



# Bounce Back

*A Self-Expression  
Workbook for Teens*

By  
The Digging Deep Project

With  
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Disclaimer: This workbook is not a substitute for professional  
mental health treatment or medical care.





# About This Workbook

Life doesn't always unfold the way we expect. Sometimes things shift suddenly. Sometimes they slowly unravel. Sometimes you don't even know exactly what happened, you just know that something feels different now.

Bounce Back is for those moments.

This workbook is not about “fixing” yourself or pretending everything is okay. It's about getting to know yourself more deeply in the middle of change like after a setback, during a low period, or in the aftermath of something that felt confusing, overwhelming, or hard to carry. Whether you've been through one specific event or a stretch of time that just didn't feel like you, this space is here for you.

The exercises in this workbook are designed to meet you where you are. Some invite you to write. Others encourage drawing, movement, or simply noticing. You might find that certain pages resonate deeply, while others don't—that's completely okay. You are allowed to skip, return, repeat, or reinterpret anything in a way that feels right for you.

Because bouncing back doesn't mean returning to who you were before. It means discovering who you are becoming and everything still ahead of you.

# Section 1



## Making Sense of Where You Are

*Exploring your thoughts, patterns,  
and inner landscape*

Sometimes the hardest part isn't what happened—it's understanding where you are now because of it. This section gives you space to slow down and explore your thoughts, questions, and experiences without pressure to have everything figured out.

You don't need a clear story or perfect answers. Just start where you are, and let your understanding unfold at its own pace.

# The Version I Can Hold Right Now

You don't have to tell the full story to begin understanding your experience. Sometimes the whole truth feels too big, too messy, or too painful to hold all at once—and that's okay. Write a version of what you've been going through that feels manageable today. This is not about accuracy or completeness; it's about what your nervous system can safely hold right now.



## Side Quest

Write about what you're going through as ONE sentence. Notice what changes when you simplify.

# The Shape of This Phase

Sometimes experiences are easier to understand as shapes or patterns instead of stories. If this period of your life had a shape, what would it be? Jagged? Looping? Collapsing? Expanding? Describe or draw it. Let it be abstract. You don't have to know what it means.



# What Feels Different

Even if you can't explain everything, you can often feel what has changed. List what feels different in you or your life: Thoughts, emotions, energy levels, how you relate to people, etc. Some changes may feel uncomfortable. Some might feel like growth.

A 2x2 grid of writing boxes, each with five horizontal lines. The boxes are decorated with various icons: a cloud with an arrow, a lightning bolt, a paint palette with a brush, a broken heart, a paper airplane, headphones, and a water bottle. The background is decorated with stars, splatters, and a leafy branch.

## Side Quest

Put a star next to anything that surprised you—especially unexpected strength. Why did you find this surprising?

# What Keeps Looping

What thoughts or questions keep replaying in your mind? These loops are not random—they often point to something unresolved or important.

1. Think about your looping thoughts. Write a looping thought on top of an infinity symbol. For example, “I really messed up,” or “everyone is going to hate me.”
2. Below, rewrite your looping thought as a question. For example, “What did I actually mess up?” or “How did I harm others?”
3. Spend at least 30 seconds thinking about each question. Do you understand anything new about these looping thoughts?



# The Story Others Might Tell About Me

If someone else tried to explain what you've been going through, what would they say? What might they miss? What would they oversimplify or misunderstand? Write what someone else might see or might think they understand, then write your own version – not to convince anyone else, but to hear yourself more clearly.

*What others see*

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*What I see*

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*What others see*

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*What I see*

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# Then vs. Now

Think about how you saw things at the beginning of this difficult period, and how you see them now. What has shifted? What has stayed the same? Brainstorm as many of these changes as you can. List or draw them. Try to use only one word per box. Notice at least one thing that hasn't changed!

How I was	→	How I am	How I was	→	How I am
How I was	→	How I am	How I was	→	How I am
How I was	→	How I am	How I was	→	How I am
How I was	→	How I am	How I was	→	How I am

# Alternate Reality

Some experiences don't turn out the way you want. That's okay. You can't do the right thing every time...and sometimes even when you do the right thing, luck isn't on your side. Think of two situations you wish had turned out differently. Write or draw the situation. Then write what happened and how you wish it had been different. Feel free to doodle around the boxes!

The image shows two identical hand-drawn templates for an 'Alternate Reality' exercise. Each template consists of a box labeled 'The Situation' on the left, with two arrows pointing to two stacked boxes on the right labeled 'What happened' and 'I wish...'. The boxes have a hand-drawn, splattered border.

# A Truth to Keep

The first section of this book helped you explore where you are now – like a snapshot. The next sections will turn this snapshot into a movie that shows how you can change and grow. For now, draw a self portrait. It can be just your face or it can be your whole body. Then write one POSITIVE truth about yourself.



**Self Portrait**

*One positive truth about myself is...*

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## Section 2



# How This Affected Me

### *Understanding how you have shifted*

When life gets difficult, it doesn't just stay outside of you—it moves inward. It can shape how you think, how you feel, how your body reacts, and how you see yourself and the world around you.

This section is about gently exploring those shifts with curiosity instead of judgment. You'll look at the beliefs, reactions, and patterns that may have developed – not to label them as “good” or “bad,” but to understand what they've been trying to do for you.

As you move through these exercises, the goal isn't to fix or undo anything. It's to notice, understand, and begin to choose what you want to keep, what you want to shift, and what you're ready to hold more lightly.

# The Body Knows

Your body often holds what your mind can't fully process. Breathe deeply. If you want, close your eyes. Try to turn your attention to each part of your body. Notice:

- Where do you feel tension? Are you accidentally holding anything tightly?
- Where do you feel numb or disconnected? What is giving you no input?
- Where feels energized or calm?

Illustrate what you notice. If you want, label these parts of yourself.



## Side Quest

Think about the parts of yourself that feel energized or calm.

Now spend at least 30 seconds imagining this feeling spreading to other parts of your body.

# I Believe...

Experiences shape the way we see ourselves and the world. What beliefs have you formed during this time? You might believe that you are strong or weak. You might believe that others want to help you or hold you back. What do you believe about future possibilities? What dead ends are you ready to leave behind?

**Beliefs about myself**

**Beliefs about others**

**Possibilities**

**Dead ends**

## Side Quest

What is one belief you wish were wrong or would like to change? If you could shift one belief, what would it be?

# Louder & Quieter

What parts of you became louder? Maybe:

- Alertness
- Control
- Withdrawal

What parts of you have gotten quieter? Maybe:

- Joy
- Confidence
- Curiosity

List or illustrate the parts of yourself that you have seen grow or pull back.



**Louder!**



**Quieter...**

## Side Quest

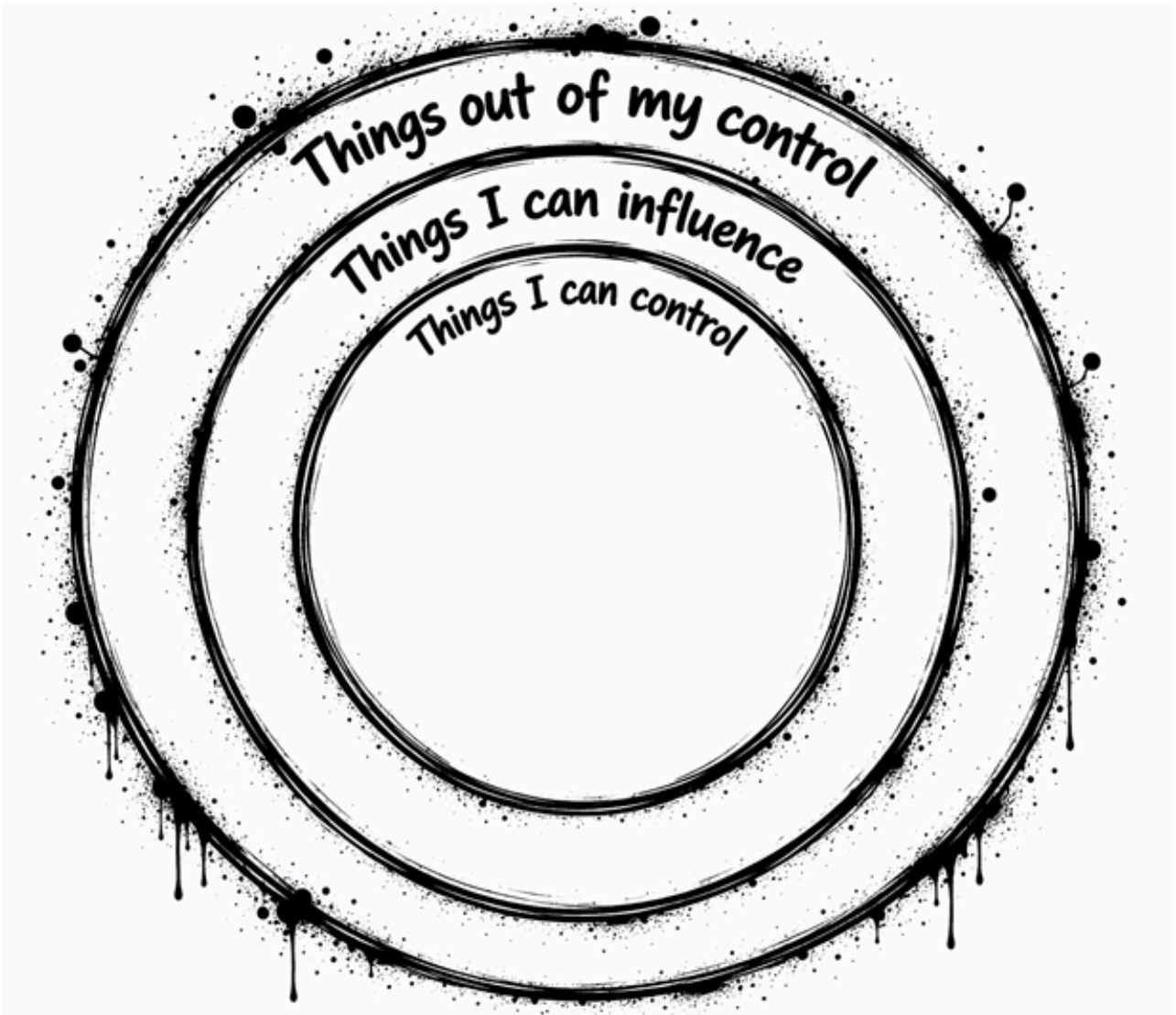
Write about quieter and louder parts of yourself:

Quieter: I'm still here, but...

Louder: It's useful for this to be loud because...

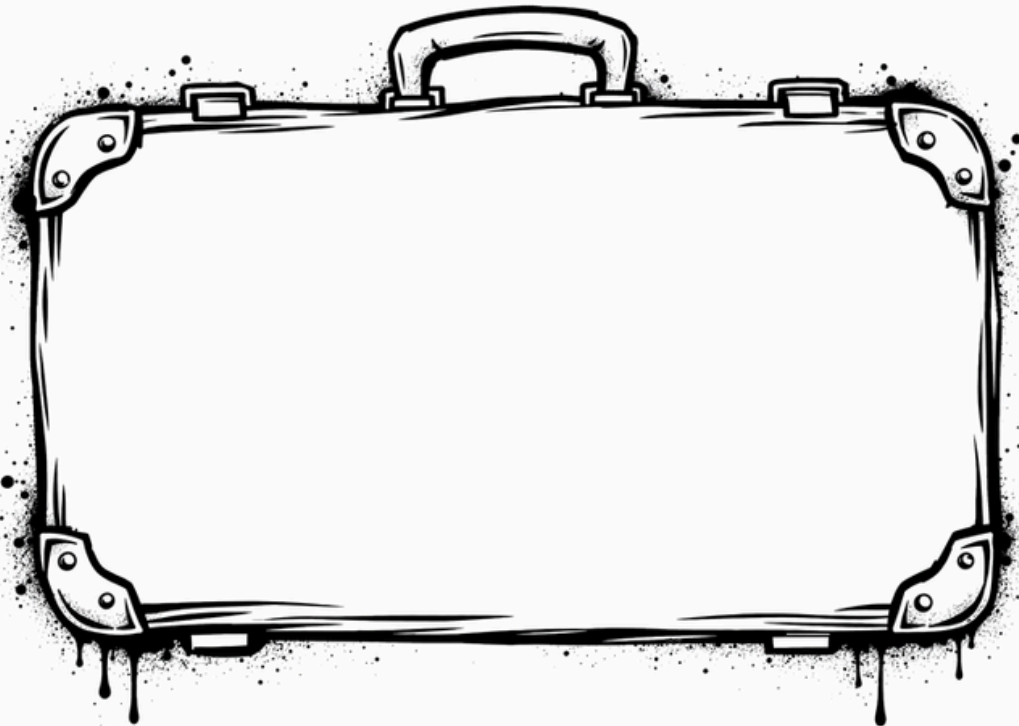
# Circles of Control

You may be able to control things like how much effort you put into a sport, activity or friendship. But you might not be able to control the outcome. List or illustrate at least 3 things you can control, things you can influence, and things beyond your control.



# What I'm Carrying

What are you carrying? Maybe it includes secrets or expectations or triumphs or embarrassments. What would each of these things look like? Would they be heavy or sharp? Big or small? Illustrate these things. Is your suitcase packed or is there still room for more?

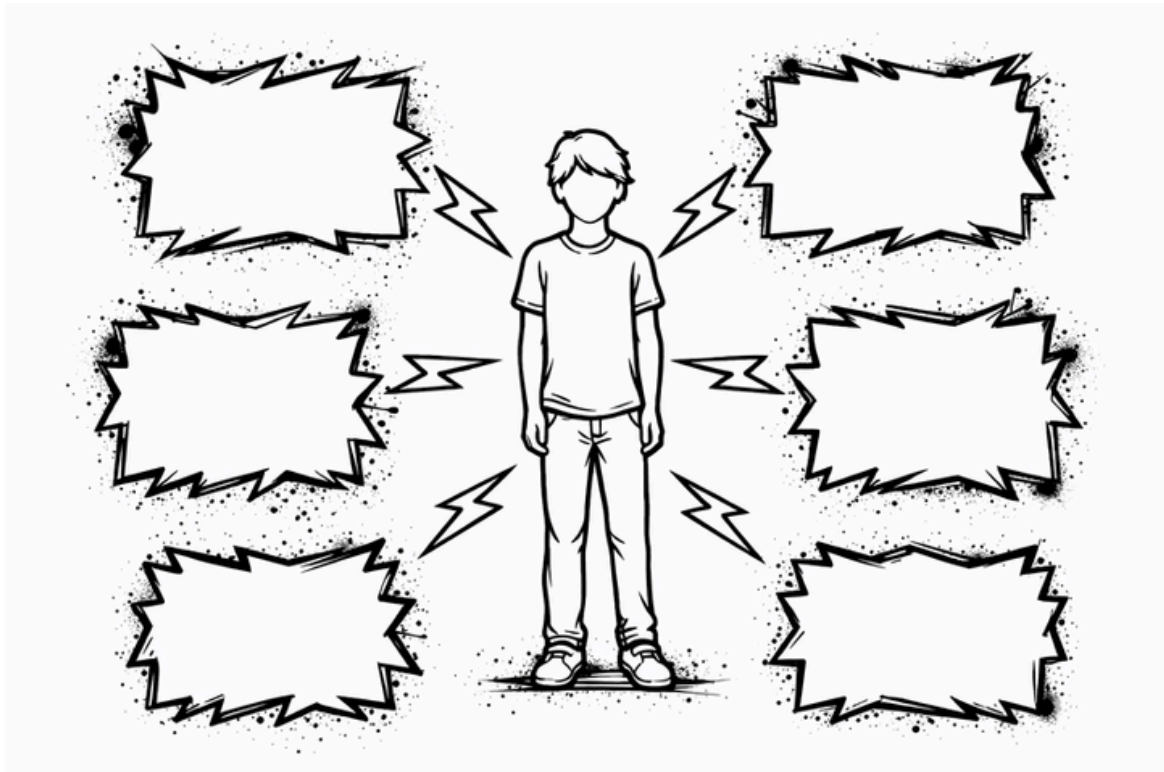


## Side Quest

Illustrate and/or describe one of these things you would like to put down.

# Things I'm Avoiding

Ergh, you KNOW you're gonna have to deal with it at some point. You'd just rather that point was, like, years or decades from now. List or illustrate things you've been avoiding.



## Side Quest

Pick one of these things to address now. What's your plan for taking on this thing you've been avoiding?

# The Gifts I Needed

Sometimes you get the support you need – a kind word or a ride home or just someone to help you hold the heavy stuff. This support can be like a gift. Illustrate and/or write about the people who have given you gifts of support. If you like, use one or more of these spaces to describe a gift you WISH you had gotten.



## Section 3



# What Keeps Me Going

### *Recognizing strengths, patterns, parts of you that carried you through*

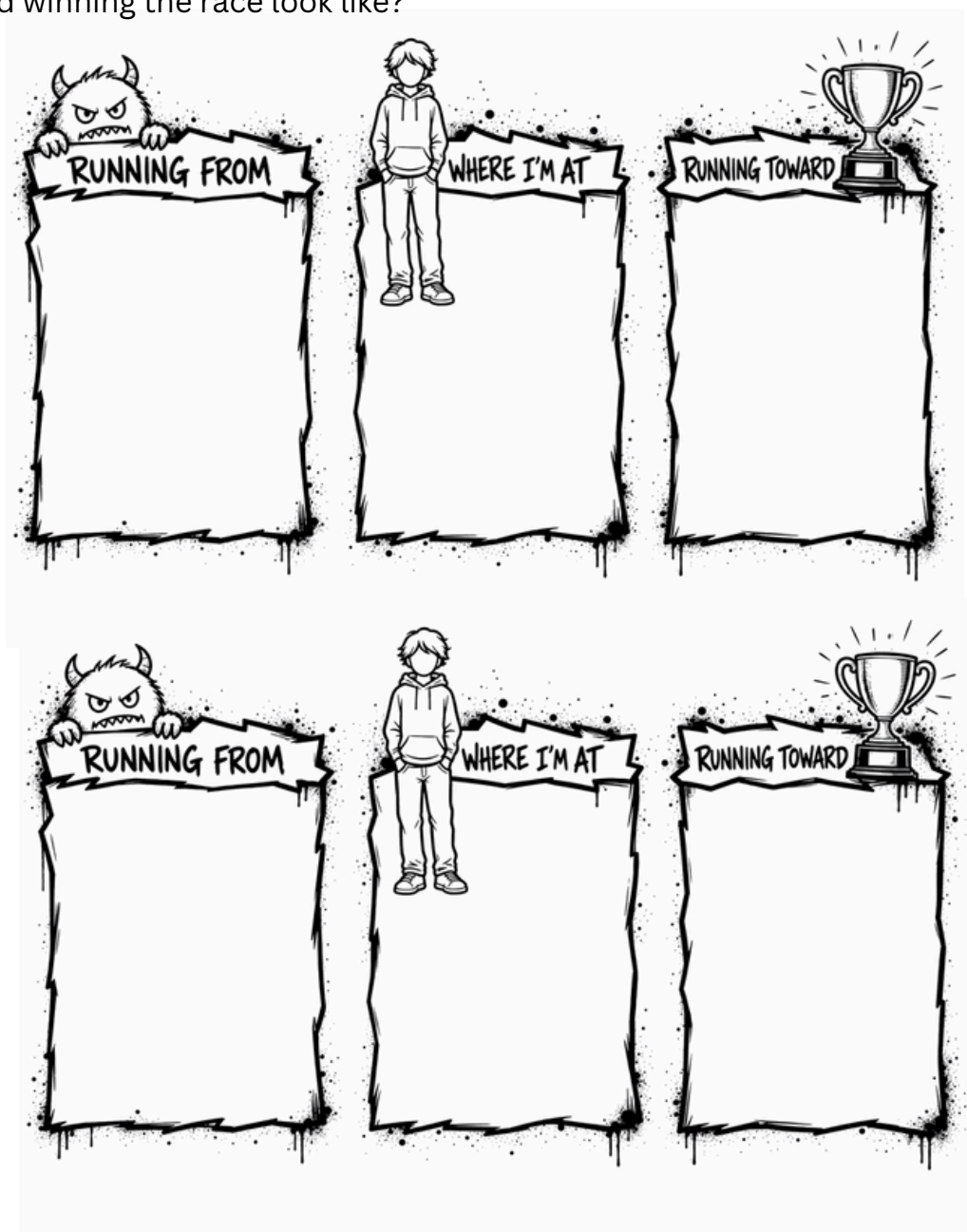
Even in the hardest moments – especially in the hardest moments – something in you kept going. It might not have looked strong. It might have felt messy, quiet, or barely there. But whether you pushed forward, paused, adapted, distracted yourself, reached out, or simply made it through one more day, those responses matter.

This section is about noticing and honoring what has already been working inside you. Not just the obvious strengths, but the subtle ones – the instincts, habits, and parts of you that helped you cope, endure, and stay.

You don't have to become stronger—you already are. This is where you begin to recognize it.

# Running From, Running Toward

Does it feel like parts of your past are chasing you? Are you staying ahead or falling behind? If you could reach any end of this race, what would it be? Draw or write about something you're running from. Then write/draw your thoughts and feelings about this thing. If you could have ANY outcome, what would winning the race look like?



# Um, Maybe You *Meant* Well?

It's hard to believe, but EVEN YOU might screw up sometimes. Think about situations you handled poorly. Maybe you were rude or said something insensitive or bailed on a commitment or did something you know was wrong. Yeah, some of these things are just mistakes – learn from them and move on. But even your worst moments may have had a purpose. Being mean could be a way of getting the space you need. Avoiding something or shutting down could be protecting your energy or surviving overwhelm. Think of situations you handled poorly...then reinterpret these situations in a positive light. Even if it turned out for the worse, what's a possible positive reason you acted this way? (If you need to, make it up...)

The image shows a worksheet with four hand-drawn boxes arranged in a 2x2 grid. Each box has a title at the top and a large empty space for writing. The titles are: 'What actually happened' (top-left), 'Why I probably did this...' (top-right), 'What actually happened' (bottom-left), and 'Why I probably did this...' (bottom-right). The drawing style is simple and sketchy, with some ink splatters around the boxes.

# Everything That Helps

Chocolate. Going for a run. Checking in with a friend. Breathing. What helps you exist or even recover when times are hard? Make a huge list of all the things that help you cope. Maybe it's looking for colored rocks. Or making faces at yourself in the mirror. List everything you can think of. Write or draw!



## Side Quest

Think of a situation you have to cope with. Now circle the top five things you can use to help.

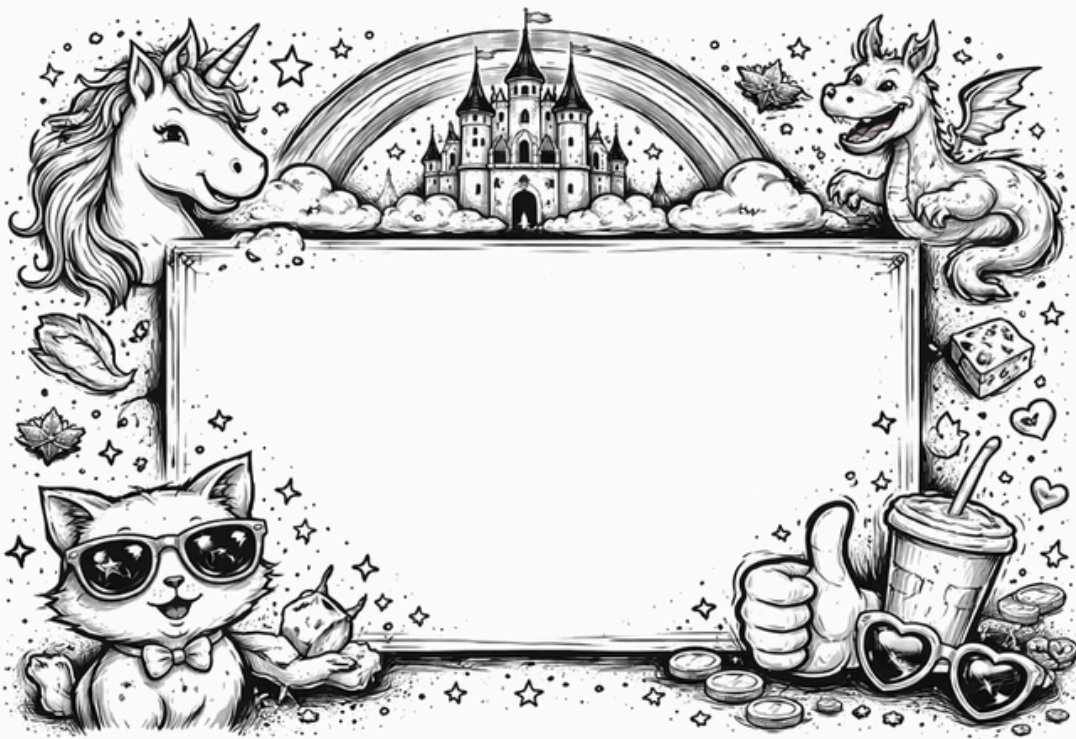
# Things I Got Through

Make a big list or collage of things you've gotten through. They might be as small as surviving a boring movie or getting to school on time after not sleeping well. Or they may be bigger things that you've had to endure. If you're up for it, find a private place and say these things to yourself out loud. Say, "I got through..." for each one.



# Things I Actually Crushed

Earlier in this book, you had the very fun opportunity to explore things you did wrong. Now you get to explore times you were awesome. Think of this like your brag-page. Did you pick up a piece of trash? Did you remember a friend's birthday? Did you do better than you expected on a test? Either list or draw these things here, next to the happy unicorns and kittens...



## Side Quest

Pick one you're especially proud of. Write or draw more about it here.

# Times I Kept Going

Think about challenges. They can be as basic as running the mile in gym class or as complex as navigating a difficult family situation. Try to remember an EXACT time you could have quit or done the easy thing, but instead kept going or did something that was hard for you. Don't worry about what happened after! Just list or draw challenges and remember how you kept going.

<b>CHALLENGE</b>     	<b>CHALLENGE</b>     	<b>CHALLENGE</b>     
<b>MOMENT OF COURAGE</b>     	<b>MOMENT OF COURAGE</b>     	<b>MOMENT OF COURAGE</b>     

## Side Quest

Think about one time you totally caved or walked away from a challenge. Sometimes it's okay or even essential to choose your battles! Would you repond the same way again? Would you do something different?

# Section 4



## Moving Forward

*Exploring what's next, at your own  
pace, in your own way*

Moving forward doesn't mean rushing, forgetting, or becoming a completely different person. It means beginning to turn your attention toward what comes next.

This section is about possibility, inviting you to explore small shifts, new directions, and the quiet ways your life can begin to open again.

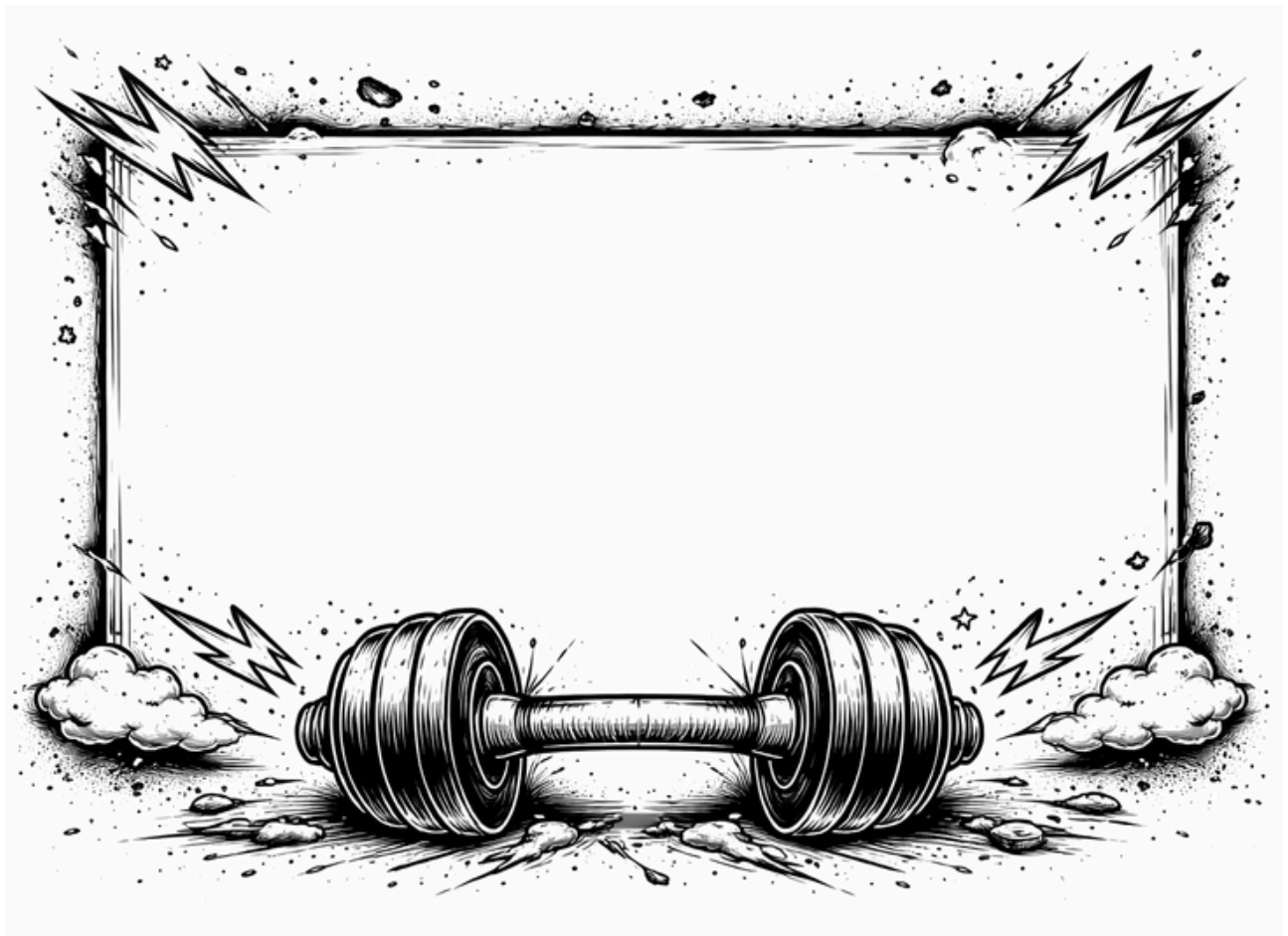
Some things may feel uncertain or even uncomfortable. That's part of growth. You are allowed to move slowly, to change your mind, and to redefine what "forward" means.

From here, you get to choose what you carry with you – and what you're ready to leave behind.

# What Does Strength Look Like?

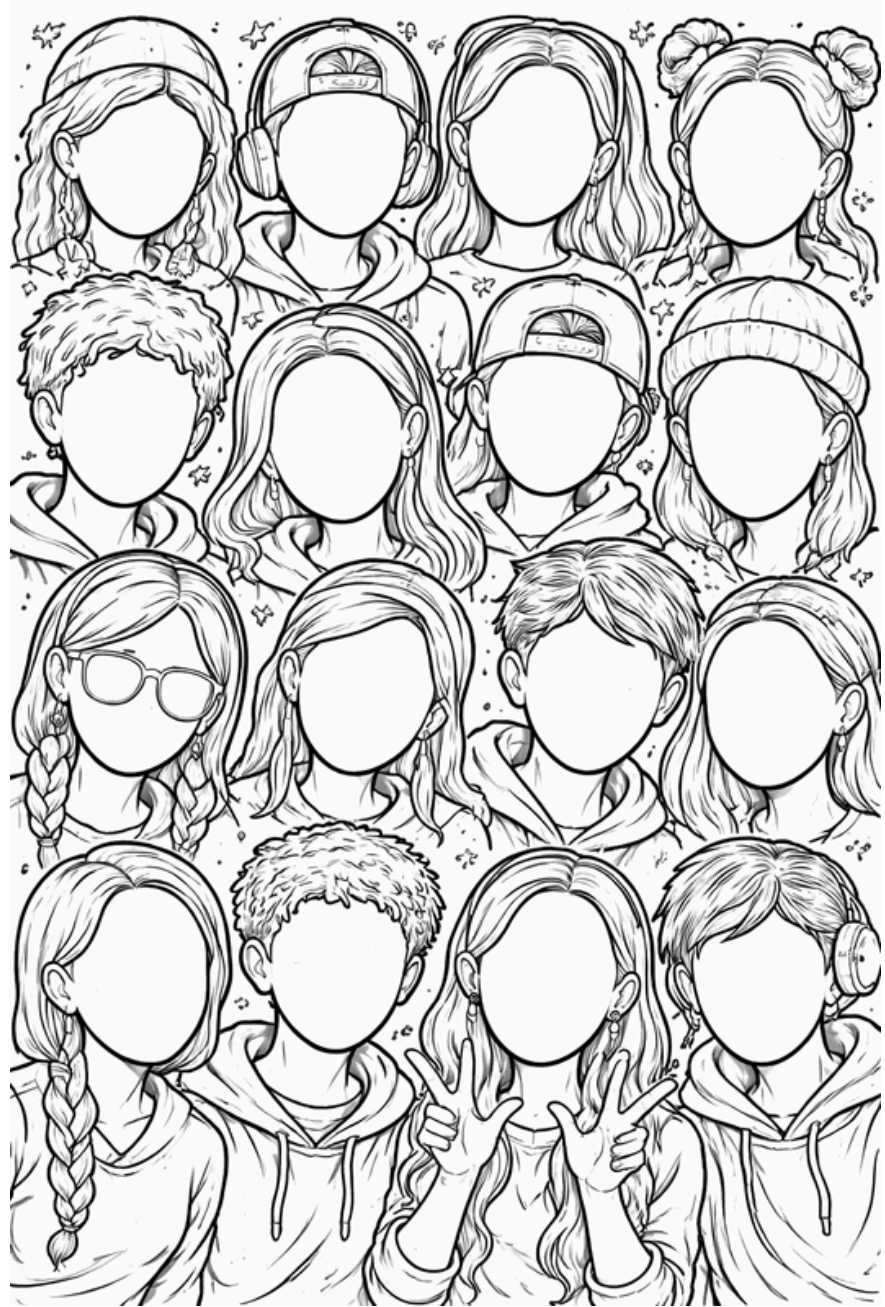
“Strength” is a pretty broad term. Does it mean standing up to bullies or keeping your cool? Is it sticking with things even when they’re difficult, or knowing when to try something new? Does it mean being honest or making people feel good about themselves? Is it about making good decisions or recovering from mistakes?

This is a hard one and it only works if you really decide to think about it. What kind of strength do you hope to represent? Write about or draw your personal version of strength.



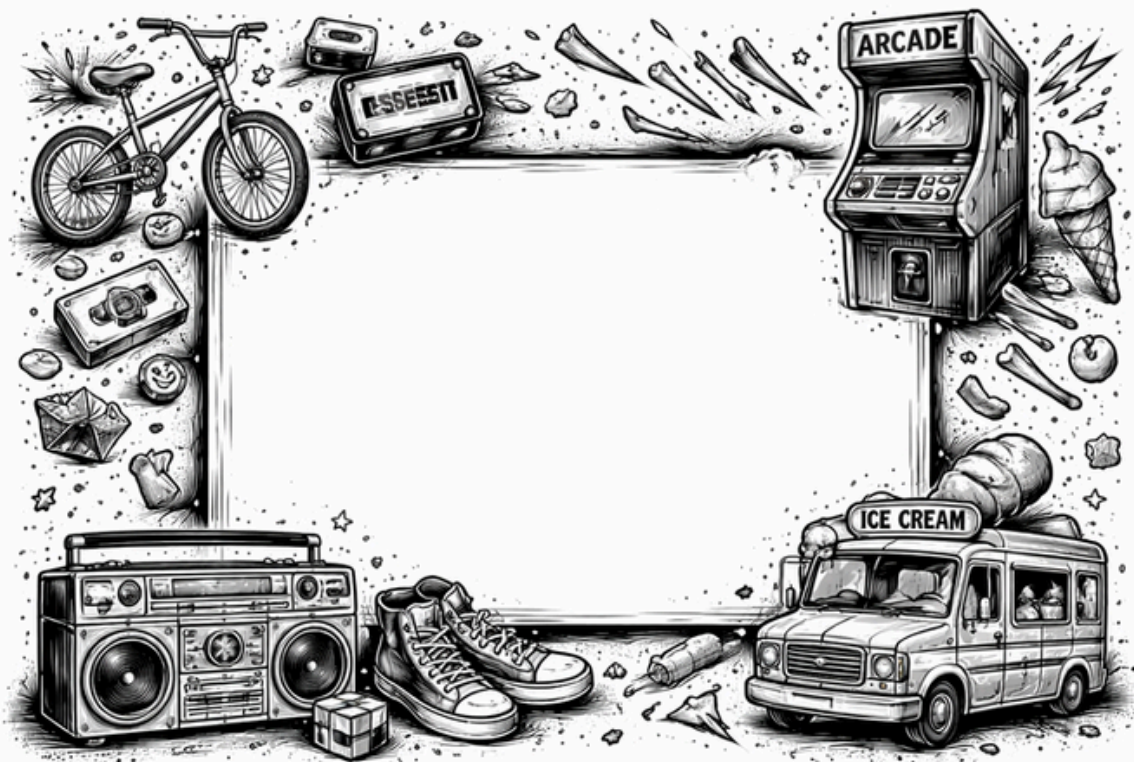
# D'You Remember Being Happy?

After a hard time, joy can feel unfamiliar, distant, or even uncomfortable. You don't need to force happiness, but you can begin to notice small moments that feel lighter or easier. Keep track of things that make you smile – seeing a cute dog, hearing a dumb joke, thinking a silly thought. Don't fill in all these things right now! Come back to this page to add more whenever something makes you smile.



# The Wayback Machine

Do you remember those orange cream-pops you used to get in the summer when you were little? Do you remember building Legos? Or reading an adventure book? Maybe it's been awhile since you've enjoyed these things. List all the things you used to love doing – or as many as you can remember.

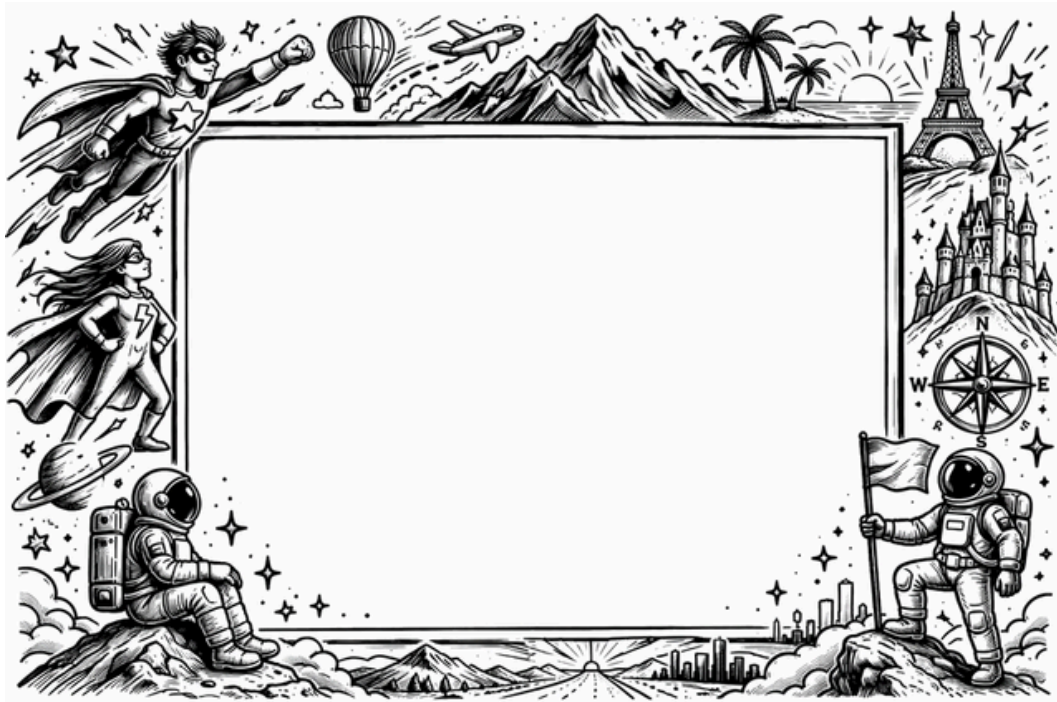


## Side Quest

The bad news is that some of the little-kid stuff you used to enjoy might be hard to pull off now. The good news is there's gotta be *something* you can dust off. Pick something from your list. Either do it or describe a plan for making it happen!

# Imagine the Possibilities

If you could do anything, what would it be? Would you fly to another planet, or go to your dream college? Would you have a superpower or visit a rainforest? No matter how impossible it seems, use this space to imagine who you would be or what you would do if absolutely anything were possible.

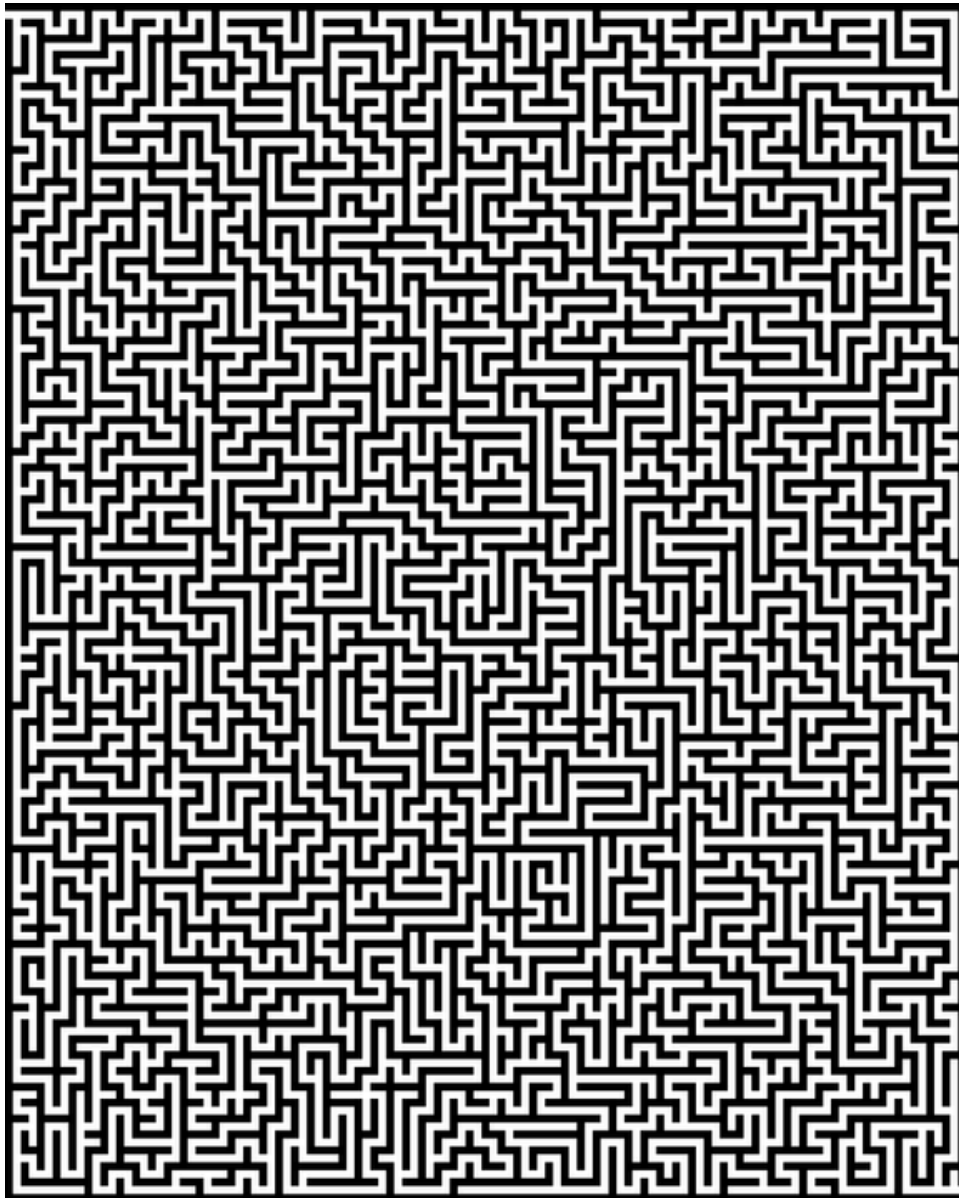


## Side Quest

Imagine a stretch goal the \*might\* be possible – more like a dream job or a major accomplishment. Write or draw it here.

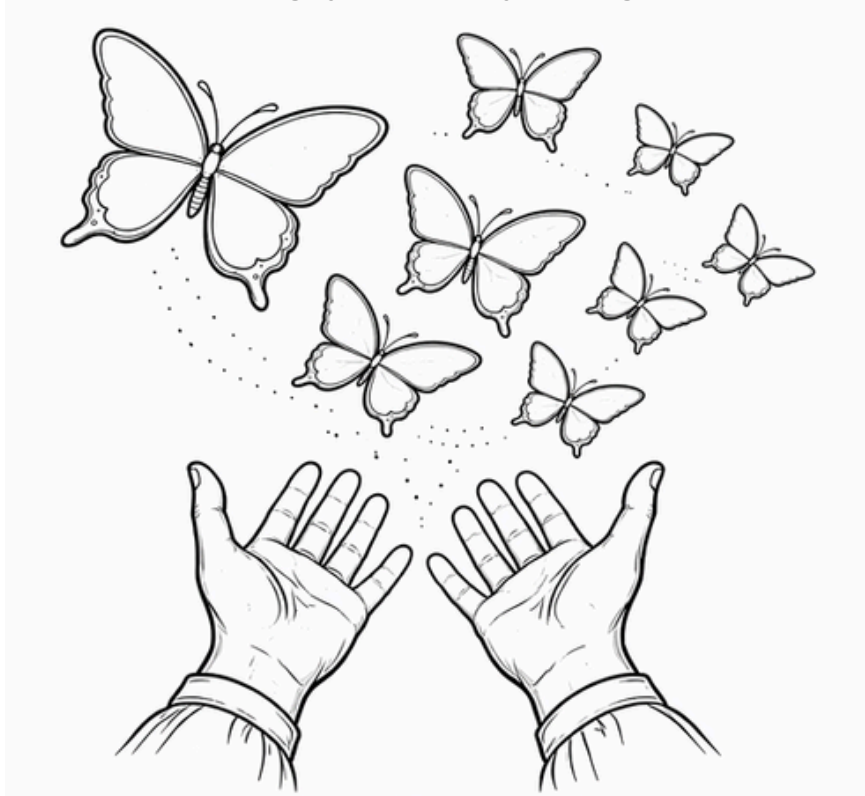
# Brain Break

Don't solve this maze all at once! When you feel your mind slipping back into negative or unhelpful thoughts, come back to this page and solve a little more of this maze as a quick way to break the cycle of negativity. If possible, use a different color each time.



# Fly Away

What are you ready to let go? Maybe you can forgive someone who messed up...or maybe you can forgive yourself? Maybe you hurt someone or maybe you're ready to let go of an outdated belief about yourself. Write these things you're ready to let go.

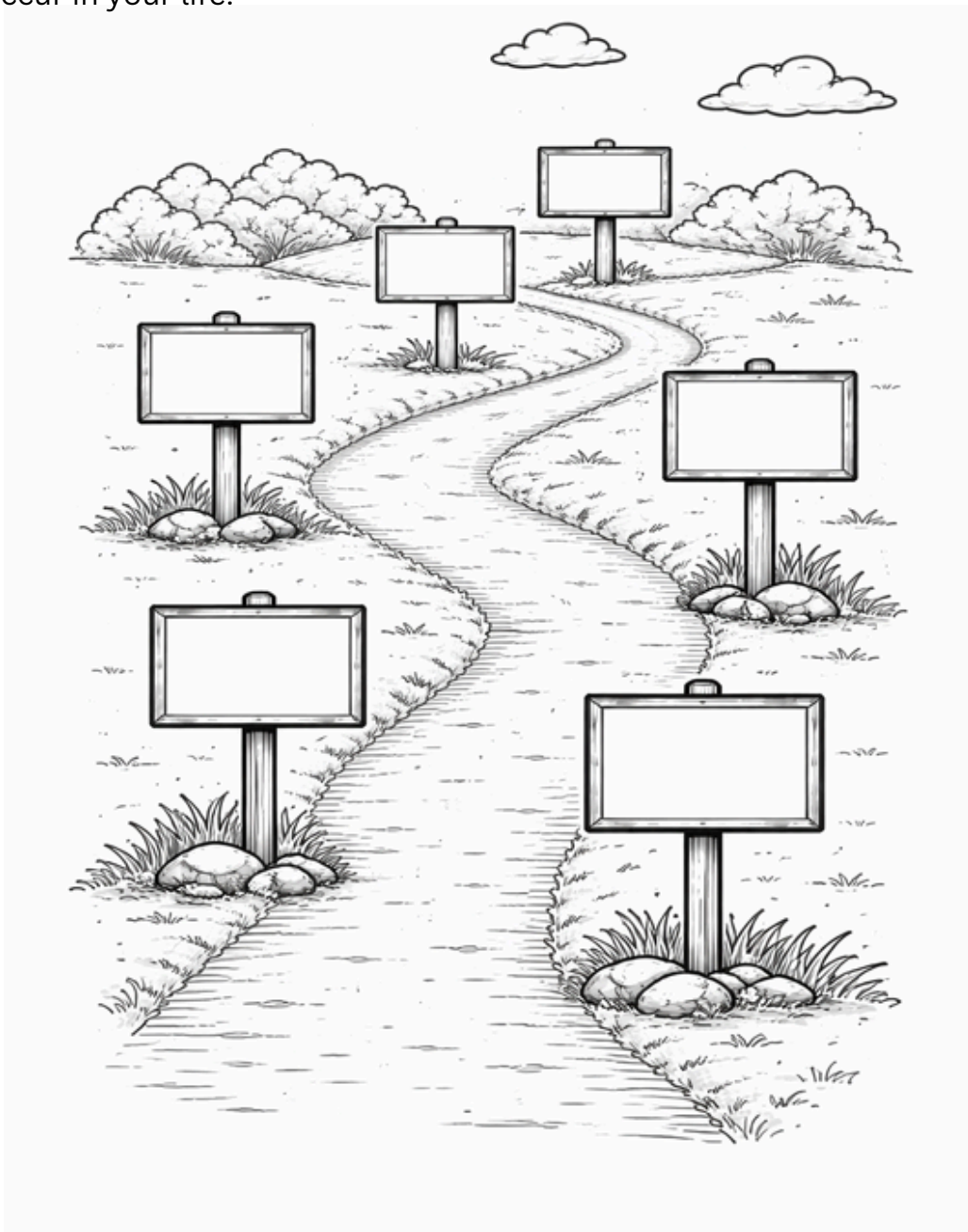


## Side Quest

Find a place where you can be yourself. Practice breathing out as you imagine launching these thoughts into the air. If you want, literally cut out these butterflies and release them. (But, like, don't litter.)

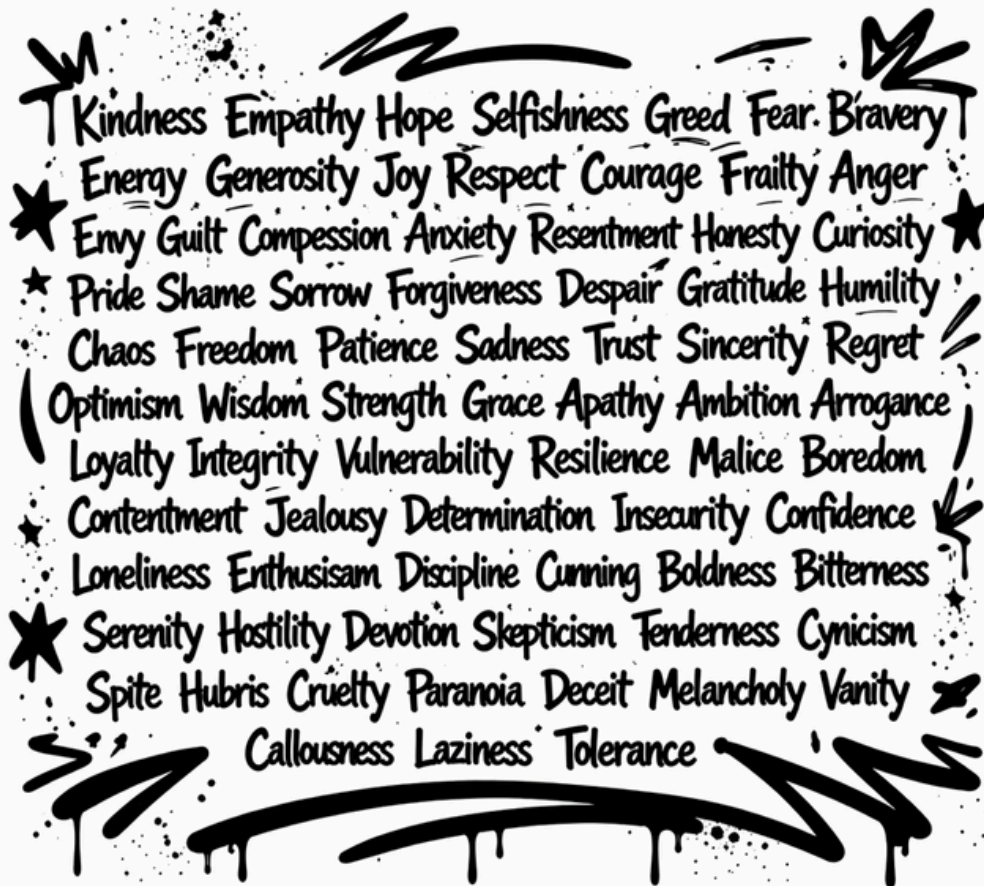
# Milestones

How do you imagine your life progressing from here? You don't have to know everything right now and not everything will work out the way you plan! Where needed, draw the path splitting into different possible directions. Try to label the important events you want to occur in your life.



# My Priorities

You can't always be kind or optimistic or energetic. But you can at least try to be some of these things, some of the time. Circle four traits you would like to express, moving forward. X-out two traits you would like to avoid.

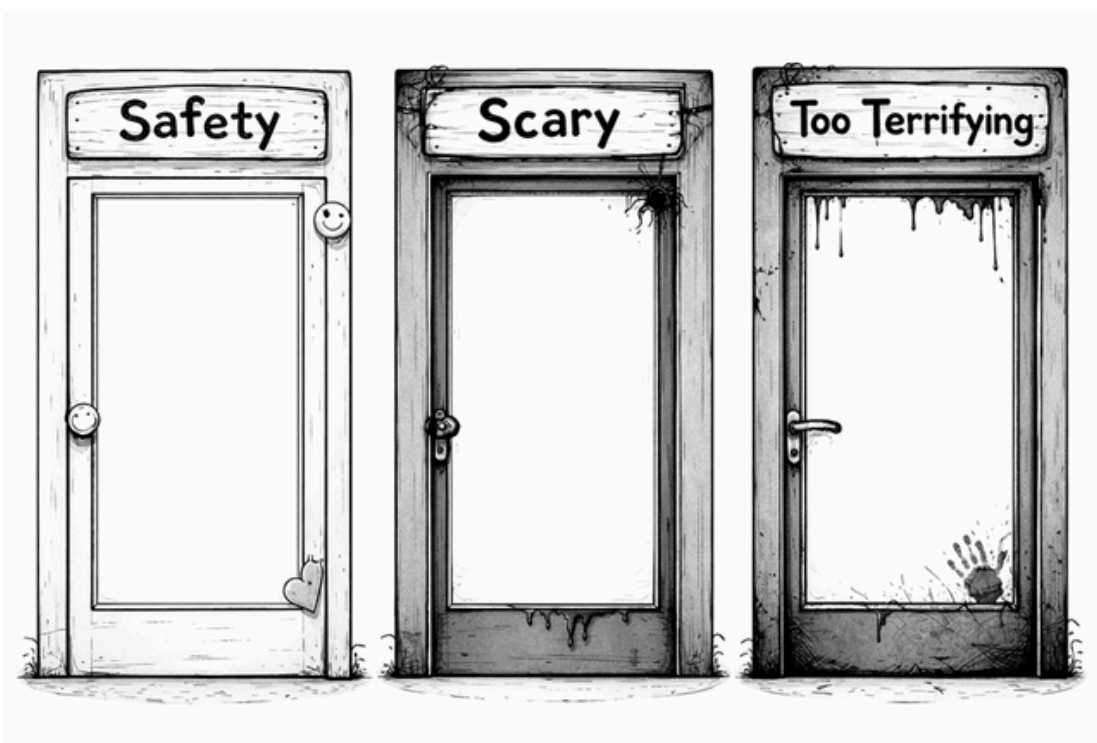


## Side Quest

Think of more traits that aren't on this list. What do you hope your future self will be like? If you want, you can also list traits you hope to avoid.

# Three Doors

Imagine three doors leading to possible paths forward. One is the safe way to go. What does that look like? The second door holds a difficult path, but might lead to greater rewards. What does that look like? The third door might be too extreme. Write or draw what it might look like to go too far.



## Side Quest

Imagine yourself opening the “scary” door. Write or draw what happens next:

# Hero's Journey

Many stories follow a path called the Hero's Journey. Harry Potter, Hunger Games, and Star Wars are a few examples. Chances are, there are elements of the Hero's Journey in your story, too. Think about where you started. Think about your challenges. Think about how far you've come. Try to discover and write/draw the following elements of your own Hero's Journey.



## Side Quest

Every second, you are changing. Every second, you are growing. You'll never be the person you were, even one second ago. Reflect on and/or write about how you are different than you used to be:

# About The Authors

## **About the Digging Deep Project**

The Digging Deep Project was founded by philanthropist Sheri Sobrato as a way to provide emotional support for young people going through tough times. She was inspired to create this project because she discovered so much about her emotions and herself during her own personal challenge with cancer as a young adult.

The Project began its journey with the journaling book *Digging Deep: A Journal for Young People Facing Health Challenges* by Rose Offner, MFA and Sheri Sobrato, MA (Resonance House, 2014), followed by the mobile self-help app, *Shadow's Edge*, and now continues with this workbook.

Parents, teachers and caregivers can find resources at [www.diggingdeep.org](http://www.diggingdeep.org) or join our community at [Facebook.com/DiggingDeepProject](https://www.facebook.com/DiggingDeepProject).

## **About Kristi Pikiewicz, PhD**

Dr. Pikiewicz earned her PhD in Clinical Psychology at Pacifica Graduate Institute in Carpinteria, CA. She completed pre-doctoral training at the Nan Tolbert Nurturing Center in Ojai, CA, and her post-doctoral internship at the Boulder Institute for Psychotherapy and Research. She currently provides remote and in-person educational assessment and counseling through Clover Learning Center ([cloverlearningcenter.com](http://cloverlearningcenter.com)). Previously, Kristi designed and delivered a social-emotional learning curriculum for a K-8 school in Boulder, CO with a mission for gifted education, and spent eight years as a middle school language arts and social studies teacher. In addition to her mental health training, Kristi holds a B.S. in environmental science from Allegheny College and a teaching credential from Western Washington University.