



BEGINNING HARD CONVERSATIONS: A TOOLKIT & ACTIVITY GUIDE

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POSSIBLE USES FOR THIS TOOLKIT:

- Provide your child/teen with the workbook after your initial conversation for them to complete when they are ready/interested
- Gradually, work through each page alongside of your child/teen
- Provide the workbook to a trusted friend/family member to complete or discuss the pages with your child/teen over ice cream
- Discuss at dinnertime altogether as a family
- Incorporate time to do the workbook at a consistent time of day to build in routine/structure and promote on-going communication
- Implement your own ideas sparked from this book!



CAREGIVER GUIDE



TIPS FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS



1

Managing Expectations: No parent ever expects to have a conversation like this in their lifetime. It is painful, messy, and heartbreaking. The goal of talking with your children is NOT that they are free from pain. Instead, one of the goals is to share in grief together, side-by-side. Reactions to grief can be as varied as children themselves.

2

A "Series of Talks": The first conversation about a parent's terminal illness is just the first of many on-going conversations; a "series of talks". Communicate often as a family. Ask questions, respect silence. Be available, present, and open.

3

Speak the Language of a Child: Children need basic, clear communication that is gentle but direct and concrete. Avoid euphemisms (i.e. "won't be here much longer") and name the disease. Honesty with children establishes trust.

4

Listen, Watch, Validate: Children can express many of their emotions through play, so be attentive to any themes you observe. Offer continued honest reassurance that the illness is not contagious or their fault. Be quick to validate their emotions and feelings without interrupting or minimizing their fears.

5

Keep the Routines and Structure: In a world of so much uncertainty and unknowns, children especially need predictability that can come from daily structures and routines. Continue to provide age-appropriate responsibilities for household tasks/chores so the child/teen can continue to feel useful and like part of the team.

6

Encourage Play: Children and teens process their world and emotions through play or activities they enjoy. Empower them in those outlets, encourage friendships with peers. And not only is play good for your children, it is good for you, too. Seek enjoyment together as a family to give you a breath from your grief.

7

It Takes a Village: Involve others in being able to care and support your child. This road is not meant to be walked alone. Seek out professional help to support the specific needs of your grieving child/teen.

8

Follow their Lead: Children will give you cues when they need space or when they have more questions. Follow your child's lead for how much they want to know, how involved they want to be in the loved one's care. Be honest if you don't have an answer to their questions. Being patient in the unknowns is an important life skill.

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS: HOW TO HOLD "SERIES OF TALKS" ABOUT TERMINAL ILLNESS

EMBRACE

GIVE SPACE/PERMISSION TO...

- ASK QUESTIONS, PLAY, PROCESS, DISENGAGE/BE SILENT, ETC.

- CONTINUE TO OFFER REASSURANCE & EMPATHY
- FOSTER RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS
- MODEL & REFLECT YOUR OWN FEELINGS
- PAY ATTENTION, LISTEN

STRATEGIZE

- INCLUDE YOUR ALLIES (SPOUSE, PARTNER, CLOSE FRIEND/FAMILY MEMBER) TO HELP YOU PROCESS
- WHAT SUPPORT DO YOU NEED?
- FORMULATE A PLAN ON WHAT YOU WANT TO SAY
- DETERMINE SETTING

ASSESS

IN A PLACE THAT IS SAFE, QUIET SURROUNDED BY COMFORT, LEARN:

- WHAT DOES YOUR CHILD ALREADY KNOW?
- WHAT CONCRETE THINGS HAVE THEY NOTICED/SEEN/HEARD?
- LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN

DISCLOSE CONCRETE INFO

- NAME THE DISEASE
- EXPLAIN THE DISEASE IN CLEAR, CONCRETE TERMS
- FOCUS ON HOW THE DISEASE IMPACTS THE BODY
- WHEN APPROPRIATE, VISUALS CAN BE HELPFUL
- IT IS OKAY TO SHOW HOW YOU FEEL...VERBALIZE AND MODEL YOUR OWN EMOTIONS
- PROVIDE, CORRECT, OR VALIDATE NEW INFORMATION

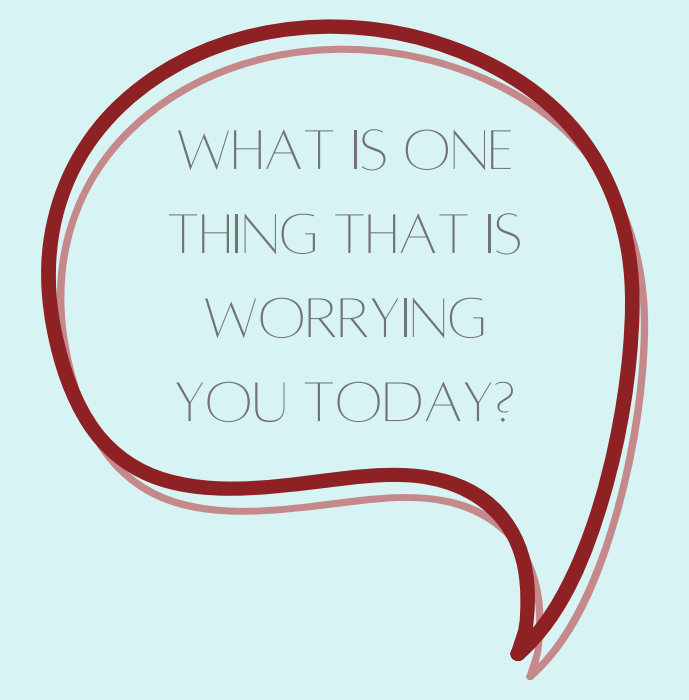
ALERT: "WARNING SHOT"

- ALERT CHILDREN THAT THERE IS HARD NEWS TO BE SHARED
- SETS THE APPROPRIATE TONE AND GIVES A BRIEF MOMENT OF PREPARATION
- "I HAVE SOME SAD NEWS...", "WE ARE VERY WORRIED ABOUT ____"
- GIVES SPACE FOR EMOTION...THEIRS AND YOURS

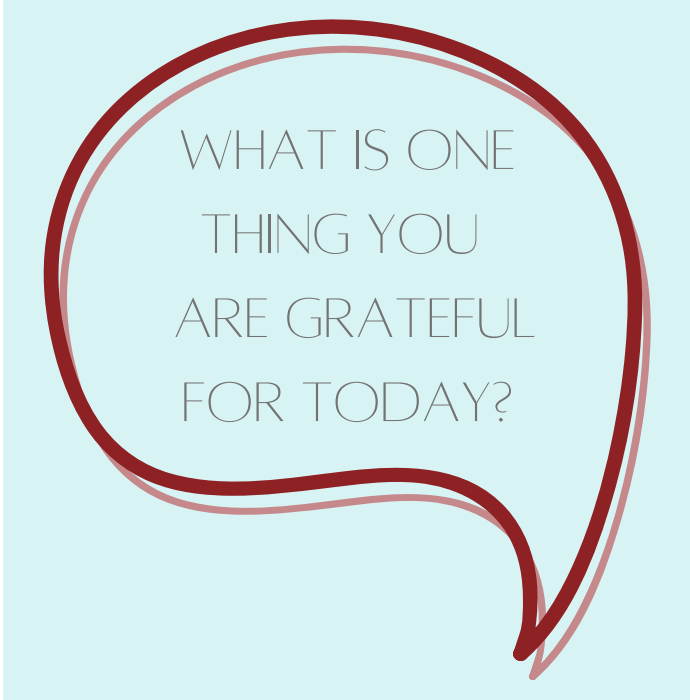


CONVERSATION CARDS

Keeping the communication lines open as a family is critical as you take each day at a time, especially as feelings can come and go and can change in an instant. Use these conversations cards to promote ongoing dialogue as a whole family. Cut them and pass them around the dinner table, incorporate them as you take turns playing a board game, use them as a prompt before bedtime.



WHAT IS ONE
THING THAT IS
WORRYING
YOU TODAY?



WHAT IS ONE
THING YOU
ARE GRATEFUL
FOR TODAY?



WHAT IS ONE
THING/GOAL
YOU WANT TO
DO THIS WEEK?



WHAT IS ONE
THING YOU ARE
LOOKING
FORWARD TO?

WHAT IS
SOMETHING THAT
IS BOTHERING
YOU?

WHAT IS A
QUESTION YOU
KEEP THINKING
ABOUT?

WHO IS SOMEONE
YOU REALLY
APPRECIATE?

WHAT WAS THE
BEST PART OF
YOUR WEEK OR
DAY?

WHAT IS
SOMETHING YOU
WISH PEOPLE
KNEW ABOUT
YOU?

WHAT IS ONE
MEMORY YOU
REALLY LOVE?

WHAT IS
SOMETHING THAT
CAN ALWAYS
CHEER YOU UP?

HOW ARE YOU
GETTING GOOD
OR GROWING AT
SOMETHING?

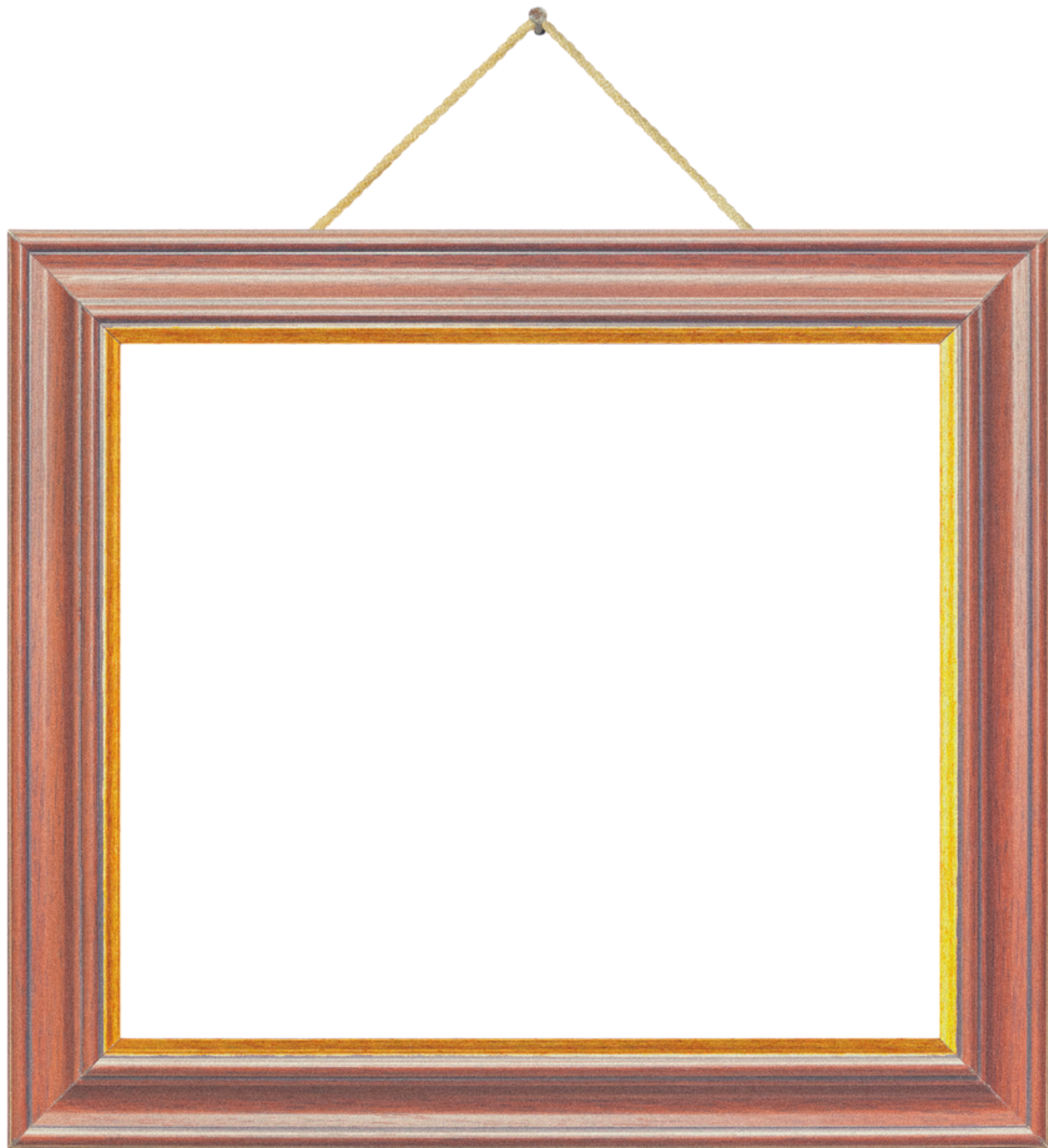


CHILDREN'S ACTIVITY BOOK



FAMILY PORTRAIT

DRAW OR PASTE A PICTURE OF YOUR FAMILY.



Further Discussion

- What do you love about your family?
- Talk about each person in your family.



THREE THINGS I LOVE ABOUT MY FAMILY...

There are no relationships in the world quite as special as your relationship with your family. What do you love about them? Or what do you love doing together?

1

2

3

Further Discussion

- What things will change and what things will stay the same since your loved one got sick?



FEELING SAFE means...
that you feel especially
comfortable and yourself.
You don't worry, you feel in
control, and your body is relaxed.

A PERSON I FEEL SAFE WITH
DRAW/PASTE/OR WRITE ABOUT THAT PERSON.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thick, hand-drawn style teal border. It occupies the lower half of the page and is intended for a user to draw, paste, or write about a person they feel safe with.



A PLACE OR ROOM I FEEL SAFE IS...

DRAW OR WRITE ABOUT IT.

IN THIS PLACE...

I SEE...



I HEAR...



I TOUCH...



I SMELL...

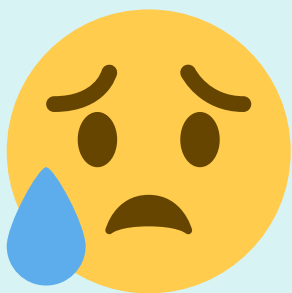


I TASTE...



WHEN I FOUND OUT MY SPECIAL PERSON IS SICK, I FELT...

CIRCLE OR WRITE IN HOW YOU FEEL.



SAD



HAPPY



CONFUSED



SCARED



ANGRY



NOTHING

ANOTHER FEELING... _____

/OTHER THOUGHTS. _____

MY SPECIAL PERSON IS SICK. THE SICKNESS LOOKS LIKE...

IMAGINE WHAT THE SICKNESS LOOKS LIKE IF IT WERE A CHARACTER...IS IT BIG OR SMALL? WHAT DOES ITS FACE LOOK LIKE? WHAT COLOR IS IT? WRITE OR DRAW ABOUT IT.



I AM WONDERING ABOUT...

After you learned more about how your special person is sick, you may have a lot of questions still. There may be a lot that is unknown, but you are safe to ask your questions and wonder together.

WHAT ARE YOUR QUESTIONS?

Question

Answer



Question

Answer



Question

Answer



Question

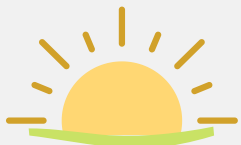
Answer



MY DAY LOOKS LIKE...

You have gone through a lot of change. And change can feel hard or scary sometimes. So, what are some things that stay the same every day and don't change? What are some things you always do? Or things you look forward to each day?

Morning



Afternoon



Evening



Options to cut/paste or circle



EAT



SLEEP OR REST



SCHOOL



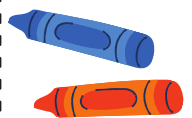
GET DRESSED



READ



SPORTS OR
SPECIAL ACTIVITIES



ARTS/CRAFTS



PLAY



TALK/PLAY
WITH FRIENDS



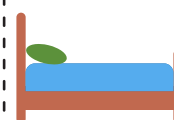
CLEAN UP



OUTSIDE TIME



PRAY



HELP CLEAN



WATCH SHOW

IN CONTROL AND OUT OF THE CIRCLE CONTROL.

When someone you love is sick, it can feel like there is so much out of your control. You may feel helpless. It can be important to recognize the things that are hard and feel out of your control. AND, it can also be important to try to look for the things that you DO have control over. Write or paste from the cards what feels in your circle of control and what feels outside your circle.

OUT OF MY CIRCLE

...

IN MY CIRCLE...




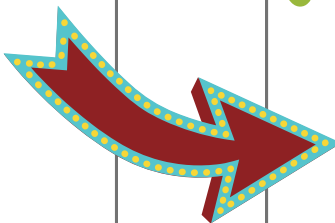


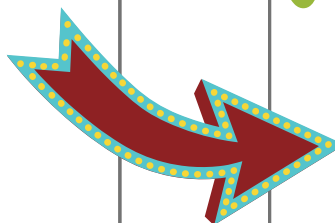
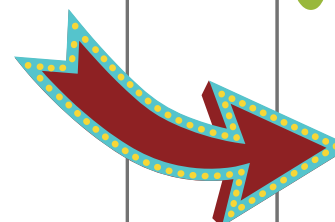
CIRCLE OF CONTROL CARDS.

CUT AND PASTE THESE CARDS (OR ADD YOUR OWN) TO HELP SEE WHAT IS IN AND OUTSIDE OF YOUR CONTROL.



CAN & CANT'S

A PARENT'S ILLNESS IS UNFAIR. IT'S HARD. IT HURTS. THERE MAY BE MANY THINGS THAT FEEL TAKEN AWAY FROM YOU AND THINGS YOUR SPECIAL PERSON CAN'T DO. IT'S OKAY TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE LOSS...AND THEN THINK ABOUT WHAT YOUR SPECIAL PERSON CAN STILL DO.

 <div>MY SPECIAL PERSON CAN'T...</div> <div></div>	 <div><div>BUT MY SPECIAL PERSON CAN...</div><div></div></div>
 <div>MY SPECIAL PERSON CAN'T...</div> <div></div>	 <div><div>BUT MY SPECIAL PERSON CAN...</div><div></div></div>
 <div>MY SPECIAL PERSON CAN'T...</div> <div></div>	 <div><div>BUT MY SPECIAL PERSON CAN...</div><div></div></div>



WORRY PET

Things may feel scary or uncertain. And that can cause a lot to worry about. What are you worrying about?

Write your worries down and then feed them to your home-made "Worry Pet." Make your worry pet out of a paper bag. Decorate your pet how you would like, especially with a mouth so the pet can eat and carry your worries for you.

WORRY PET FOOD

What are you worried about today? Write it down or draw a picture of your worry.
Then, feed it to your worry pet.

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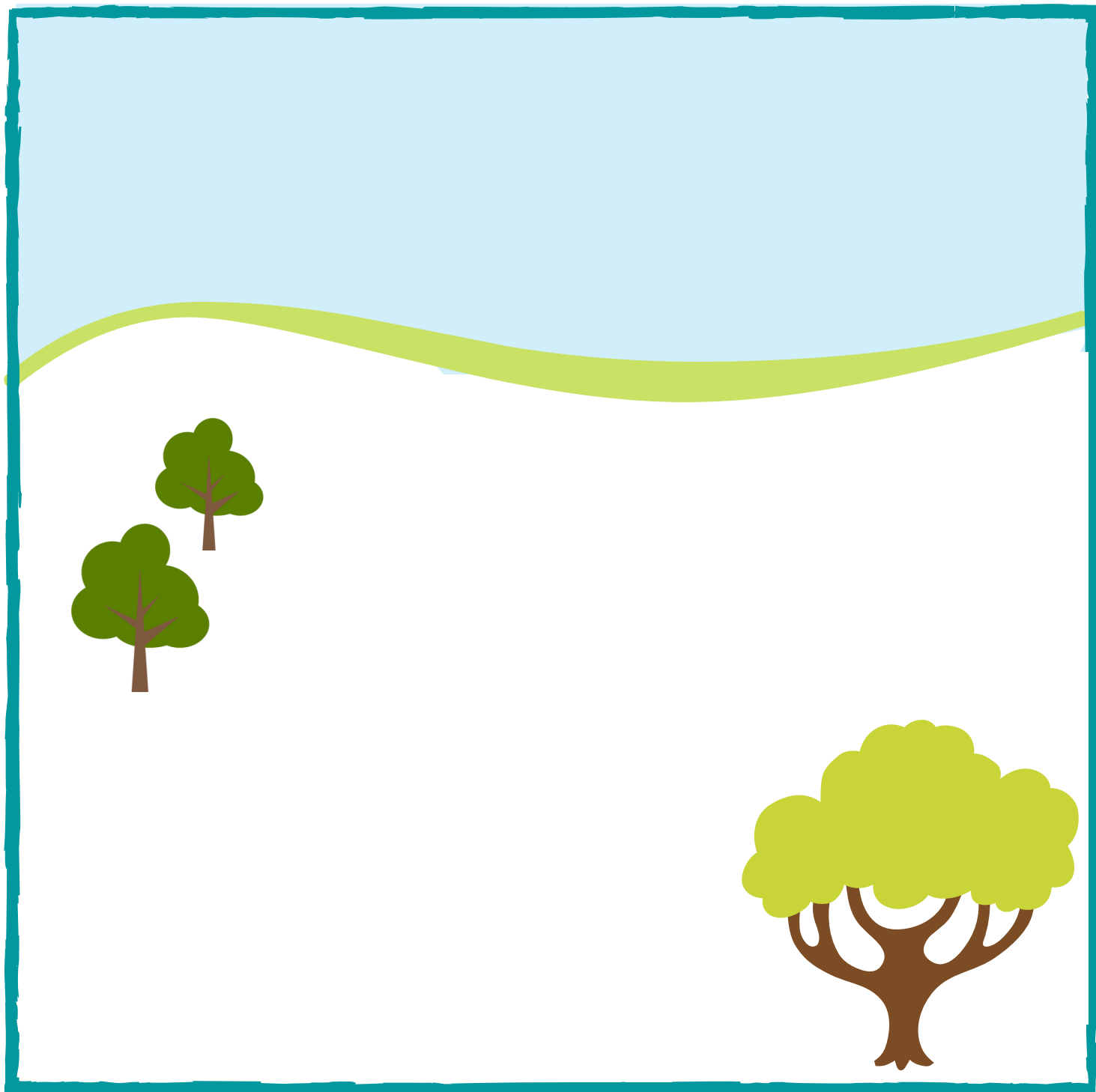


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THE ROAD AHEAD...

WHEN SOMEONE YOU LOVE IS SICK, YOU MAY NOT KNOW WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT. DRAW ABOUT WHAT YOU THINK THE ROAD AHEAD LOOKS LIKE FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY...DOES IT FEEL BUMPY? DOES IT FEEL SMOOTH? IS IT TWISTY OR STRAIGHT?



I DREAM ABOUT...

WRITE OR DRAW A PICTURE ABOUT WHAT YOUR HOPES AND DREAM.

IT COULD BE A DREAM FOR YOUR FAMILY, A HOPE FOR YOUR SPECIAL PERSON, OR A WISH FOR YOU!



TEEN JOURNAL





FAMILY TREE



WRITE ABOUT YOUR FAMILY OR DRAW A FAMILY TREE. HOW DO YOU RELATE TO EACH PERSON?





TOP THREE



WHAT IMMEDIATE FEELINGS DID YOU FEEL WHEN YOU WERE TOLD ABOUT YOUR PARENT'S ILLNESS?



1.

2.



3.



THE FEELING THAT IS THE HARDEST RIGHT NOW IS....
WHY?



ONE PERSON I FEEL COMFORTABLE SHARING THESE EMOTIONS WITH THIS WEEK IS...





UNANSWERED QUESTIONS



WRITE ALL YOUR QUESTIONS YOU ARE LEFT
WONDERING ABOUT AFTER TALKING WITH YOUR
PARENT ABOUT THEIR ILLNESS.





A NOTE TO THE ILLNESS



WRITE A NOTE TO YOUR PARENT'S ILLNESS. WHAT DO YOU HATE ABOUT IT? HOW ARE YOU WRONGED BY IT? DON'T HOLD BACK.





MANAGING THE STRESS



THINK ABOUT A TIME IN THE PAST WHEN YOU FELT OVERWHELMED. WHAT HAS HELPED YOU MANAGE THE STRESS WHEN YOU HAVE FELT THAT WAY?



WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOU CAN TRY TODAY?





GOALS



WHAT TOP 3 GOALS DO YOU HAVE FOR YOUR SELF
THIS WEEK?



1.

2.

3.



WHAT TOP 3 GOALS DO YOU HAVE FOR YOUR
FAMILY FOR THE NEXT MONTH?



1.

2.

3.

