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FINDING YOUR WAY WHEN SOMEONE DIES OF COVID-19
A JOURNAL FOR TEENS

This book belongs to



The National Grief Center
for Children & Families

The mission of Dougy Center is to provide grief support in a safe place where children, teens, young adults, and their families can share their experiences before and after a death. Dougy Center also provides support and training locally, nationally, and internationally to individuals and organizations seeking to assist children who are grieving.

This resource was funded by the Brave of Heart Fund, founded by the Foundations of New York Life and Cigna and administered by E4E Relief. The Brave of Heart Fund was established in 2020 to provide charitable grants and emotional support services to families of the frontline healthcare workers, volunteers, and support staff whose lives were lost in the fight against COVID-19. It continues to offer support to these bereaved families via partnerships with non-profit organizations aligned with the fund's core purposes. employee relief fund.org/brave-of-heart-fund

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Introduction

You're likely reading this because someone in your life died of COVID-19. Whether it was a parent, grandparent, sibling, friend, other family member, or someone from your community, this workbook is a place for you to draw, write, wonder, remember, and express whatever comes up in your grief. In these pages you'll find quotes from teens who are grieving, writing prompts, and activities. Everything in these pages is just a suggestion, so choose the activities you'd like to do, and leave the rest.

Having someone die can change everything, but it doesn't always. Sometimes your day-to-day life looks the same, but you feel totally different on the inside. There are a lot of metaphors for grief. Some teens talk about it coming in waves. Others say it feels like an earthquake, shaking everything around them. You're left to pick up the pieces and figure out what life will be like without that person. Who will you be? How will your family react? What will you remember and what will you miss? There are no expectations for how you should think and feel about the person or the loss. Grief can be intense and loud or quiet and barely there. Some people aren't sure what they feel. It's all okay.

The fact that your person died of COVID might add some layers to grief that seem extra unique. The kind of medical care they received, the information you and your family got about their health, how other people reacted, and what you could and couldn't do to honor their life with a funeral, memorial, or Homegoing are just a few things that could be unique to having someone die of COVID.

While no one can know exactly how you feel, there are some things that teens who are grieving seem to have in common. Here are a few examples:

- Worried if they're grieving the "right" way
- Being filled with so many questions
- Wondering if it's normal to feel so numb
- Friends and family acting weird/not knowing what to say or do
- Having trouble concentrating or remembering homework
- Feeling older and more mature than their friends
- Being angry at the person for dying



Something we've learned from other teens is grief doesn't care about schedules or rules. There are no instructions to follow and there isn't a right or wrong way to feel. What's more important is figuring out what works for you. Since grief doesn't have a clear middle and end, the activities in this book are in random order. You get to decide how to go through this book – maybe you'll go from beginning to end or end to beginning. Maybe you'll spin the book in a circle and see which page it opens to first. It's totally up to you.

As you make your way through this book, you can ask friends and family for help. Depending on how old you were when the person died, you might not have a lot of memories. Who could you ask to find out more? Who would know what your dad was like as a teenager or where your grandmother most wanted to go on a trip? We also know that not everyone was super close to their person who died. No matter what your relationship was like, or if you didn't really have one, this book is for you.

One last (but important) thing. Grief can be really hard – and it can make other things that were already hard seem impossible. Sometimes, teens who are grieving need more help than a journal can offer. If you are struggling with school, eating, or sleeping, or if you're thinking about hurting yourself or others, talking to a real human person can be one of the best ways to get help. You can start with a friend, a family member, a trusted teacher or counselor, or a crisis line such as Youthline, a peer-to-peer crisis line for teens. You can call them at 877-968-8491, text them by sending teen2teen to 839863 between 4 p.m. and 10 p.m. PST, or chat online at theYouthLine.org. Two more options: the Crisis Text Line can be reached by texting HELLO to 741741 or you can call the Crisis Lifeline at 988. Whether you connect with a crisis line or a person in your life, please do reach out to someone when you're struggling – you matter, and you deserve help and support!



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We had to do an online memorial for my mom. It kind of felt like going to school, all those people in tiny boxes and the music we tried to play came out wrong.

99

Emotional Whirlwind

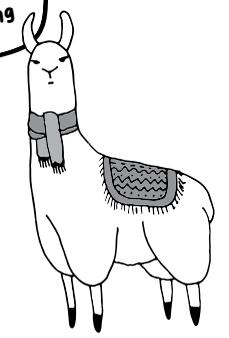
Check the ones you've felt since your person died.
(What's missing? Fill in your own.)

- Angry
- Scared
- Confused
- Embarrassed
- Numb
- Relieved
- Ashamed
- Awkward
- Happy
- _____
- Sad
- Bored
- Calm
- Guilty

There are no all good or all bad emotions. They're just emotions. And, there are some that are more comfortable to experience than others.

Go back and color in the ones you like feeling and draw an "x" through the ones you'd give a 0/5 star review.

Sometimes I have so many emotions at once, I don't know what I'm actually feeling



Grief shows up... everywhere!

Kind of like dust, grief can show up everywhere. Even in places we'd never expect. Here's a list of ways that grief might be showing up in your life.

Check the boxes of ones that have been true for you:

- Having to remind myself it really happened
- Having a hard time sleeping
- Physical symptoms like a stomachache, headache, nausea
- SO. TIRED.
- Hard time eating/eating a lot
- Racing thoughts (especially at night)
- Crying. Crying. And more crying
- Not crying
- Thinking my person is just on a trip somewhere
- Forgetting for a moment that they died, and then feeling guilty
- Feeling everything and then nothing and then everything again
- Yelling — sometimes at other people, sometimes into the void
- Having trouble remembering something about my person — the sound of their voice, what their favorite food was, etc.

- Having trouble remembering a lot of things — “What were we supposed to read for English??”
- Being mad at friends who haven't had someone die
- Feeling lonely — “No one gets this, at all.”
- Having dreams about my person
- Not having dreams about them
- Working harder than ever at school
- Thinking, “What's the point of school?”
- Wanting to be with friends all the time
- Having a hard time getting motivated for activities outside of school
- Feeling more connected to my culture and family
- Noticing it's hard to talk about my grief with the people I'm closest to
- Having a hard time concentrating or focusing — on anything
- Wanting to zone out
- Feeling connected to other people — IRL or characters on TV/in books who have had someone die
- Other ways grief shows up for me:

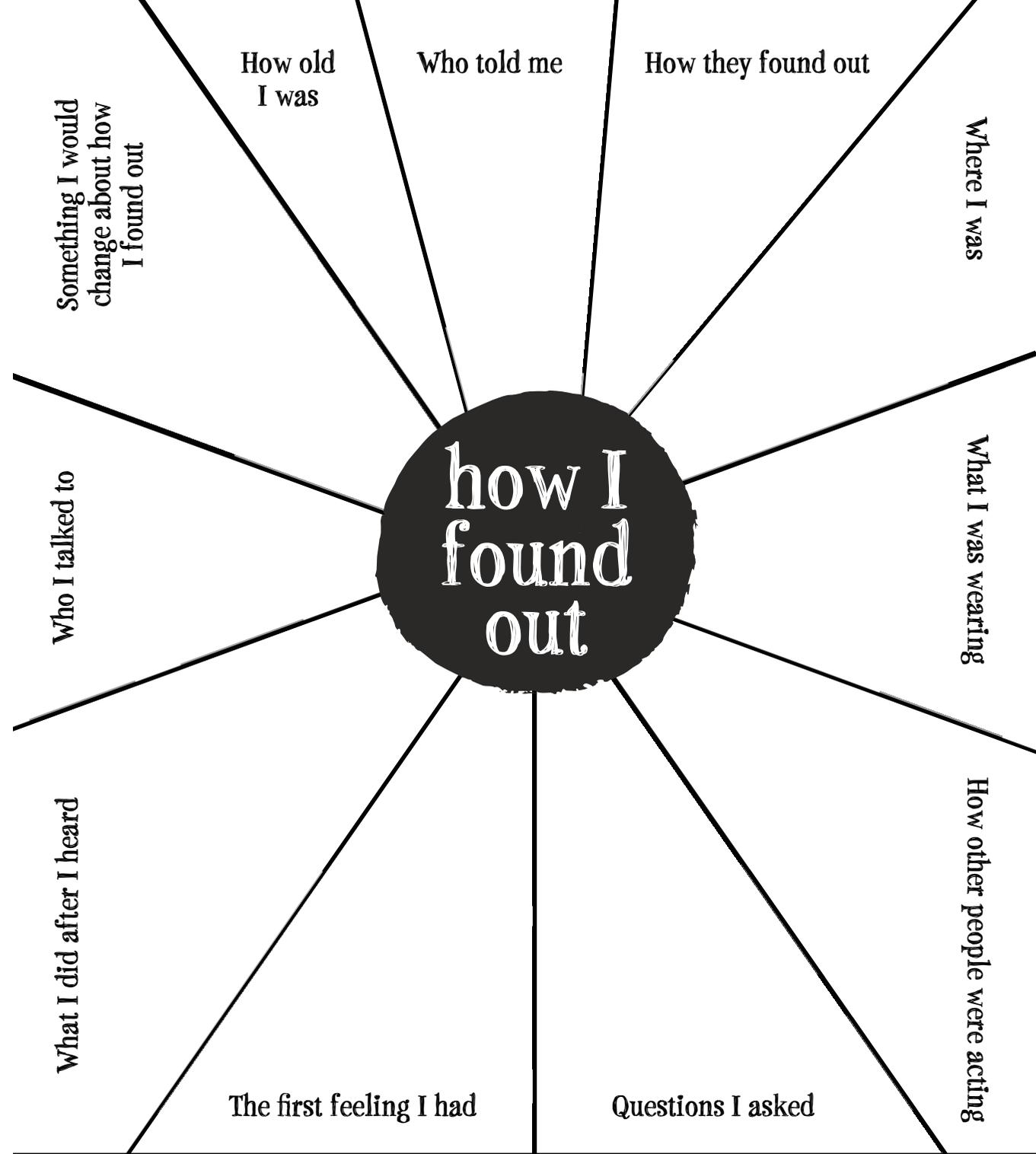
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My dad died early in the pandemic.

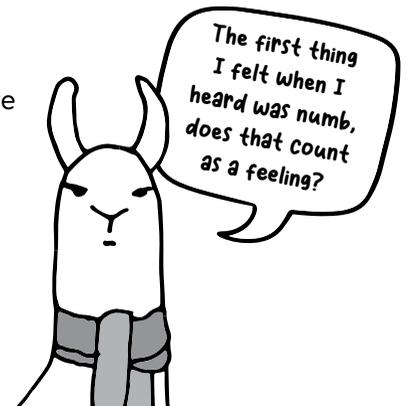
No one could come be with us,
that made it extra lonely.

I kept wishing my cousins could come
play video games and just hang out.

99



Everyone's story is unique when it comes to finding out their person died. How did you hear? You can use the prompts above or you can free-write your own version. The answers to these prompts might be crystal clear, or you might not remember anything. Hearing hard news affects everyone differently.



Grief Potholes

Sometimes things come out of nowhere that make grief get louder. It can be like driving down the road and wham! The car you're in hits a pothole no one saw coming. Grief potholes can be anything, even something that isn't directly related to you or your person who died.

Put check marks over the potholes you've experienced lately and write your own in the blank ones.

Heard a certain song

A holiday

A scene in a movie

Family celebration

COVID being in the news

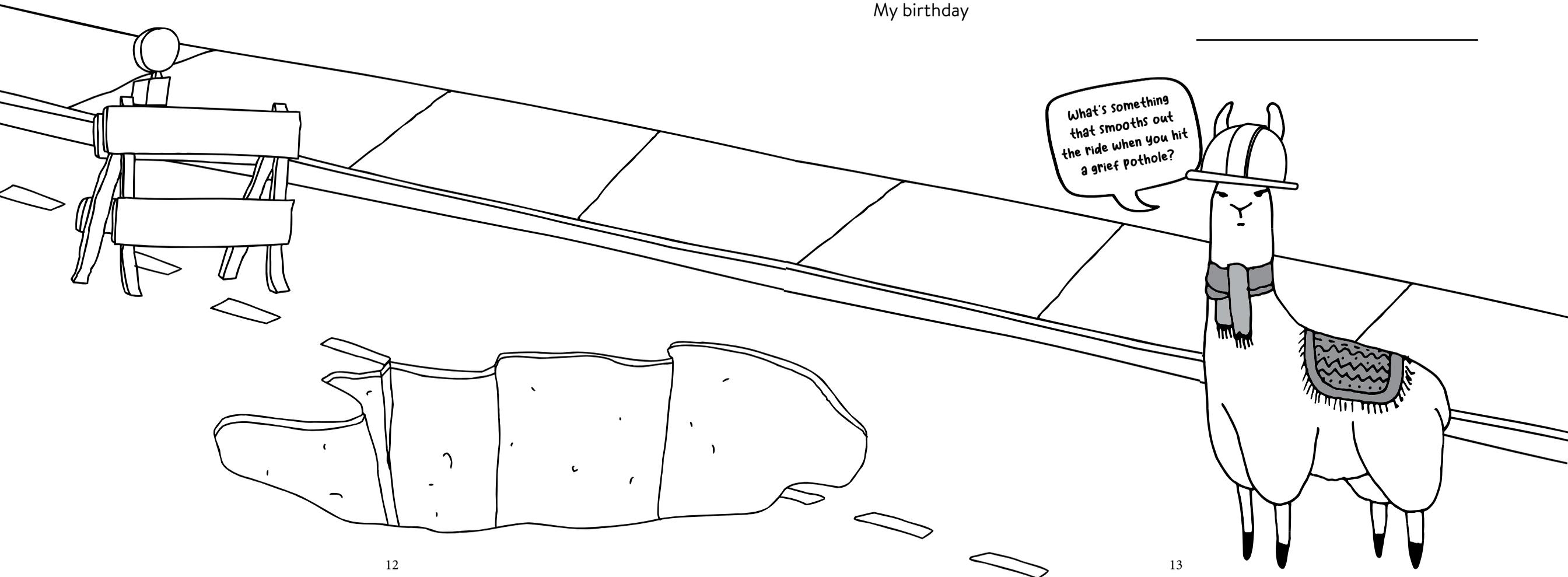
Random hard day

People making jokes about COVID

Anniversary of their death

Their birthday

My birthday



“

When my mom got COVID,
we thought she would be fine,
but then she got really sick and had
to go to the hospital. She was there
for a few weeks and it was a
rollercoaster. One day she'd be getting
better then the next she'd get a lot
worse. It was so confusing.

”

WEIRD THINGS PEOPLE SAY

After someone dies, the weird/frustrating/awkward/rage-inducing “Did you really just say that??” comments and questions from other people can seem never-ending...and every now and then, someone says something that actually helps. Grab your red pen and cross out all the not-helpful things people have said to you (add your own, too).

“THERE’S A REASON FOR EVERYTHING.”

“Were they **vaccinated?**”

“How did they get it?”

“How are you?”

(Said almost in a whisper with that weird, pitying head tilt)

“They wouldn’t want you to feel
[sad] [angry] [guilty].”

“COVID’S NOT EVEN REAL.”

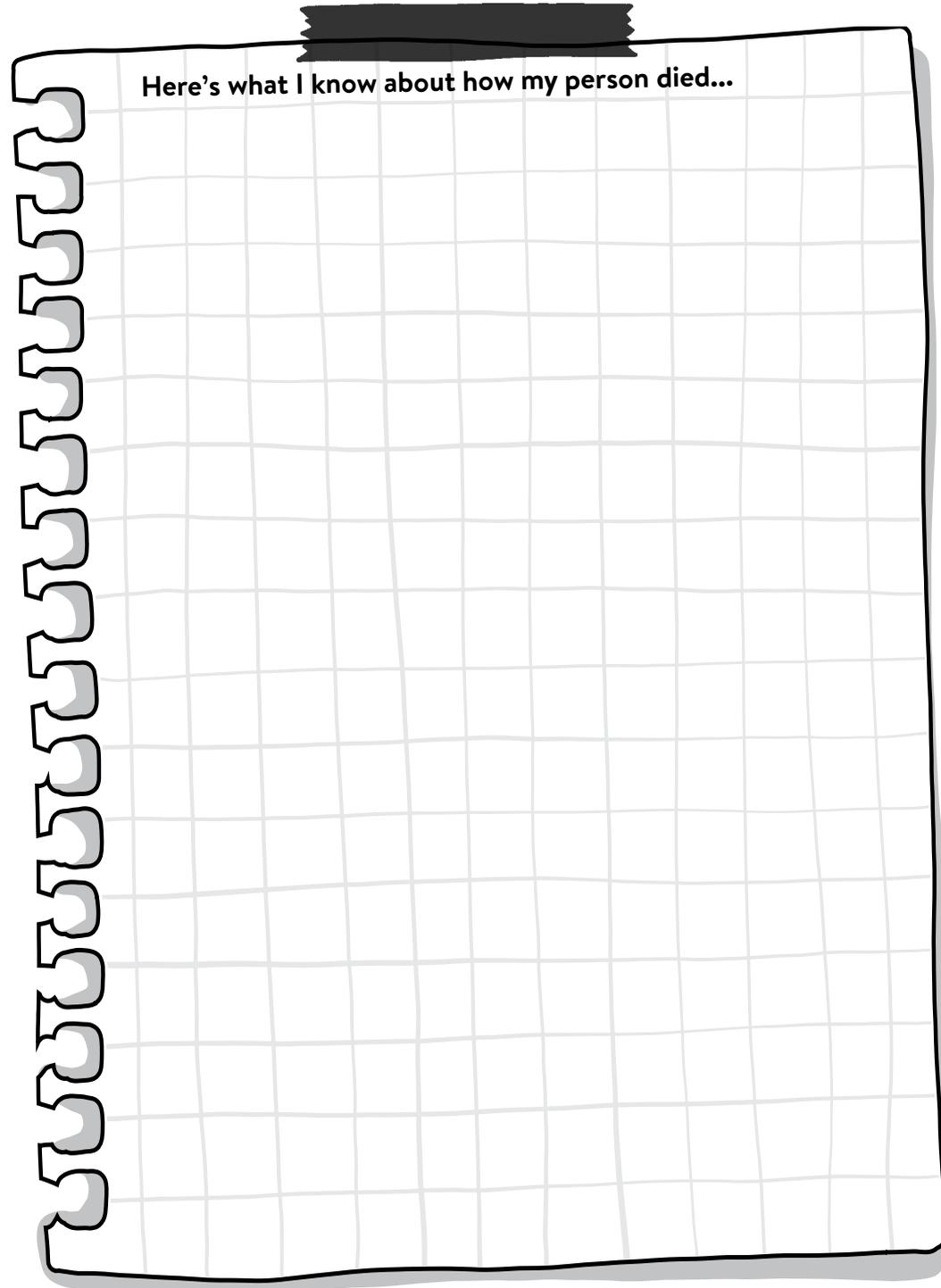
“At least...they’re in a better place.”

“At least... no one else in your family died from COVID.”

What I know...

Do you have questions about how your person died? Have people in your world said things that you know aren't true? Write or draw about it here.

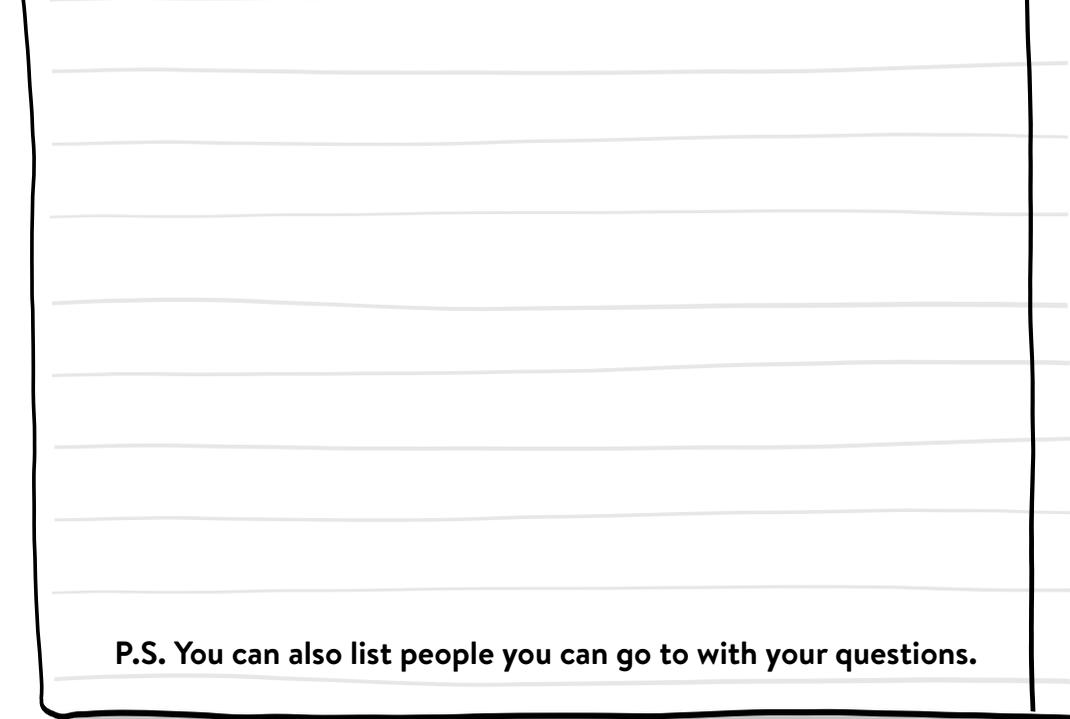
Here's what I know about how my person died...



Things other people have said about how my person died that I don't believe are true...



Questions I still have about how my person died...



P.S. You can also list people you can go to with your questions.

good [and bad] advice

Did your person who died ever give you some good advice? Or maybe some bad advice?! If so, write or draw about it below. You can also write or draw a situation you'd ask their advice about if you could. If you could go back in time, what advice would you give to your person?

“

My mom got COVID from her work in the hospital. Sometimes I get really mad that she had to go to work when other people's parents got to work from home.

”

Advice they gave me

Advice I wish I could ask them for

Advice I'd give them

Not all advice is good advice. Did your person give you any advice that you definitely won't be following?

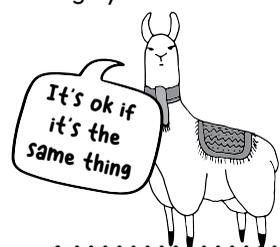


A few things we used to do...

When someone dies, we might miss a lot of things about them like the sound of their voice, how we felt when we were around them, or their sense of humor – but/and – we can also miss the things we used to do with them.

In the squares below, write or draw a few things you used to do together.

- ★ Star the one that was their favorite
- Circle the one that was your favorite



and one thing I wish we could

In the triangle, write or draw something you've done recently that you wish you could have done with them.

A large, hollow triangle shape formed by a dotted line. It is intended for the user to write or draw inside it.

“

Even though school was still virtual,
my dad let me go back to soccer
practice. That was so helpful, just
to see people and do something that
felt normal again.

”

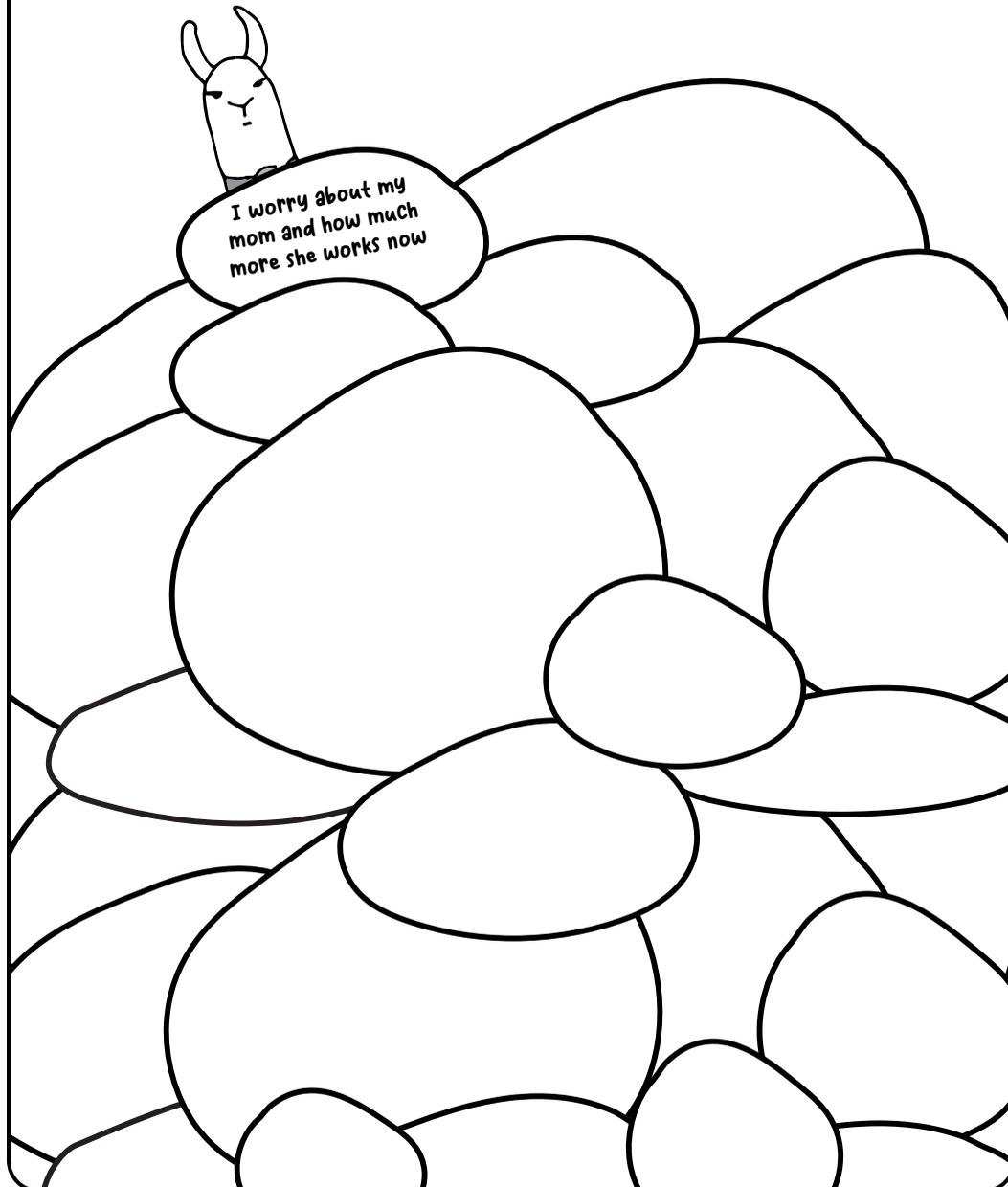
Grief Weirdness BINGO

The list of things that can feel weird in grief is long. Mark off the situations you've been in so far.

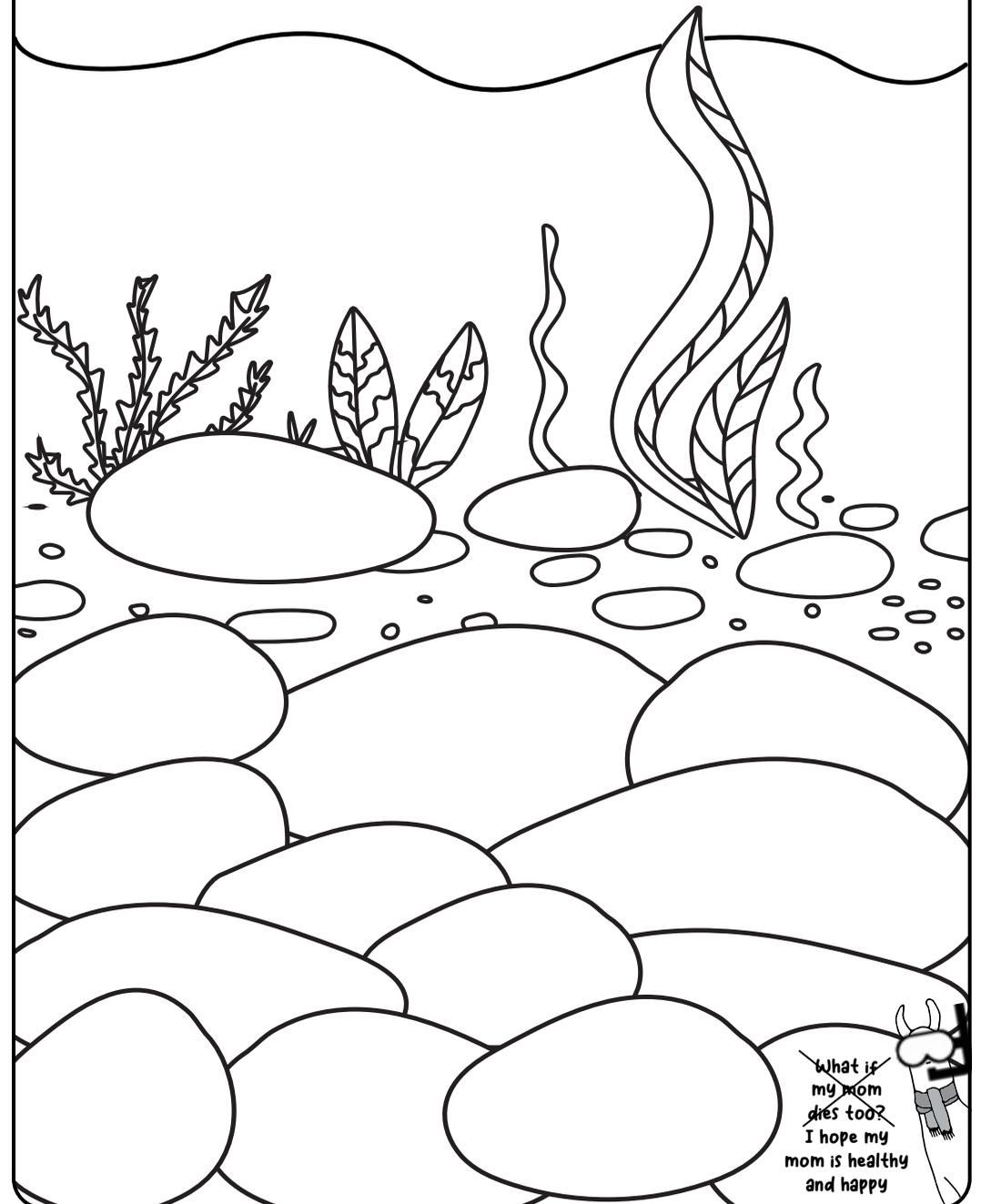
People saying "I'm sorry for your loss"	Getting hugged by strangers	Someone asking "Were they vaccinated?"	Meeting new people	Getting mail in their name
Phone calls asking for them	Filling out applications that ask about family	Crying at school	Crying in other public areas	Thinking they are just on a long trip
Having dreams that throw off the whole day	Making decisions about the future	FREE SPACE: write your own	Forgetting the sound of their voice	Hearing "You look just like them"
The first holiday without them	The first birthday without them	People asking "How did they die?"	Being asked "How are you/ Are you ok?"	Feeling numb
Having a hard time concentrating	Grief being more intense at night	Grief being more intense in the morning	Feeling guilty when I feel happy	Worrying about other people dying

WORRIES & Wishes

Some teens say that after their person died of COVID, they started to worry about things they didn't really think about before. Things like: Will other people I care about get sick and/or die? Will people judge us because my person died of COVID? How will my birthday be now? Will my friends be weird with me? Who will be there when I graduate? What worries do you have? Write them on the rocks below.



Sometimes it helps to take each worry and turn it into a wish. Which of the worries that you wrote on the rocks can you turn into wishes? Write these new wishes on the rocks under the river.



66

I hate it when people ask
 'How did they get it?'
 It makes me feel really guilty,
 like what if I brought it
 home from school?

99

EMOTION WORD SEARCH

Grief is so much more than sadness or anger. Any emotion you think of can be part of your grief. Circle as many feelings as you can find in the word search.

Z	A	S	W	R	T	Y	P	B	M	B	A
L	R	X	D	F	A	D	R	O	K	E	N
V	A	B	N	K	P	G	X	R	L	W	X
W	E	C	S	S	B	N	E	E	H	I	I
G	F	F	D	C	W	A	I	D	I	L	E
Y	V	C	M	P	O	Q	Z	X	H	D	T
J	P	C	A	L	M	N	K	O	U	E	Y
V	F	U	J	O	Y	W	F	I	S	R	I
A	N	G	R	Y	P	I	M	U	R	E	R
R	E	L	I	E	F	U	F	T	S	D	T
W	D	A	S	X	Y	B	Z	Q	F	E	O
C	I	S	M	J	L	Q	M	L	P	B	D
G	U	I	L	T	O	D	P	U	R	T	O
N	O	S	T	A	L	G	I	C	N	O	U

FEAR

GUILT

RAGE

CONFUSED

NUMB

SAD

JOY

RELIEF

BEWILDERED

ANGRY

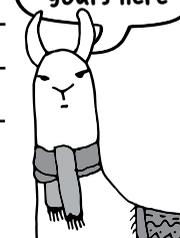
ANXIETY

BORED

CALM

NOSTALGIC

What did we miss? List yours here



COMFORT ESSENTIALS

Grief is uncomfortable so it can help to find things that bring you comfort. Using your senses, write or draw items that are comforting. You might even gather a few and put them in a special place you can access when things feel extra hard.



THINGS YOU CAN SEE



THINGS YOU CAN HEAR/LISTEN TO



THINGS YOU CAN TOUCH



THINGS YOU CAN TASTE



THINGS YOU CAN SMELL

“

My dad and grandparents told me the truth about my other dad's health when he was in the hospital with COVID. It was hard to hear the bad news, but I'm glad they didn't keep anything from me.

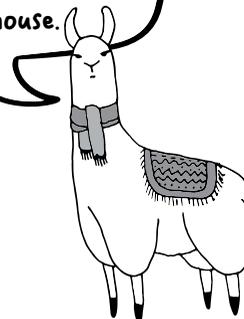
”

BD/AD

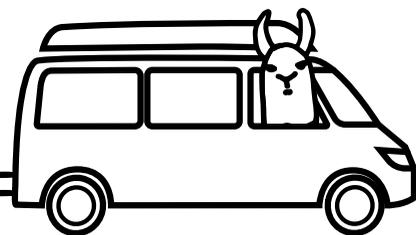
Some teens describe life as being BD or AD – before the death or after the death. When someone dies, it can change almost everything, inside and out. Sometimes a few things stay the same. In the space below write or draw about what life was like before your person died and what it's like now.

*If you need ideas, think about...
Family, Friends, Me, School, Hopes
& Dreams, House, The World, Sleep,
Food, Health, Feelings*

When my parent died, we had to move to a different town, I really miss my old house.



getting out of **STIGMA TOWN**



Have you heard of the word “stigma?” It’s a bunch of negative and unfair beliefs that society or a group of people have about something or someone. We can’t think of much that’s more unfair than people judging someone or their family because of how they died. It happens a lot and it hurts. While stigma is mostly associated with deaths like suicide, homicide, and substance use, it can also affect families of people who died of COVID-19. The first step in fighting stigma is to recognize when it’s happening so you can figure out if and how you want to respond.

Which of these statements and questions have you heard since your person died?

1. Were they vaccinated?
2. How did they get COVID?
3. Did they wear a mask?
4. It’s not even a real disease.
5. It’s their fault they got COVID because they chose to travel.
6. Did they have underlying conditions?
7. Who else in your family got it?
8. Did someone you know give it to them?
9. Write in your own...

Now, go back and cross out the ones you hope to never hear again.

Sometimes it helps to practice how you want to respond to these kinds of things, just so you feel prepared. There’s also what we say inside our heads vs. what we say out loud. Feel free to write some practice responses below – both the inside and outside voice ones.

Inside Response

Outside Response

1.

1.

2.

2.

3.

3.

4.

4.

5.

5.

6.

6.

7.

7.

8.

8.

9.

9.

“

When Grandma told me he had died, I didn't believe her. It didn't make any sense because I knew he was vaccinated and healthy. All these other people got COVID and they were fine. Why him?

”



text time

What are some texts you wish you could send to your person? How do you imagine they might respond? (If your person didn't text, imagine what you would write if they did).

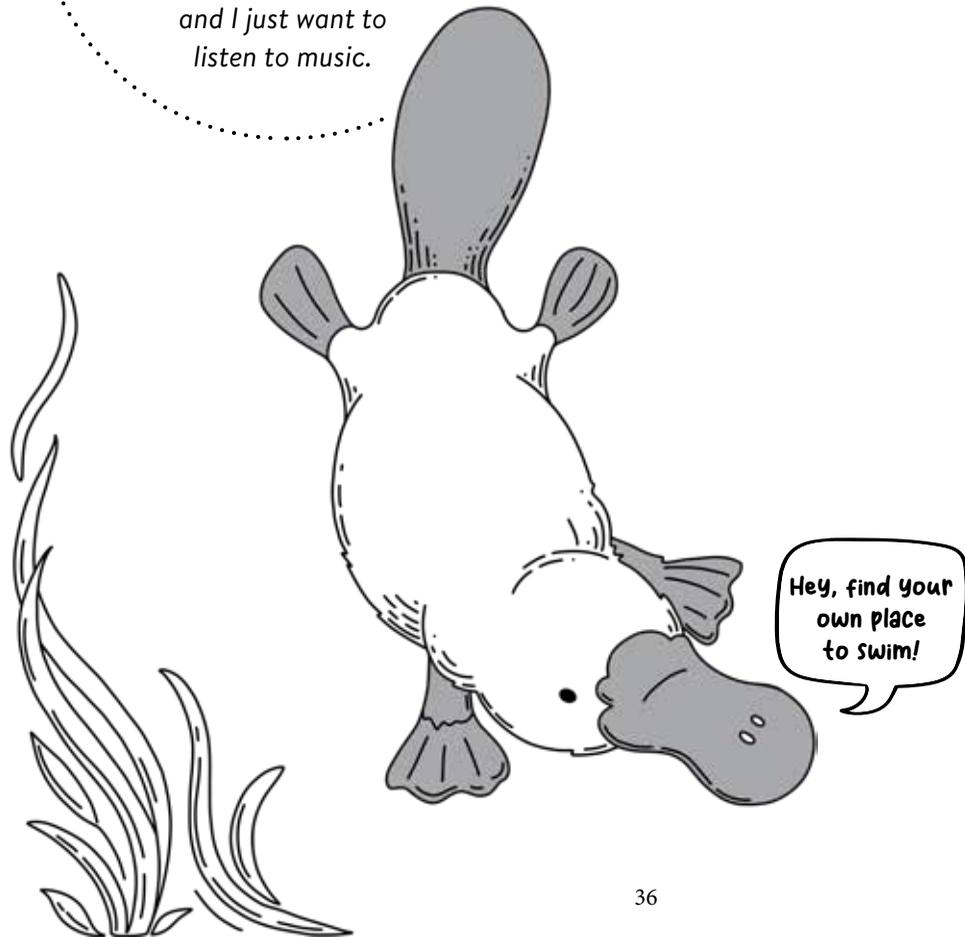


Sometimes You're a Llama Sometimes You're a Platypus

Did you know that the platypus is one of most solitary animals on the planet? Llamas, on the other hand (hoof) are pack animals and stick close to their llama friends and family. Sometimes we grieve like platypuses, different from everyone around us. Other times we're more llama-ish and our grief looks like the people we are closest to.

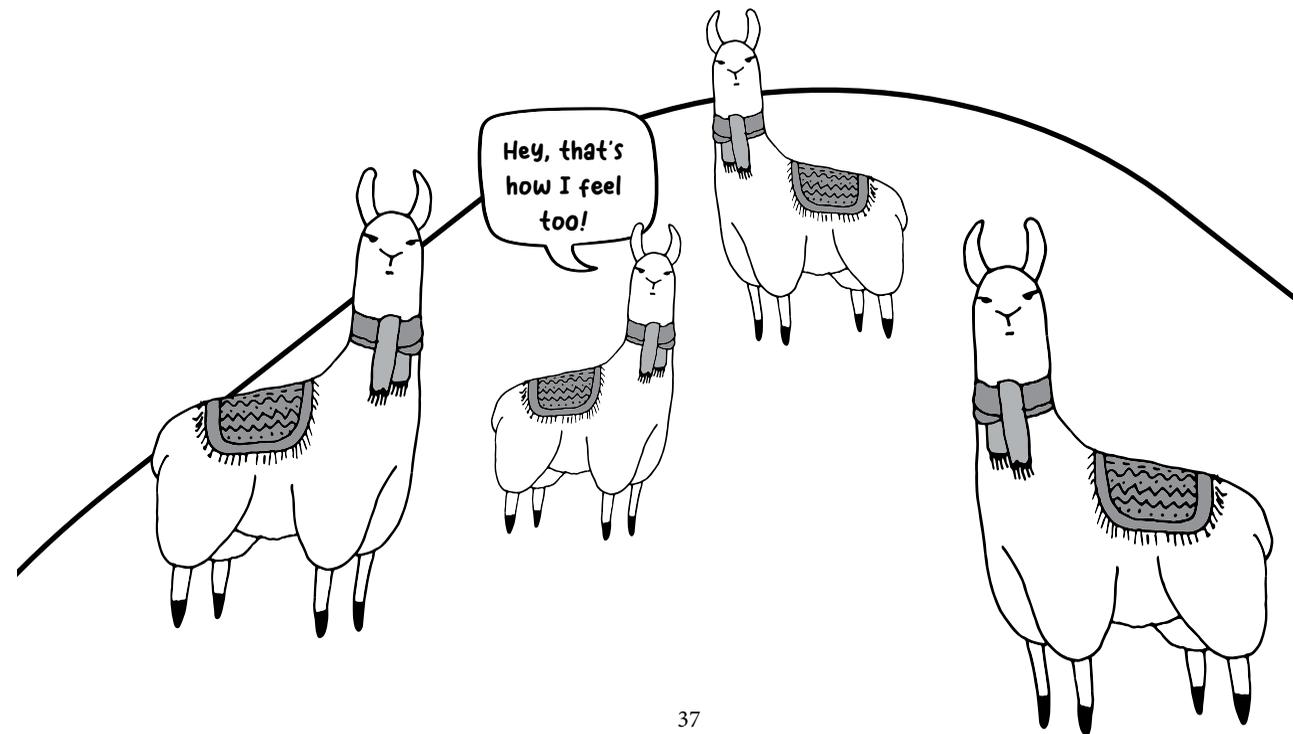
**Write or draw ways
your grief is different from
your family and friends...**

*For example: We have different
thoughts about how they got
COVID – OR – They want to
talk about it all the time,
and I just want to
listen to music.*



**Write or draw ways
your grief is similar to
your friends and family....**

*For example: We all like having
a lot of photos up – OR –
My mom and I both wish
he'd gotten the vaccine.*



“

After the vaccines came out, I tried really hard to convince my mom to get one, but she refused. I'm mad at her and wonder if she would have survived, but mostly I just miss her a lot.

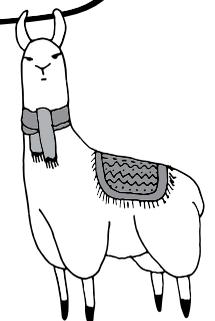
”

WHO KNEW?

Some teens say things like, **“Who knew I'd be able to get up in front of people and talk about my dad?”** or **“Who knew I'd be able to keep up my grade in math?”** or **“Who knew I'd get so close with my aunt after my mom died?”**

What are some things you're surprised by or proud of since your person died?

I didn't think I'd want to play soccer since he came to all of my games, but I stuck with the team because it helps me feel closer to him



UNUSUAL ROOMMATES

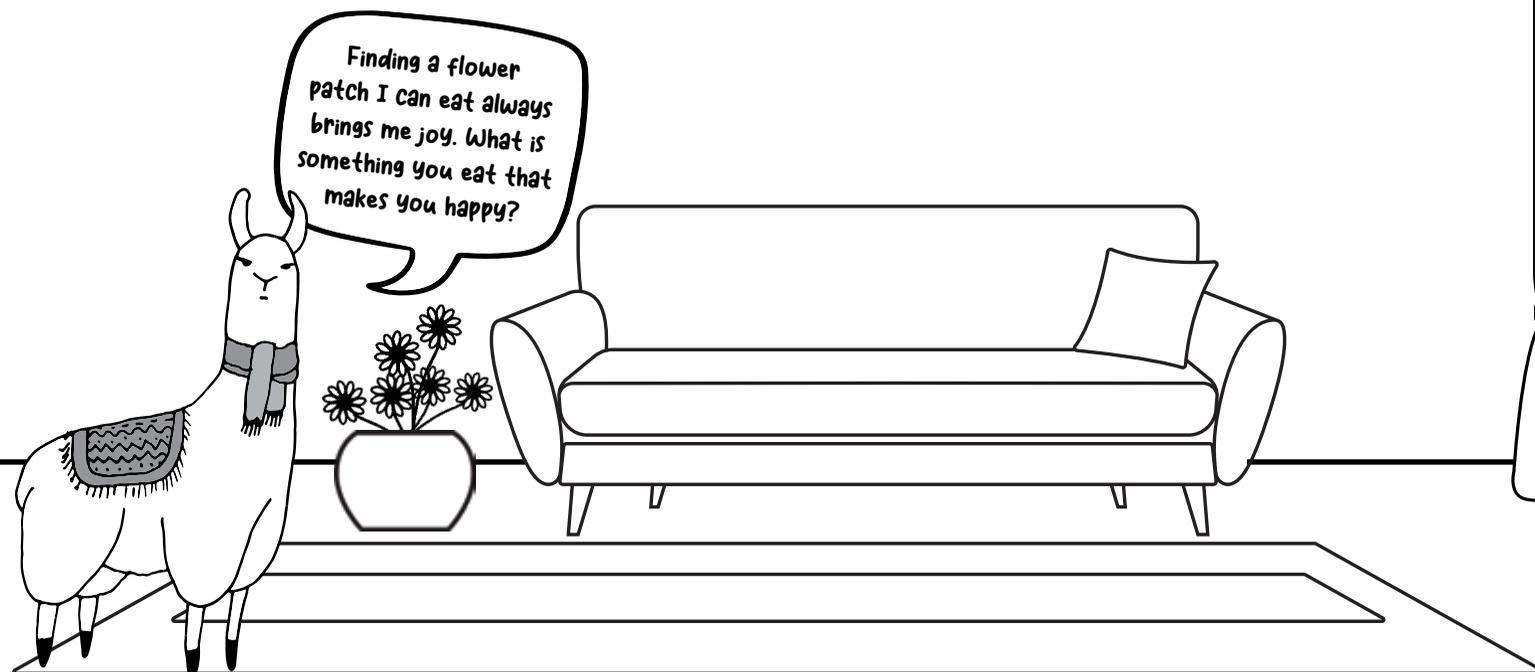
joy & grief

A lot of teens feel guilty when they catch themselves having fun or not thinking about their person. That's the trick though – grief and joy can live in the same place and not cancel each other out. Even knowing that, it can still be hard to make space for joy.

Write down five people, places, things, or experiences that bring you joy. If you can't think of any, take a moment to look around the space you're in. Are there any objects or people there who bring you some joy? If you still need inspiration, head outside or look out a window and see if you find anything outdoors.

1.

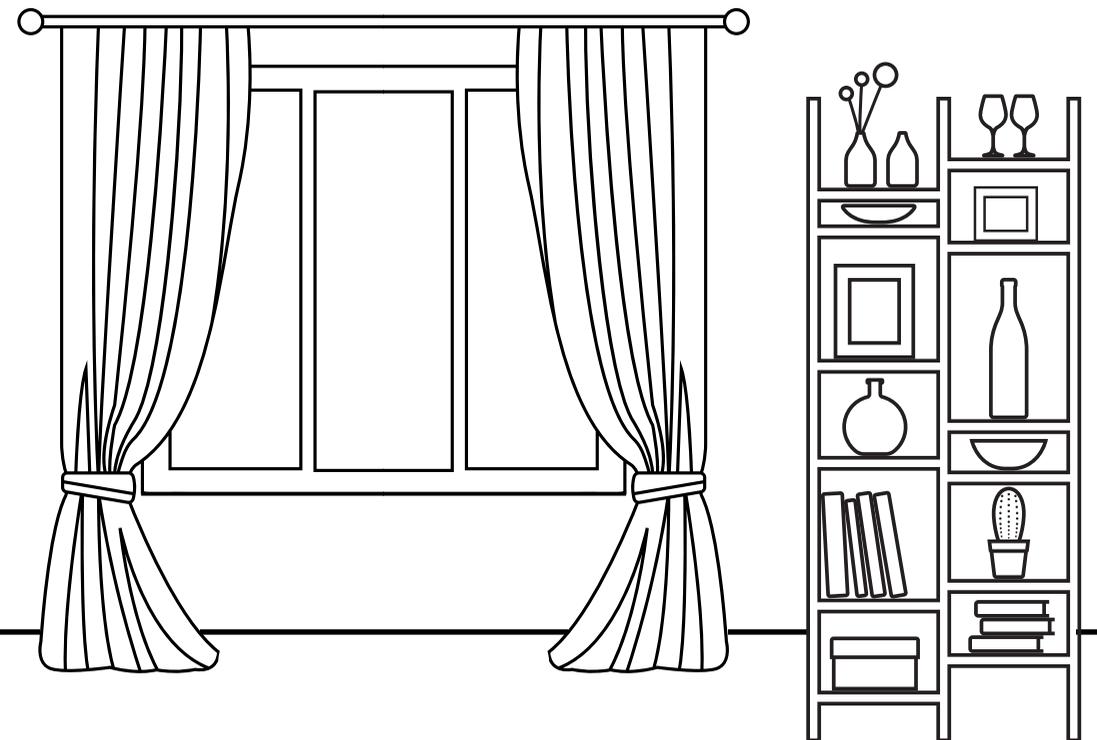
2.



3.

4.

5.



“

When the grief is really hard, three things help: hugging my dog, listening to music, and talking about them with my grandparents. They tell me funny stories about what they were like as a teen.

I love picturing them as my age.

”

Dear You,

Sometimes we wish we could tell the people in our lives who have died about the big things going on – but most of the time we miss being able to tell them about the small, day-to-day things. Write a letter to your person about all the things, big and small, you’ve wanted to tell them about. If you need some ideas, check out the prompts at the bottom of the page.

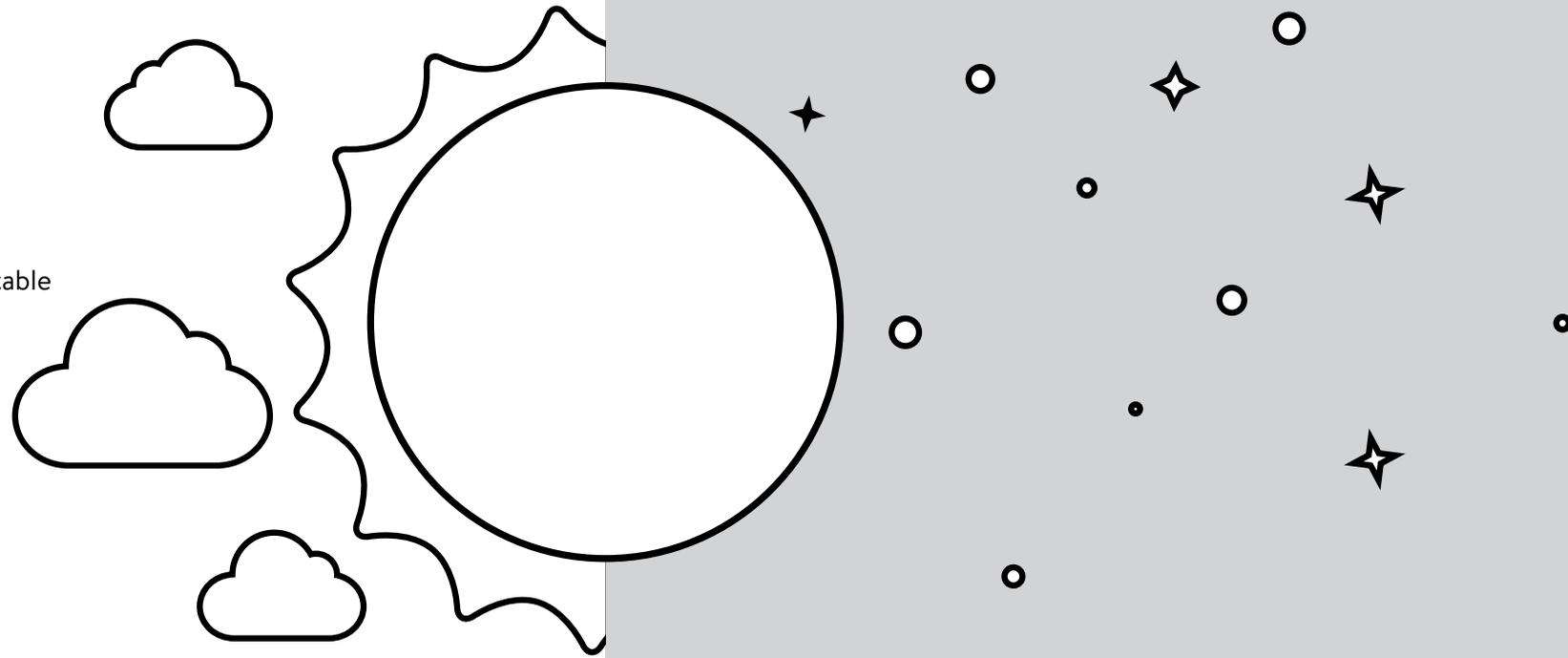
Dear _____

Prompts

- At school...
- My friends...
- Our family...
- One day I hope I can...
- Yesterday...
- Music I think you’d like...
- New shows I’ve watched...

A.M./P.M. ROUTINES

Life might feel really uncertain and unpredictable when someone dies of COVID. Building in morning, evening, and any time of day routines can help. What routines do you have? Which ones would you like to start?



GRIEF PERMISSION SLIP

As teens who have had someone die of COVID, we give ourselves permission to...

- Know the truth about the death, the person who died, and the circumstances surrounding the death
- Ask questions and have them answered honestly
- Be heard and listened to without receiving unsolicited advice
- Be silent and not share our thoughts and emotions out loud
- Disagree with your perceptions and conclusions about COVID and how our people died
- Grieve in our own ways – without hurting ourselves or others
- Feel all the feelings and think all the thoughts of our own unique grief
- Not have to follow the “Stages of Grief”
- Be angry at the circumstances that led to our people being exposed to COVID
- Wonder if we could have done something to prevent the person from getting COVID
- Disagree with people who are insensitive, especially those who give us clichés or inaccurate information
- Have our own beliefs about COVID, vaccines, policy decisions, other factors related to how our people died
- Be involved in the decisions about the rituals related to the death
- (Write in your own) _____

You can contact
Douggy Center at
503-775-5683, visit
them online at douggy.org,
or email them at
help@douggy.org!



