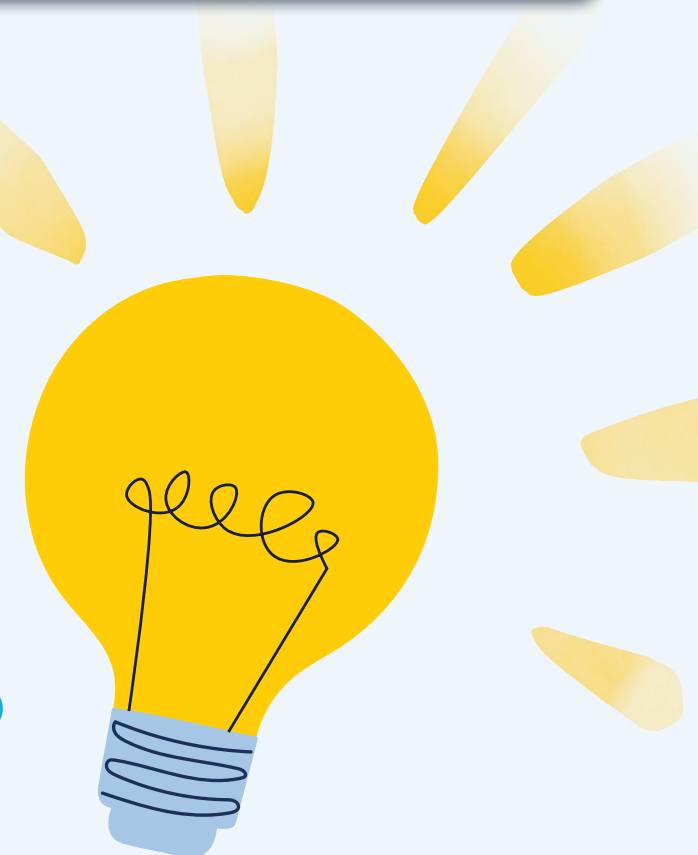
Had my husband not passed when he did, it would have ended in disaster. They would have been hit and most likely crushed. This dangerous accident was immediately reported on the radio. The road to the canyon had to be closed to allow the propane to clear before the traffic could resume. I am more than grateful that my husband followed his intuition.

I'm certain you have felt your intuition. Maybe you are talking with friends and someone starts talking negatively about someone who is not there. You may be tempted to join in to be part of the group, but something tells you not to. Your instinct tells you not to say anything. Your intuition is protecting you.

Consider how that person would feel if they heard what was being said. Think about how you would feel if you said something knowing that it hurt someone. Remember to always follow the Golden Rule: Do to others what you want them to do to you.

If you understand the wisdom of listening to your intuition, it's your choosing day, so you can decide to continue or move onto the next prompt. If you feel you need to understand it better, please continue.

Trust Your Instincts



Have you ever been influenced by your intuition?

Did you listen or not?

What happened?

Would you make the same choice in a similar situation?

Road Trip: Trust the Signs

Life is full of twists, turns, and choices. Sometimes your intuition gives you quiet signals to help guide the way. Use your inner voice to choose a path at each fork in the road.

Start

You're at a sleepover and someone starts gossiping about a friend who isn't there.

- a. Stay quiet and uncomfortable
- b. Join in so you don't stand out
- c. Speak up or change the subject

You're walking home and something feels off, even though it looks normal.

- a. Ignore the feeling—it's probably nothing
- b. Call a parent or safe adult
- c. Change your route or go with a friend

You're the Driver!

You're offered something that doesn't feel right—maybe a dare, or breaking a rule.

- a. Say yes so you don't seem scared
- b. Say no and trust your gut
- c. Make a joke to change the topic

No matter what path you take, each choice teaches you something. Your intuition is always there—ready to guide you next time.

Change and Transformation

**Make small changes every day.
Be a little better each day.**

**A bad attitude is like a flat tire.
You can't go anywhere unless you change it!**
—Zig Ziglar

Our brains are crazy busy as they are the most amazing of all computers! Our brain processes over 70,000 thoughts every single day. We believe what we tell ourselves. NEGATIVE thoughts can make pathways or grooves in our brains. Repeated negative thoughts deepen those grooves, making it difficult to get out of having negative thoughts. If we choose POSITIVE thoughts, we create new pathways.

Brain wave tests show that when we use positive words, our feel-good hormones flow. Positive self-talk releases endorphins and serotonin to the brain. They then flow throughout our bodies and make us feel good.

Knowing this, we can recognize our negative thoughts and change them into positive ones.

Our mind believes what we tell it. Tell yourself that you are awesome and then believe it! Never say negative things, even when teasing, as your mind will believe those too!

What consumes your mind controls your life.
—Natural Life

To understand what we can and can't change, here's a list of each for you to understand and use.

Out of your control:

- What other people say
- What other people think
- Other people's actions
- How other people spend their time
- Other people's opinions
- Boundaries
- Future

Things you can control:

- Words
- Choices
- Thoughts
- Friends
- Attitude
- Manners
- Actions
- Reactions

Snakes are a perfect symbol of transformation. They teach us to get rid of what no longer serves us to become better. Snakes must literally shed their skin or die. As painful as letting go can sometimes be, it's what allows us to survive, grow, and thrive.

If you are a happy, upbeat, positive person, move to the next prompt to share your sunshine. If perhaps on occasion you slip into the negative zone, let's work on this together.



Make a list of the things that you would like to change.

Are these any of these negative things?

Make a list and write down how you can you change these things.

Each night before bed, write down the positive things that happened during the day. You may need to look really hard and possibly put your hip boots back on and use your magnifying glass to see them, but they are there! Try this for a week, and then look back at your list to see all of the good things.

Use your journal to make this a daily habit. Try it for a month and see how much better you feel. Celebrate each small step in your journey to change. Always remember the journey of the caterpillar to being a butterfly. You have the courage to change!

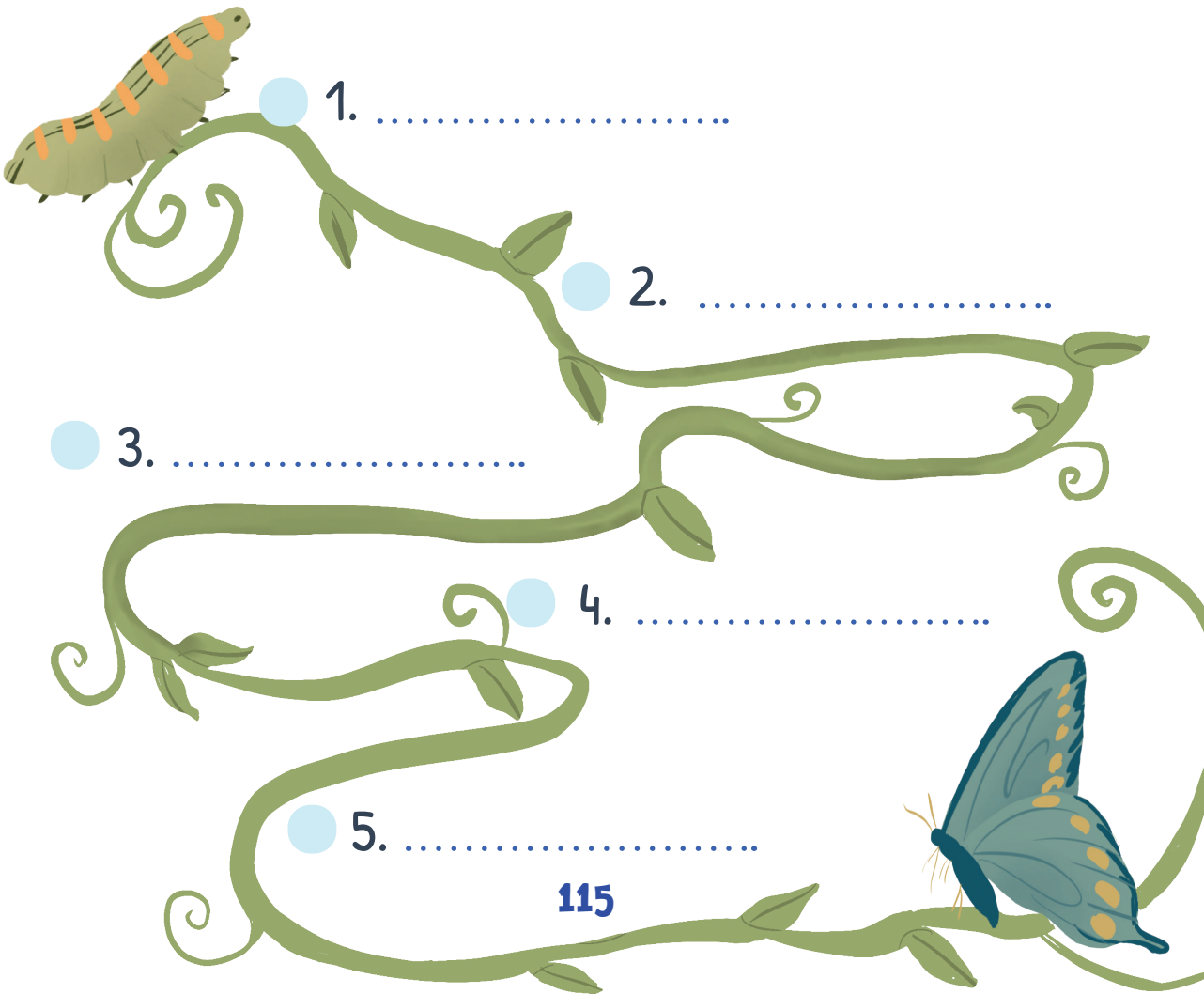
Talk about your blessings more than you talk about your problems.
—Natural Life

Tiny Changes = Big Growth

Transformation Tracker

Here are some small choices you can make each day to become your best self. Choose some from this list, or think of your own, and fill in the blanks on the path below. Check off a step each time you try one!

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Take a deep breath before reacting | Try again after making a mistake | Let go of something that upset you |
| Encourage someone else | Think a helpful thought | Ask someone for help |
| Celebrate a win, big or small | Say something kind to yourself | Take care of your body |



Creativity

**Solve problems by coming up with creative solutions.
Always be curious!**

Imagination is more important than knowledge!

—Albert Einstein

My students' Christmas project this year was to create Christmas Countdowns. They were watercolor circles printed with 24 numbers and had a hand like a clock hand to point to each number as they counted down the days. The countdown sat on a stand shaped like a pair of legs with elf shoes at the bottom.

Each student chose their own idea or theme to carry throughout the design. They began by creating quick sketches or thumbnails of their designs on sticky notes. Their theme was to be used throughout designing their pieces. The more advanced students used watercolors to add a quick color audition to their thumbnails. None of the completed projects were similar. Every piece of art was as unique as the artists who created them. They were delightful!

These pieces can **never be duplicated!** Even repeating the exact design will be different. How we do things in our drawing, color choices, technique, etc. is part of who we are. Everything we do is our signature style. Bringing your ideas to life as only you can do is how you create your own brilliant work.

If you are a creative person and understand the creative process, move forward to your next project. If not, let's review the steps and find what works for you.

Following are the steps to begin the creative process, no matter what creative endeavor you are taking on. Everyone's process may vary, so do what works best for you.

- Gather information, inspiration, pictures for reference, and what you know.
- Write down your ideas and create simple thumbnails. A thumbnail is a quick sketch of your idea. Just enough to remember what you were thinking. The more thumbnails you draw, the more relaxed you become.
- Allow the process to happen. Out of nowhere, the one you like most will present itself—the “aha moment.” That is when your idea light bulb turns on!
- Following the “aha moment,” write down an outline from start to finish of your idea, including the techniques and tools to be used and anything else needed for its completion. Include your color choices to make certain they are your best choices.

For me, if I have a general direction, but then just allow the process to happen, the result will be much better than following the first idea and forcing it to happen.

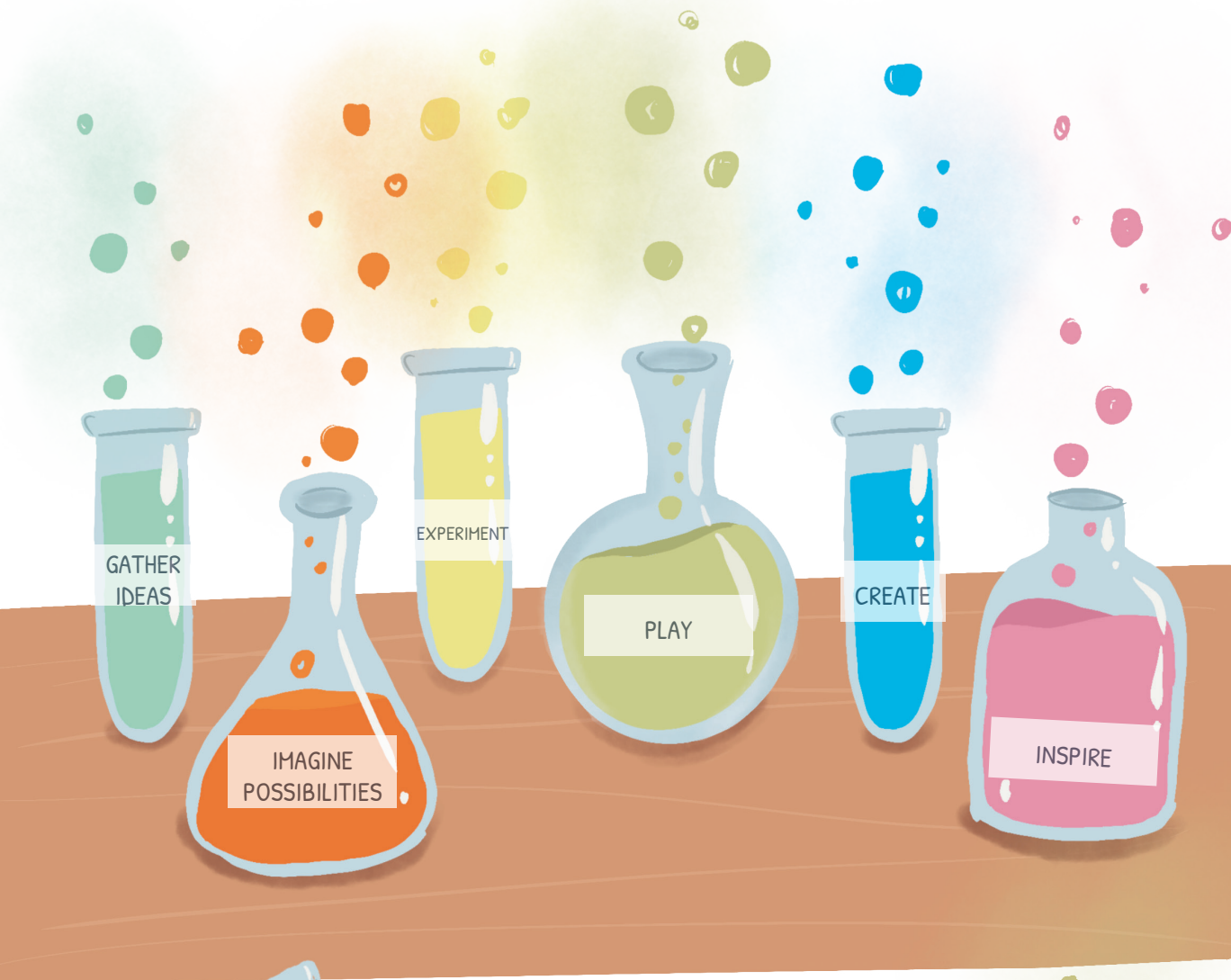
Getting lost in the process and enjoying each moment will produce an amazing result.

Think outside the box. Don't force the process. Don't plan each step. Allow yourself to have fun, get lost in the journey, and enjoy what you create! Creative thinking is the way to solve problems and key to the invention of new things or ways of doing things.

Creativity isn't just about art. I often hear people say, “I'm not creative.” Everyone is creative, but in different ways. It may be in how you dress, how you cook, or how you plant the flowers in your yard. The more you use your creativity, the more creative you become.

Creativity Lab

When you create and express yourself, it makes you feel happy.
It may be writing, cooking, sewing, gardening or painting. The
pleasure of creativity can erase sadness.
JUST START! Don't wait for everything to be perfect!



Add your own test tube!
**What word would you give your
creative formula?**

.....

**Write down things that you do that
allow you to be creative.**

What makes these things unique to you?

Do you enjoy being creative?

What other things would you like to create?

Creativity is contagious. Pass it on!
—Albert Einstein

Real Facts About Life

Solve problems by coming up with creative solutions.
Always be curious!

You can only ride your bike or drive YOUR car! Even though you think you would do a better job at driving someone else's, you can only be a spectator or a passenger.

This is one of the most difficult lessons I have learned in my life. To remind me of this, there's a miniature Volkswagen pendant hanging in my studio. We are all here on our own journey. We are all here to help each other through one another's journey. We are here and ready to pick up the pieces and even carry each other when someone needs us to.

The following are facts to be remembered.

- **Always be thankful.** If you are thankful, show it.
- Tell those you love that you love them every chance you get. **No one will be here forever.**
- **When you are wrong,** be strong enough to **admit it.**
- If you make a mistake, **own your mistake!** Apologize. Everyone makes mistakes. Learn from your mistakes.
- If you don't understand something, **ask questions** until you do.

- If you stumble or sometimes fall, **pick yourself up** and try again.
- If you can't do something and need help, it's okay to **ask others for help.**
- If someone looks like they need help, **offer them help.** When you do something for someone, **do not expect anything in return!**

Everything is going to work out.
YOU GOT THIS.
—Natural Life

**Keep
going**

**Be
thankful**

**Growth
Ahead**

Road Signs

What reminders or rules do you want to follow as you travel through life? Use the blank signs below to help you remember what really matters to you.



You can only drive your own bike or car!

You are the one in the driver's seat. You can choose when to brake, when to turn around, when to pick up passengers—and when to ride solo. Think about your life as a journey and answer the prompts below.

What kind of “driver” are you right now? Focused? Distracted? Nervous? Confident?

Who helps you read the map or navigate tough roads?

What's something you'd like to leave behind on the road?

What's ahead that you're excited about?

In Conclusion...

You can be anything you can imagine!

Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom.
—Aristotle

In creating this journal there have been lots of detours, speed bumps, and dead ends along with unbelievable “coincidences”. I began this journey with a list of questions and no clue of where this all was going, just sleepless nights and a sense of urgency that this book needed to happen. Several wonderful people that I am blessed to have in my life, believed in me, helped and encouraged me to continue.

One coincidence was going to the theater to watch “Bright Star”. It's a true story about a woman who spent her life mapping the stars. The main character questioned how she had spent her life, feeling that she had wasted her life and that she was insignificant. At the end of the play, the narrator shared with the audience that the discovery she made that changed the entire world. **“The brightest stars take the longest to shine.”** Her life's work changed and influenced the world's understanding of the universe and space travel and led to the invention of the Hubble Telescope. The story was fabulous! “The brightest stars take the longest to shine.” Many of us may wonder about our “purpose in life”. We may **never** see or understand the impact of our lives. Be confident that it may be little things every day that have the potential to make a difference in someone's day, or life. There's also a possibility it may be **HUGE**, changing **EVERYONE'S** world forever!

After working through the pages in your awesome journal, you will understand that you are unique, full of potential and incredible possibilities for your journey. **The following are the things that are among the most important things I learned.**

Your life is what you think about.

If you only think about the bad things that happen or have happened in your life, you will continue on the negative path. Let the past go. Let the negative thoughts go. Look for positive, wonderful things in your life. Sometimes they may be difficult to find, but they are there. Each morning, start your day by thinking about how awesome your day is going to be. At the end of each day, think about or make a list of positive things that happened during the day. Some days it may be difficult to find very many, but look hard and you always can! This is a wonderful habit and will fill your life with happiness and sunshine, even when it rains.

Create a life you don't need a vacation from!
—Natural Life

Lift others as you travel forward to reach your goals and dreams

Whenever I'm having an occasional not-so-awesome day, I do something nice for someone else. It always turns my day completely around and makes it better.

Today I will not stress over things I can't control.
—Natural Life

Where your mind goes is where your energy flows. Read this again.

This was an epiphany when the light bulb came on and I finally understood! If you keep running different thoughts through your mind, allowing what you are thinking to wander from here to there, to somewhere else instead of your task at hand, **YOU ACCOMPLISH NOTHING!** Your energy is running around inside your brain and going nowhere. Nothing is getting done or done well, except lots of thinking. Think about what you are doing as you actually focus on it and **DO IT.** It can be something as simple as brushing your teeth. I often shut my eyes so I'm paying attention. **FOCUS ON WHAT YOU ARE DOING!** **DON'T** let your mind wander! Be present. If it's something you are planning to do, visualize the steps you are going to take to accomplish it. Then take **ACTION** and **DO IT!** You will be amazed.
FOCUS and GET THINGS DONE!

Everything will happen or fall into place when it's supposed to

Trying to force things to happen may result in progress, but **allowing things to happen in their own time**, will give you amazing results. I compare it to the creative process. I can know exactly what I'm going to create, the steps to create it and in my mind see the end result. If I gather inspiration, relax, and allow it to happen, discovering and embracing new ideas during the process, the end result will be better than I could have imagined; **FANTASTIC!** It's the perfect opportunity to learn by overcoming obstacles and embracing each detour.

Life is like a camera. Just focus on what's important. Capture the good times. Develop from life's negatives and if things don't work out, just take another shot.

—Natural Life

Tell yourself how amazing you are, each & every day!

My husband and I, with other family members, attended a play in which one of my students was performing. Because of a mistake purchasing their tickets for the wrong day, one of the actor's grandparents wasn't going to be able to watch him perform. The actor's other grandfather went to the person in charge and explained how far they had driven to be there to see their grandson perform. He suggested they figure out a way to allow them to watch his performance, which was the last one for the play. He returned to his seat and explained to his daughter that he had talked to them and thought they should let them in. When she giggled at his story, he responded "Obviously you don't realize how important I think I am!"

ALWAYS REMEMBER how important **YOU ARE!** It's **ALWAYS** worth an **ASK!**

Surround yourself with friends and family that are positive, uplifting and only want the best for you!

Caring and sharing people in your life are a must! Surround yourself with like-minded, positive people. If someone in your life is negative and does not respect you or your dreams, move on. If you feel exhausted after being around them, it's time for a change. It may be difficult, but do what is best for **YOU.** A real friend will want what is best for you, laughs with you, encourages you, stands up for you and is happy for you when good things happen. You must also keep in mind that **YOU** must be a good friend in order to have a good friend. **YOU** are the most important person in your life. **Believe in yourself.** Be confident that **you can do hard things!**



Celebrate every small victory along the way.

Your celebration can be as simple as picking up and enjoying your favorite treat.

Sometimes I have to remind myself that I don't have to do what everyone else is doing.



Be proud of yourself.

Share your accomplishment with someone who cares about you. They will be excited that you shared.

You're every nice word I can think of.
—Natural Life



Think about the most important things that you have learned while working through your journal. Write them down and refer to them often. These things may even change as you move forward in your journey. Read and reread your journal when you need a lift, or need a reminder of things you are grateful for.

We are who we are because of what we have been through and the choices we make each day.
—Vicki Merryweather

The following list is to help you see and remember that it is **YOUR CHOICE** each day to take the positive or negative path. Remind yourself each day that you get to choose!

- Complain or **BE GRATEFUL.**
- Blame others or **BE ACCOUNTABLE.**
- Feed your fears or **FEED YOUR DREAMS.**
- See the bad or **FIND THE GOOD.**
- Give up or **KEEP TRYING.**
- Expect the worst or **EXPECT THE BEST.**
- Follow the crowd or **FOLLOW YOUR HEART.**
- Be envious or **BE CONTENT.**

**Each moment of everyday is
YOUR CHOOSING DAY!**
—Pat Nelson

This quote was shared by a dear friend and I use it every day. It's like being given permission to make **YOUR** choice!

**In moments of doubt:
Trust your gut.
Hug your dog and eat a donut!**
—Natural Life

For additional resources and extensions to complement each of the prompts included in *Your Best Life!* with direct links, please

visit us at:

VICKIMERRYWEATHER.COM

The following list is a sampling of the resources included there.

NATURALLIFE.COM

F.E.A.R.L.E.S.S. Face everything & rise!

To educate, empower, and reduce the stigma of anxiety disorders.

H.E.A.L. HELPING ENRICH AUTISTIC LIVES

healautismnow.org

Please visit the Natural Life LIVE HAPPY BLOG where they share all of their give back initiatives!

HOPESQUAD.COM

To foster human connection, community and hope. Their goal is elevating mental wellbeing through peer-to-peer suicide prevention programming in schools of all levels.

988 SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE

A national network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Raise awareness and help with suicide prevention. **Call. Text. Chat.**

SAFEUT

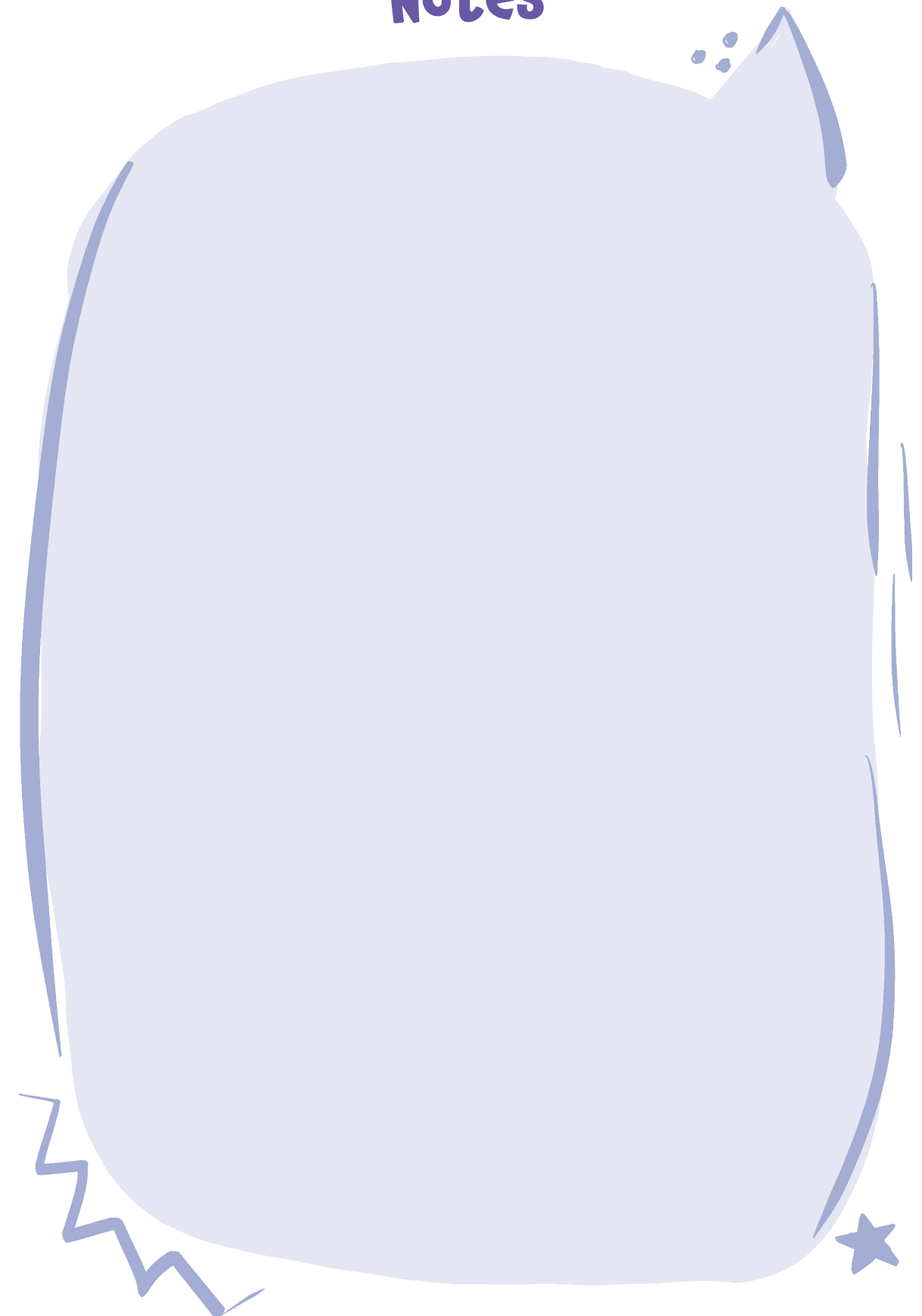
A free app that connects students, parents, educators, and front-line workers to licensed counselors for mental health support. It also offers a confidential tip line to report bullying, unsafe behavior by friends or peers, and suicide concerns – for yourself or someone you know.

WWW.OPENARMSDANCE.ORG

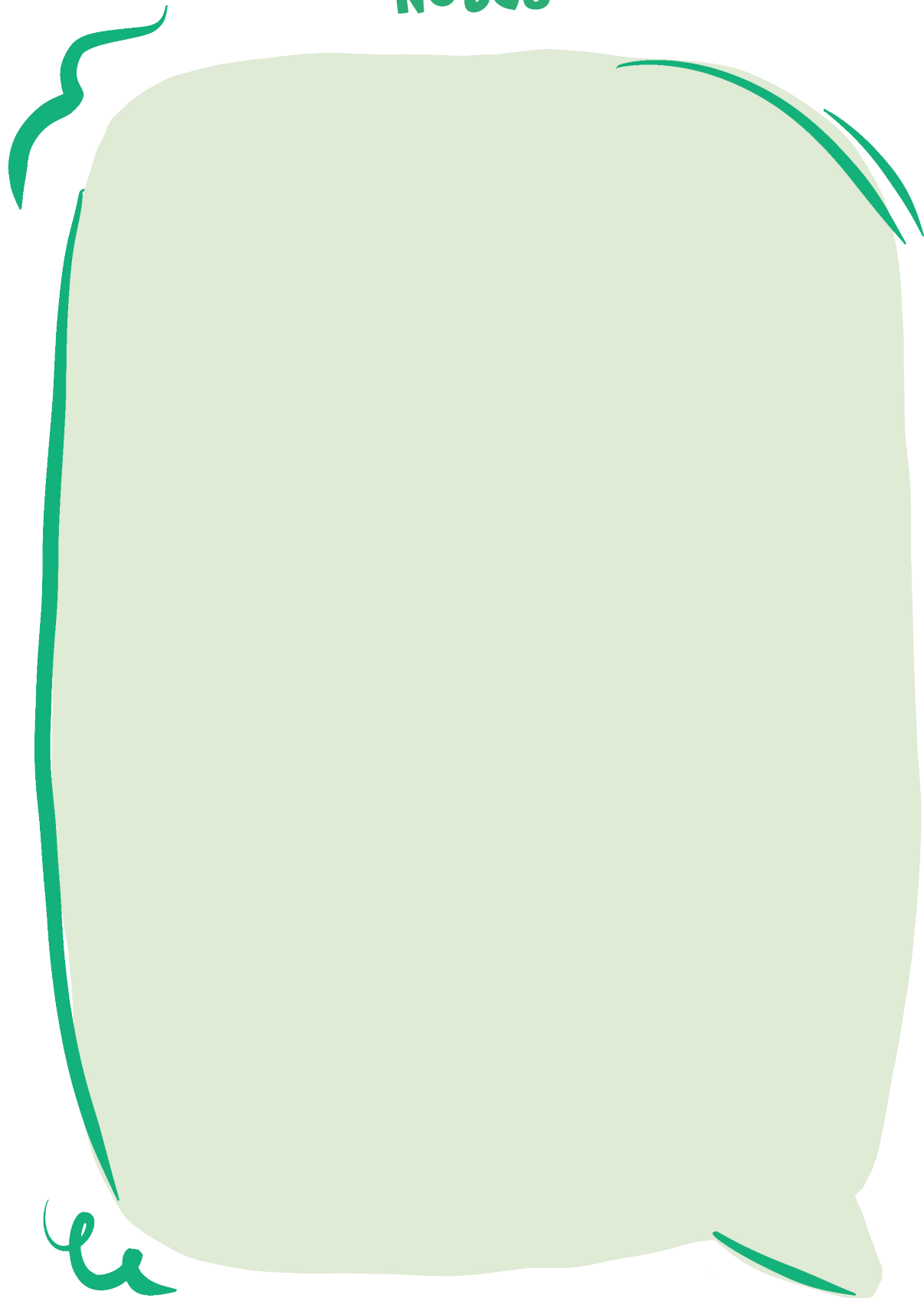
Provides information for all inclusive dance group for creating greater joy and compassion while opening arms, hearts and minds.

**"You're gonna be happy." said life,
"But first I'll make you strong."
–Natural Life**

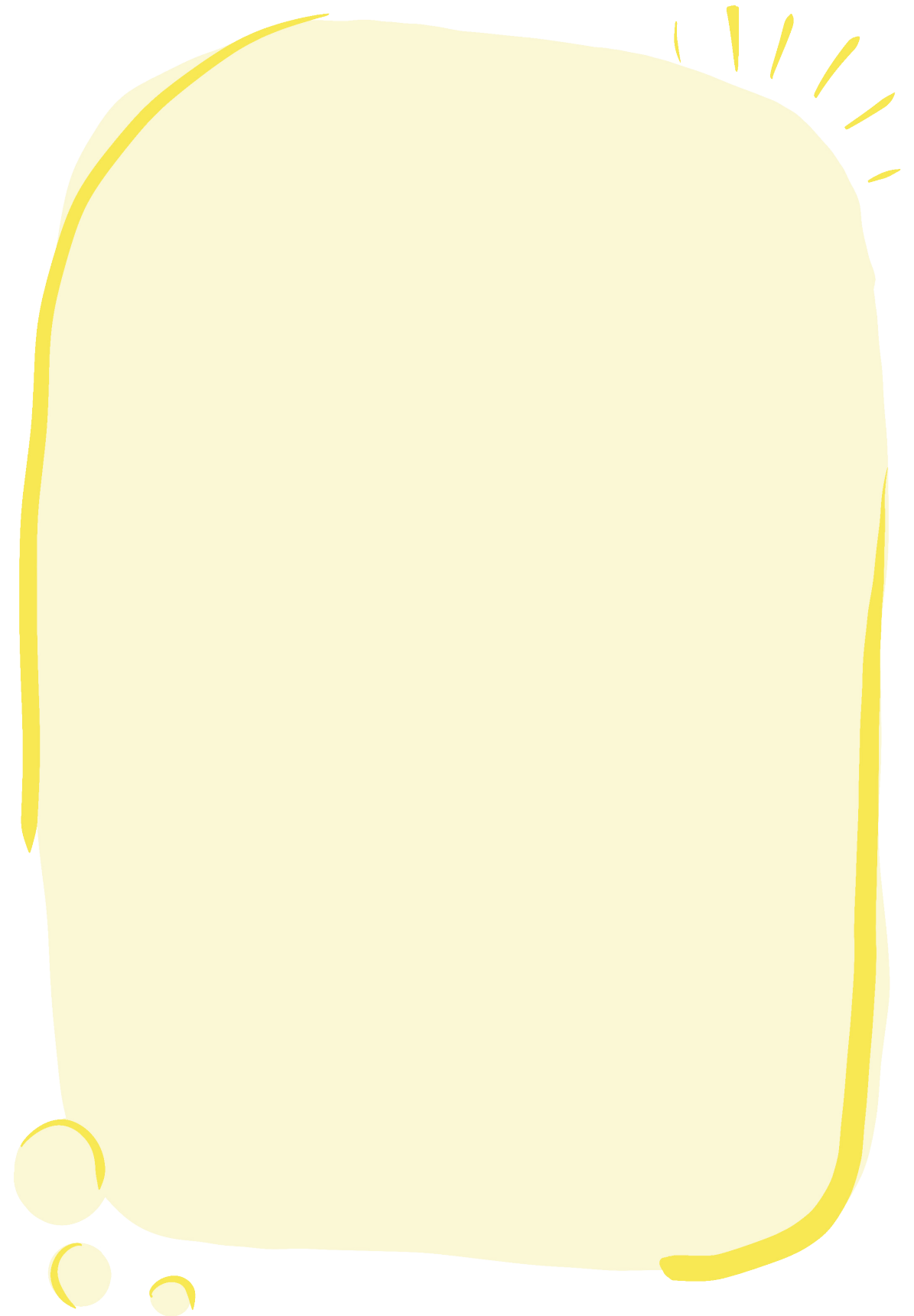
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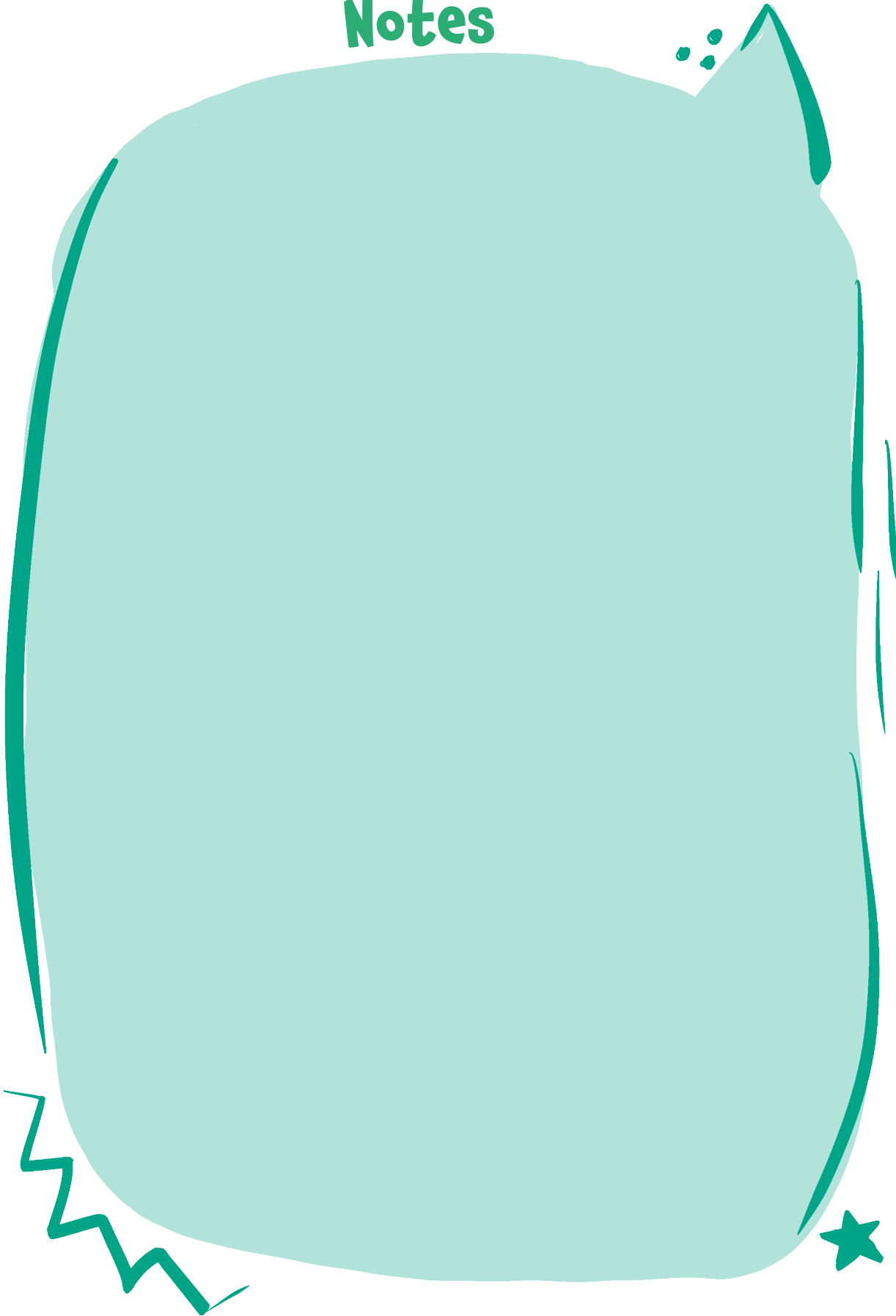
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