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A Child's Mental Health Journey: Using an Activity Book as a Guide for Mental Health Literacy
and Emotional, Social and Behavioral Development

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A Child's Mental Health Journey: Using an Activity Book as a Guide for Mental Health Literacy and Emotional, Social and Behavioral Development

Like adults, children experience mental health symptoms that can have negative effects on their life and development. According to the CDC (2018), 1 in 6 children has a mental health disorder are 2-8 years old. The prevalence of many mental health disorders increases as children age, and those 6 to 11 years old are more likely to have behavioral problems. There are many theories of why this may be, including the increase in the number of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) a child may have. Those who are exposed to trauma during childhood are at greater risk for lifelong health problems. About 11% of children with 3 or more ACEs have a higher chance of developing a mental health condition than those who had zero (CDC, 2018). These numbers are high and may continue to increase if interventions are not in place. Mental health interventions and decreasing mental health effects can and should be accessible to every child and one way to ensure broad access to mental health information and identify children in need of mental health intervention is in the classroom. Many life factors are affected by mental health, including emotions, behaviors, and social skills, and interventions should be designed to support these areas. The purpose of this project is to address ways that mental health can be supported in children by addressing areas of development, including emotions, lifestyle, and social skills.

The literature review below details some of the psychological research literature about areas of development like emotions, behaviors, and a social life that could support the mental health of children. First, mental health literacy will be explored including the importance of learning about mental health and its role in the classroom. The next topic is how emotional

development is taught in the classroom. Topics such as stress and mindfulness are explored and how children can utilize these skills to improve their mental health. Next, there is some research on how social skills are taught in the classroom and how strong communication and problem-solving skills can contribute to mental health. Lastly, health behaviors and lifestyle are discussed in the ways of diet, physical activity, and exercise and how they are related to mental health.

At the end of this paper, there is a section describing the process that went into creating the activity book that is included with this paper. This activity book is designed to educate children on mental health and how to support their mental wellness in areas of development. This section describes the inspiration for the book. An explanation of the title of the book and content layout is discussed in this section. The theme of the book is also important to discuss, and how the title, the theme, and the purpose of the book are all interconnected. Lastly, the activities are further explained, and the purpose of each activity is in the book.

Literature Review

Investigating current educational efforts in teaching mental health literacy and development is essential in crafting an activities book. Much of this review explores research taking place in the classroom, including games and curriculums. This literature review summarizes psychological research on ways children can be taught mental health skills in the classroom. The review below also highlights the importance of many of the topics selected for inclusion in the activities book. In this section, literature on mental health literacy and social, emotional, and behavioral development will be further explored.

Mental Health Literacy

The term MHL was first used in 1997 by Jorm to describe “knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders which aid their recognition, management or prevention (Kutcher et al., 2016). The education supports decreasing the stigma and how to find help. As a child develops, they can continue to learn more about mental health, support in decreasing the stigma surrounding it, and improve their mental wellness. This section focuses on research examining mental health literacy in schools.

Mental health literacy can be taught in the classroom the same as other subjects covered in schools. Ojio and colleagues (2019) demonstrated the feasibility and efficacy of a short class-based mental health literacy program for 5th and 6th-grade students (Ojio et al., 2019). The program was a 45-minute classroom intervention that focused on mental disorder prevalence, mental health, and lifestyle and seeking help from a trusted adult in an age-appropriate manner. Before the intervention, 662 children from nine elementary schools in Tokyo self-reported their knowledge of mental health, recognition of a mental health state, and the importance of seeking help. Researchers also asked students if they would ask for help for themselves or a peer. The session consisted of a pre-test, a 10-minute animated short film containing mental health topics, and a post-test immediately after and 3 months later.

Results indicated that student knowledge of mental health, understanding of different mental states, and wanting to help peers with mental health problems improved in the immediate post-test and 3 months afterward. The intervention was brief, but in the end, the students were able to quickly understand and learn from the mental health literacy program. This type of education is important, and it is key to highlight that it is not that difficult to incorporate these concepts into a child’s education. In the case of this study, mental health literacy improved with

a simple 10 min video. However, this intervention was passive and primarily involved watching a video. Some students may have had a problem engaging with the video and the content. Having a more interactive program in the classroom or at home may be equally or more beneficial. Engagement and application to real-world situations may have greater benefits. Some researchers have focused on developing interactive games as another way to promote mental health literacy among school-aged children.

Games and puzzles are a fun way for children to learn something new, whether that be improving vocabulary, developing motor skills, or acquiring mental health literacy. Sometimes games, especially when played with peers, can be highly beneficial in developing a variety of skills. One game that aimed to support a child's growth in understanding mental health in a fun and educational way was developed by Jayman & Ventouris (2020). An exploratory study was conducted to test the efficacy of their socio-emotional intervention card game, called Book of Beasties (BoB), which aimed to destigmatize mental health, promote wellbeing, and develop emotional literacy. The game consists of little beasts, each with associated worry and comfort items, and children support them by completing an interactive activity. The study investigated whether BoB could be an effective resource for school staff who are responsible for mental health support for children. Participants included four students aged 8 and 9 years, two were boys, and two were girls. The game was led by the school staff, who followed game instructions, and researchers observed the students. Researchers conducted observations during gameplay and conducted interviews after the game was played. These observations and statements made in the interview were operationalized to determine the success of the single session. Throughout the game, it was clear children understood they needed to support the beasts in their worries and

generate solutions, even connecting them to humans. They also showed empathy towards their favorite beast card and even related to them. This activity can educate children on their mental health and have compassion for others.

Tools like this are highly interactive and provide the chance for children to engage in play, which is highly beneficial for development. The students in this research project were able to develop their socio-emotional skills in a fun and engaging way. This study highlights the importance of interacting with the information children learn and applying them to everyday life. Even though the sample was small, it shows possible outcomes children can have in response to this game. One thing that stands out is the idea of using monsters in this game. Children love fantasy and being able to play pretend. However, it might be even more beneficial to include examples of someone like themselves or their peers in the game. There is no doubt that the monsters are engaging, but there are a possibility older age groups would no longer engage in the fantasy world.

When engaging in mental health literacy, children can have a better understanding of what it is while gaining the tools to be able to support their mental health. Small classroom interventions can educate children on their mental health, how to seek support, and wanting to help their peers with mental health problems. There have also been some interactive and creative ways for students to learn about mental health. A simple card game has been helpful in social-emotional engagement. However, there is a lot that comes with understanding mental health and how to support it. The following sections investigate ways mental health literacy can be better understood in emotional, social, and behavioral development

Emotional Development

Emotional development allows children to learn about their own emotions, how to control them, and what happens when emotions take over. Understanding emotions, stress, and self-regulation can have benefits for the mental health of children. This section outlines current research on what is taking place in the classroom for a child to learn about their emotions and effective ways to control them, especially mindfulness.

Emotional self-regulation is an important skill to learn. If not taught properly, there may be further problems in emotional expression. Researchers explore this important and how a child can learn this skill throughout their life (Eisenberg et al., 2010). The definition of emotional regulation is discussed, and the role genetics and environment play in its development. There are many environmental factors discussed in this review, including socialization, expression, and discussion of emotions. Socialization and emotional regulation look at how parents and family can impact how a child self-regulates. Expressing emotions is important to consider in self-regulation, including safe places to express emotions. Discussion of emotions is explored, such as the meaning of emotions and what may happen if they are not expressed. Intervention is also for understanding emotional regulation with programs like PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies). This research provides a background of what takes place during development and how parents and educators can do better in this process. Parents play a significant role in this, and because children are always watching, they must be effectively modeling these behaviors.

One of the ways that emotional self-regulation can be taught in the classroom is through mindfulness training. Mindfulness can bring awareness to one's present experiences while also having an attitude of acceptance towards it. Mindfulness training can benefit physical and mental

health, including stress management, anxiety, and social interactions. Interventions can take place in the classroom and improve stress, behavior, and cognition. The absence of mindfulness, mind-wandering, where we are not focusing on the present, is connected to unhappiness, and the mind easily goes to this state (Creswell, 2017). In addition, mindfulness interventions are becoming easier to access through smartphones and the internet. Additional programs and therapy are also utilized. This understanding of mindfulness provides a baseline of what it can do for anyone, especially those early in life. The popularity of mindfulness in the classroom is now becoming an aspect of education. Mindfulness should be accessible to everyone, therefore should be incorporated into the classroom.

Mindfulness in the classroom has become much more popular as a way for a child to access techniques used to manage self-regulation. Researchers conducted a meta-analysis to further examine the research on mindfulness programs used in schools (Zenner et al., 2014). Twenty-four studies were utilized that included 1348 students, with 846 serving as controls that were in grades 1 to 12. The most prominent mindfulness exercises in the studies were focusing on breath, understanding thoughts and emotions, and being aware of senses among other types of interventions. The outcomes of these interventions were measured based on cognitive performance, emotional problems, stress and coping, resilience, and third-person ratings, many measured based on self-report questionnaires. The results showed that mindfulness had the most significant effect on cognitive performance and smaller but still significant effects on resilience and stress. This meta-analysis shows there is an effect on mindfulness in the classroom can have lasting effects on students.

Children go through stressful experiences throughout their life. There is this idea that children cannot get stressed because they have it easy. School can be an anxiety-inducing experience for many, and traumatic experiences can happen at any time causing a wide range of emotions. Children should be taught how to regulate their emotions as it is an important skill that will be helpful throughout their life. It should be accessible to everyone and included in school programming as that allows the ability for any child to learn the skills. The research shows that there are significant mental health benefits to mindfulness and a decrease in stress and an increase in cognitive performance and resilience.

Social Development

Social development involves children learning how to interact with their peers, friends, and family. Problem-solving is another aspect of social development, including collaboration with others and proper communication. Social interaction and spending time with others has a positive effect on mental health (Bauer et al., 2021), therefore, it is important to focus on social development in early childhood. Similar to emotional development, social development is associated with positive mental health in both children and adults. This section focuses on how children are learning about social development in the classroom.

Social relationships, especially in school, are significant in the development of a child. Having poor peer and teacher relationships in the classroom can lead to disliking school, a decrease in participation, and performing poorly academically. A classroom is a place where students can learn how to develop healthy, supportive relationships. A study conducted by Garcia Bacete and colleagues (2019) demonstrated the long-term efficacy of an intervention to improve social relationships among first-grade elementary school children in Spain. As a

classroom intervention, researchers tested the GREI (Spanish acronym for Interuniversity Research Group of Peer Rejection). Peer processes in Spain are similar to that of North America, therefore, their intervention was developed based on North American interventions. 43 children from Spain participated, and 229 first graders were the comparison sample from four elementary schools. 214 first graders were the intervention sample from the same four schools following the year the comparison group was first graders. The program focused on general students but could also focus on children who are the most disliked by peers. This intervention was designed to support positive relationships in elementary school between children and their peers and teachers. Important factors that were targeted in this study were the social and behavioral skills of children, relationships with peers, positive teacher-student relationships, parental support, and parent-teacher relationships.

During the fall as a first-grader, students completed a questionnaire assessing peer liking and disliking, how the student perceived their peers to like or dislike them, overall peer acceptance, and children's perceptions of their teachers' warmth and organization. At the end of second grade, students completed the posttest with the same items. Results showed those who received the intervention had better peer outcomes, including being liked more by peers, a higher approval from peers than expected, expecting to receive disliking from peers, and reported higher overall peer acceptance and relationships with teachers. However, the benefits of GREI were more evident in the target children who were the most disliked by peers. This study was an example of classroom interventions that can take place and an evaluation of them to determine whether they are effective or not. It highlights the importance of intervention, especially in schools where it is accessible to every child.

There are benefits to learning how to problem solve, especially at a young age. Researchers utilized an intervention framework in the classroom that focuses on collaborative problem-solving skills through communication, problem-solving plans, and organized work (Gu et al., 2015). The focus of the study was to explore strategies to improve these skills in students. The intervention framework further develops social interaction skills that may improve collaborative problem-solving skills. These skills include setting up rules for group discussion, utilizing group plans for problem-solving, and creating evidence-based arguments. To study the effectiveness of this intervention, they wanted to look at how interventions affect group and problem-solving skills.

Participants were two 3rd grade classes with students ages 9 to 11. One was the treatment class (TC), and the other was the control class (CC), which was assigned randomly. The pretest assessed the students' observation, identification, and reasoning skills. Both classrooms worked in groups to finish a project on air quality where they had to prepare to solve the problem, solve the problem, and wrap up the project with their solutions. The TC group received the interventions, establishing group rules, utilizing tools towards a solution, and concluding with a reflective discussion. The CC group was also tasked to complete the project but did not receive any support on problem-solving. The findings indicated that the intervention was supportive in developing group and problem-solving skills. TC students were better at group discourse by following group rules and making plans for their project than the CC students. This study explains how to teach problem-solving in an age-appropriate way. This is in a school situation, but some of these techniques can be used to problem-solve in daily life and work on communication skills.

There are positive effects to social interactions for children. It can support their mental health, and because of that, it is important to allow children to work on their social skills. That is why the classroom is the best way to not only practice by spending time with friends but learn new skills to interact with anyone. Interventions in the classroom can have lasting effects, including being liked by peers and a decrease in expectations of peers disliking them. These types of interactions allow students to have more confidence in themselves. Learning how to problem-solve at a young age in the classroom allows those skills to be carried throughout development. Research shows that these interventions in the classroom increase these skills, including following rules and making project plans. Relationships in life mean a lot to everyone, and there is nothing better than allowing children to get better at being a friend or someone supportive.

Lifestyle Behaviors and Mental Health

Throughout development, children learn to conform to standards, especially within lifestyle choices and taking care of themselves. Behavioral development typically involves manners and appropriate behaviors in specific situations but should also be considered a part of lifestyle choices, including nutrition, exercise, and sleep. This section explores current research on behavior and lifestyle, how they affect the development and mental health of a child, and how they are being taught in the classroom.

The lifestyle of a child should be considered when evaluating their mental health and wellness. Researchers assessed the relationships between behavioral lifestyle factors and emotional functioning in a large, population-representative sample (Hoare et al., 2019). The study included 2,240 school children ages 9 to 13 years old. In addition to general demographics,

the students answered questions from the Dartmouth COOP Functional Health Assessment charts/ World Organization of Family Doctors (COOPS/WONCA) that assessed quality of life where many questions asked about emotional functioning, including how to resolve their emotional problems. The students also reported their dietary intake for 3 days, focusing on their fruit, vegetables, and soft drink consumption. Researchers also measured the children's physical activity and time spent watching tv and playing video games. Researchers found that females were at a greater risk for poor emotional functioning than males. They also found that being overweight or obese, having less than 3 hours of physical activity a day, and soft drink consumption was associated with poor emotional functioning. This study highlights the relationship between lifestyle choices and mental health. However, this study was conducted as a survey with participants and their families answering the questions. There is a chance the findings are inaccurate due to reports being falsely estimated.

The study above provides a general overview of the effects physical activity and diet can have on mental health. Researchers have investigated both and how they can benefit overall well-being in children. Engaging in physical activity may have positive effects on mental health in children. In completing a meta-analysis, researchers were able to investigate the effect of physical activity interventions on mental health (Rodriguez-Ayllon et al., 2019). This study looked at all studies determining the relationship between mental health in preschoolers, children, and adolescents to physical activity. They were able to find and review a total of 114 original studies that involved many activities, including yoga, aerobics, and sports. Children and adolescents ages 6 to 18 had a small but significant effect of physical activity on mental health. Physical activity was also found to have positive effects on those who had depression, anxiety,

and stress, and it improved satisfaction with life and psychological well-being among subjects. Therefore, an increase in physical activity may positively support children and adolescents when it comes to their mental health.

Diet also plays a role in affecting mental health among children and adolescents. Researchers conducted a systematic review to further understand the relationship diet has with mental health (O'Neil et al., 2014). They investigated 12 studies that reached these criteria. Healthy diets were characterized as having nutritious food, including vegetables, fruits, fish, and other healthy food groups. Unhealthy diets were those high in fat, carbohydrates, and processed food. Mental health was measured in terms of depression, behaviors, and having a diagnosis from a doctor. Findings concluded that unhealthy diets were associated with a decrease in mental health quality. Their evidence, however, was not enough to support the relationship between a healthy diet and improved mental health and if unhealthy diets worsen mental health. This study had a low number of studies utilized, but points in the direction of how dietary patterns can improve mental health or not.

Getting enough sleep for a child is significantly important for their development and their health. There are set recommended hours of sleep a child should get every day. For example, a 6–10-year-old child is recommended to get 9-12 hours of sleep every day (AASM, 2016). Researchers also state that it is important to promote a healthy and ample amount of sleep in early childhood and continue into adolescence. Sleeping the number of recommended hours is associated with better mental health, emotion regulation, learning, and attention among other benefits. Good sleep should not just be about the right amount, but also timing, consistency, and quality.

To further support the research above, more studies have been conducted on the development and wellness of children. A research study was conducted on the importance of sleep for schoolchildren and its benefits for development and academics (Torrijos-Niño et al., 2020). The two purposes of this study were to describe sleep patterns and problems in students and analyze the relationship between sleep quality and quantity with academic achievement. The study consisted of 330 children ages 8-11 from 20 primary schools in Spain. If the students had complete sleep data and information from their parents, they were analyzed in the study. The researchers gave the children and their parents the Children's Sleep Habits Questionnaire that measures sleep problems and habits. They found that about 6% of the children slept less than 9 hours a day, and about 9% reported sleep problems. They also found a negative relationship between sleep duration, sleep problems, and academic achievement, but had no statistical significance. This study highlights the importance of quality and quantity of sleep. Sleep can have a major impact on the brain, and overall health and should have high value at a young age.

Sleep and mental health also have a strong correlation with one another. A research study further explores this idea by understanding the relationship that mental health conditions have with sleep (Blok et al., 2022). The study included 788 10-11-year-olds and 344 13-14-year-olds. The mothers and the children reported on the sleep patterns of the child while wrist actigraphy was used for accurate readings. The mothers also reported the mental health of their children. The study found that the higher the sleep problems, the more mental health problems there were for both age groups. This research study shows the importance of sleep for a child, especially for their brain and mental health.

Mental health is affected by what we do and the decisions that we make. Our lifestyle, including what we eat, how much we move, and our amount of sleep all is affected by our overall mental health. Allowing children to engage in healthy habits is crucial in decreasing their chances of developing depression and anxiety among other psychological conditions. Research shows that physical activity and diet have positive effects on the mental health of children and adolescents. These behaviors should be taught in the classroom to increase accessibility, including in physical education classes, during lunch, and discussed further in the classroom.

This literature review provides a glimpse into the interventions taking place to support children with their mental health. It also outlines what parts of development can be supported to increase wellness for a child. Classroom interventions to support mental health should be happening, and the research shows it is effective and not as time-consuming. These interventions assist in emotional development and how to control them when feelings are high. There is also an increase in mental wellness when there is support in social life. Lastly, health behaviors in diet, exercise, and sleep contribute to overall mental health. This information should be taught to children at a young age so they can apply these habits to their own lives, therefore boosting their mental health. It should also be in the form of classroom interventions, so it is accessible to everyone. Below is an explanation of the way I have developed an intervention for kids to further support their mental health through an activity book.

Creation of the Activity Book

My research on different types of development and mental health guided me in the creation of this activity book. I wanted to find a way to combine my passion for mental health education and graphic design into something for kids. This section of my paper will focus on the

decisions I made about the elements to include in my book. Hopefully, this provides some guidance as there is not much of a manual in writing a book, let alone an activities book.

I could have made a children's book with characters and a plot, but I wanted to find a way for children to be able to engage with the information. Research shows that engaging in these activities or play affects emotional well-being for kids (Howard & McInnes, 2013). They can read about it and then do fun activities that go along with it. Wouldn't it be better to color in the best foods to eat for the brain instead of just listing them?

The audience of this book was also important to me. I wanted to find an audience that would appreciate the activities and coloring pages while being able to understand the skills provided to benefit themselves. My main audience is the ages of 3rd to 6th graders because I have the most experience working with them, and I have noticed they have a willingness to learn and want to have fun doing so.

Inspiration

At the beginning of this project, I conducted my research on what is available in the genre of mental health activity books. I searched Amazon for books using search terms including mental health, mindfulness, activity books for kids, and social skills. These terms are associated with the topics covered in my book. They also offered some additional information I thought was important to include in the book.

In some of the research, the language was a little odd. This means that some of it had negative connotations about the child or those they are close to. For example, a questionnaire about family characteristics I found online had a follow up stating that if a child scored low on the characteristics, there is something wrong with the family and the child needs to talk to

someone about it. It is important to teach a child to talk to a safe adult if needed, but possibly discussed in a more positive way. I always imagined activity books to be a space for positivity and creative freedom and for kids to learn and try new skills. I focused on that for this book.

Title and Layout

Understanding your mental health and that of others is a continuous journey. This can be difficult to understand, especially as a child. Children can understand mental health, but rarely are they given the tools or taught how to manage it. I titled the book “Your Mental Health Journey” as a way to offer a guide to children to learn more about their mental health and ways to improve it.

After having a general idea of the goal for the book, I needed to develop sections or chapters of the book. It was important to me to include a section on what mental health is. In a bit of my research, there were school programs that shared what mental health was and what it looked like for others. I also wanted to include common mental health disorders and feelings that a child may have experienced directly or through association with a family member or peer. Out of 5.8 million children, 9.4% have anxiety problems (CDC, 2018), therefore anxiety is discussed in the activity book due to its high prevalence.

The next sections came from my research on finding a definition of what mental health is. According to MentalHealth.gov (2022), mental health is, “mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices.” This definition explores emotions, social skills, and behaviors or making choices. I wanted to include these subjects in the book because they are also areas of development that a child goes through. I created

interventions in these developmental areas for children so they can benefit them throughout their life.

Theme

As I mentioned, I hope this activities book comes as some sort of guide for any child to learn more about their mental health. With mental health described as a “journey,” I wanted to organize my activities around a “journey” related theme, which led me to focus on different types of traveling and transportation for each section of the book.

There are four main characters featured in the book, a car, a boat, a cloud, and a star. The car and boat are ways of travel, but the cloud and star are associated with travel and location. The cloud represents the sky while the star represents space. Each chapter of the book features these characters in some way. The car is featured in a maze while the cloud is shown in a connect the dots puzzle.

The Activities

It was a lot of fun to develop for kids to allow them to explore the information provided on mental health. The activities I decided on were what I thought would be the most engaging. A lot of my activities are coloring pages because it is a way for kids to make the book their own. There is a coloring page in each chapter that relates to the topics being discussed in the chapter. For example, the section on health behaviors has pictures of healthy and unhealthy foods for the brain. The reader is challenged to color in the foods they believe are good for their mental health. They can learn about the foods in an engaging and fun way.

Another important aspect of the book is utilizing empty spaces. I introduce these activities by giving a small prompt to allow the child to interact with the material. They are asked to write

or draw what relates to the activity. The reader then has complete creative freedom to do whatever they want that makes sense to them. In these spaces there is no right or wrong answer, it allows them to learn the content and use trial and error to understand the material more clearly.

Lastly, I created puzzles for a bit more of a challenge for the kids. There are secret messages to decode, a word search on feelings, making a list, and a maze. I think this is a great way to take information and make it a lot more fun. These puzzles were a lot of fun to design. I utilized some resources to decide what would be the best type of puzzle.

It was a lot of fun to write and design this entire activity book. I enjoyed developing a variety of activities that are entertaining for the readers. The colors utilized and the child-like sense to it radiates positivity in my opinion. The literature review and creation of the book were worked on rather simultaneously. Throughout, I was able to take the research and apply it to the book. This included reading more on interventions utilized in the studies and applying them to the book. For example, in researching mental health literacy interventions, I utilized the topics mentioned and put them in the book in an interactive way.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to provide a possible intervention that could be used to educate children on their mental health. Mental health is prevalent among children in the United States, and it should be addressed for the odds to decrease. One of the best ways to do this is classroom interventions on certain topics, which are discussed in the literature review. It is important to educate children on mental health literacy as they cannot just themselves but get

help for others. Emotional development should also be considered in terms of developing mindfulness skills and how to manage stress. Mental health can also be supported by the improving social skills which are being taught at some schools according to research. Lastly, having healthy habits is correlated with having better mental wellness. These are all of the ways that mental health is affected, so a great way to address them is to develop an activity book for kids to allow them to explore the topic in their own, creative way. This book should be viewed as a toolbox and allows children to go back into the book to refresh themselves on the topic and further develop their skills.

There are a few limitations to this paper and this project. The literature review provides a very general overview of the literature that is out there on mental health literacy and the other areas of development. These research articles were found in the terms of classroom interventions concerning mental health and emotions, lifestyle, and social skills. Regarding the activity book, it is not designed to “cure” a mental health condition. Many of the activities are not used to determine if there is an issue or to “fix” an issue. They are a way to explore different ideas that are shown in the book. It is also recognized there are a variety of ways that children can be supported when it comes to their mental health and education. They are just a sampling of many activities that young children can interact with.

In the future, I hope this book continues to develop by including additional topics that affect mental health. Mental wellness is all-encompassing and involves many aspects of our lives. In addition, I hope to find more interventions when it comes to engagement and plays in terms of mental health. Teaching kids about mental health was something I never learned about in school. Currently from spending time in schools, I know there is hard work being done by

school counselors to educate children on these tools. Hopefully one day, all schools will be utilizing these interventions where eventually it will become a requirement like writing and math.

I was determined to shine a light on mental health in children. There continues to be this idea that children cannot have mental health conditions, but in reality, they are highly prevalent and there need to be opportunities for that to change. Starting at an early age, mental health should be taught as a part of life skills, including what it is and ways to improve it. If given the right tools, a child can do anything. This project adds one way that is possible through a fun and engaging book. Hopefully, more research continues to show the importance of mental health discussions in the classrooms and the importance of it. Children are our future and deserve any chance they can get to benefit themselves for future development.

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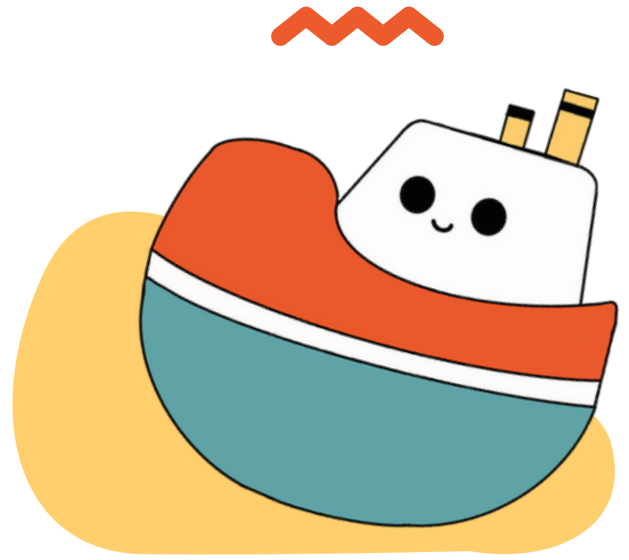
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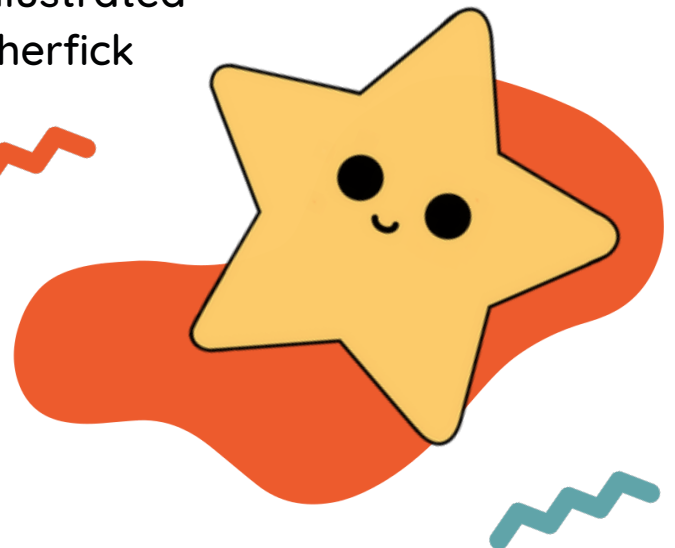
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**YOUR
MENTAL HEALTH
JOURNEY**

An activity book just for you on how
to support your mental health!

Written and Illustrated
by Sage Sherfick



HELLO DEAR READER!

Welcome to the beginning of your mental health journey or you know enough about mental health already and you are here to have some fun. I am so excited for you to read this book. There are so many fun activities and cute characters to guide you along the way!

This book is all about mental health. You will learn what it is and how to help others who may be struggling with mental health. Most importantly, there is some information about what you can do to improve your own mental health. I give you a lot of possibilities, including mindfulness, sleeping, and developing social skills.

The best thing is, you are improving your mental health by reading this book. You are taking steps to improve your self or you want to find ways you can help others. Either way, it is amazing that you are ready to learn!

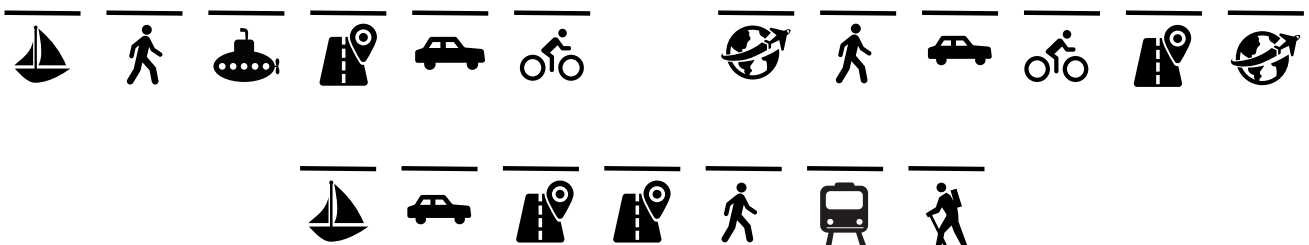
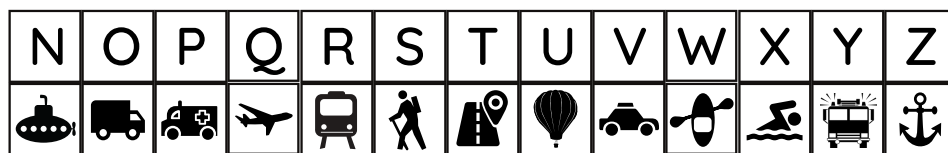
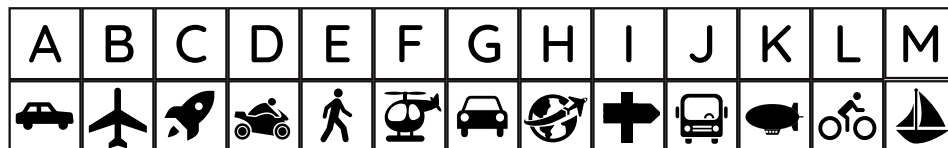
Enjoy this book! There are no right or wrong answers. This is yours to experience mental health in your own way!

WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

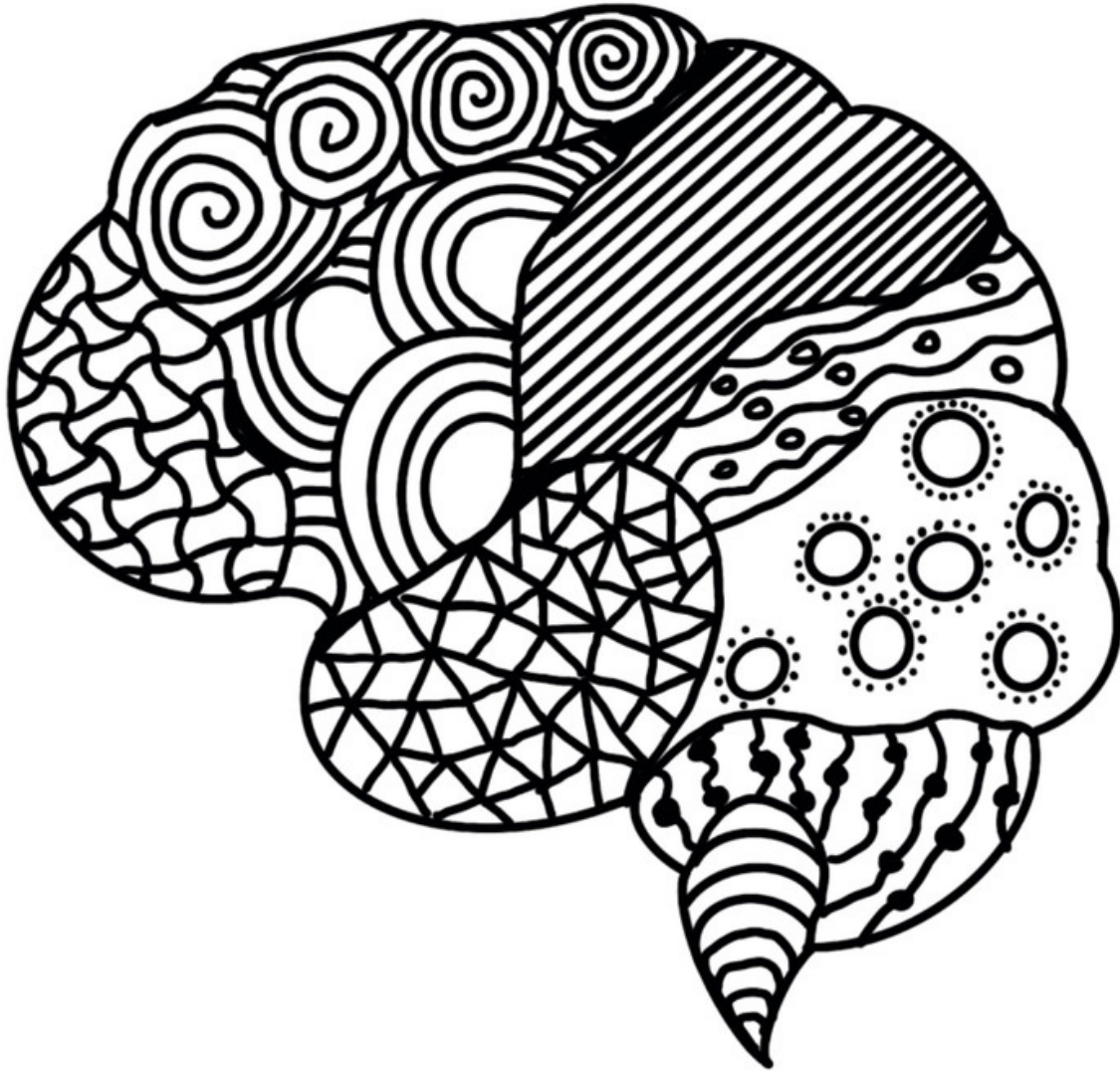
You may have heard the term mental health, but what exactly does that mean? Mental health takes place in the brain and involves how we feel and act. It also supports how we interact with others and make choices. If we have good mental health, everything will benefit from it.

There are people who do not have good mental health. For a moment, think about a medical problem you or someone you know has. If you have a friend with a peanut allergy, their throat closes and they begin to swell up if they eat peanuts. To feel better, they take medication and possibly go to the doctor to feel better. Similarly, mental health conditions like anxiety and depression start in the brain. Sometimes people with a mental health issue feel like something is not right, but take medication to feel better.

There is something about mental health that is really important! Find out by solving the secret message



This is a magnificent brain that controls how you feel and what you do and say! Color in the patterns!



Anxiety

A lot of kids have anxiety. Imagine you are walking and suddenly trip on a stick. You are about to fall but catch yourself at the last second. That sudden rush of worrying you will fall down sets something off in your body that there is danger. Anxiety is getting that feeling all the time, even when there is no danger. Someone could be sitting on their bed and feel anxious or stressed.

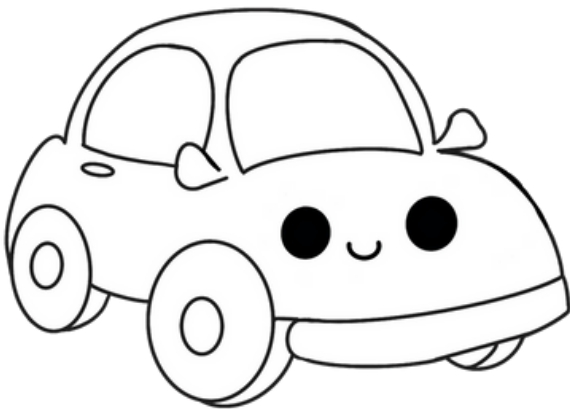
Have you ever felt anxious before? Maybe it is waiting for a grade on a test or you got worried about something. Write or draw about it.

FEELINGS

Now with an understanding of what mental health is and how it affects everyone, there are key parts in what can contribute to supporting our mental health. The goal of this book is to guide you on your mental health and there are many skills to get you on the right path. This section focuses on learning about emotions and feelings.

How do you feel when you get a good grade on a test? How do you feel if someone is mean to you at school? Our feelings are what guide us through life and help us understand how to respond to a situation.

Our friends are showing many emotions. Color them in and guess what emotion they are sharing.



There are so many different types of feelings and responses to the world around us. How many feelings can you find in the word search?



- | | | |
|-----------|------------|-----------|
| HAPPY | SCARED | SAD |
| ANGRY | EXCITED | ANNOYED |
| DISGUSTED | GLAD | CONFIDENT |
| CONFUSED | FRUSTRATED | WORRIED |

Stress

Do you feel like you have too much homework or too many places to be at once? Being this overwhelmed often leads to stress and having a lot of pressure on ourselves. Take some time in the space below to write or draw what makes you feel stressed.

Mindfulness

So, what do you do when you are stressed? You might have a way to make yourself feel less overwhelmed. Maybe it is watching a movie, reading a book, or drawing. What if you are really stressed and overwhelmed and nothing seems to be working?

One way to clear your head and reduce stress is to practice mindfulness. Mindfulness brings awareness to how you are feeling, in the moment, while also having an attitude of acceptance towards it. Mindfulness can benefit physical and mental health, including stress management, anxiety, and social interactions.

One simple exercise that can calm you down from the stress is a simple breathing exercise. All you need to do is breathe through your nose and out through your mouth.

Write or draw what brings you mindfulness or peace. Maybe it is talking to someone or spending time with a pet.

There are so many ways people can be mindful and calm themselves down.

Here is a few scrambled examples of ways people can feel mindfulness.

Unscramble them and uncover other ways to try to calm down.

OYAG

NLGWAIK

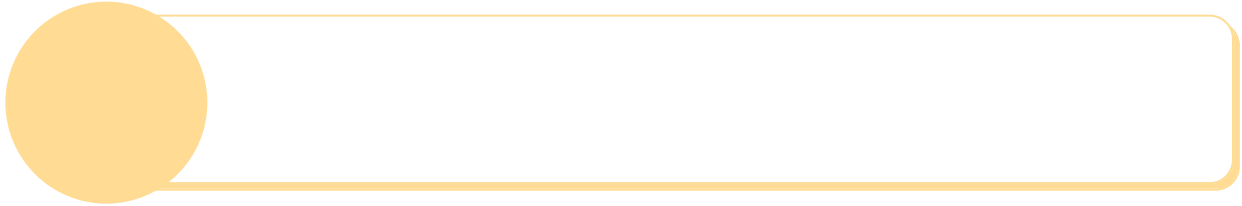
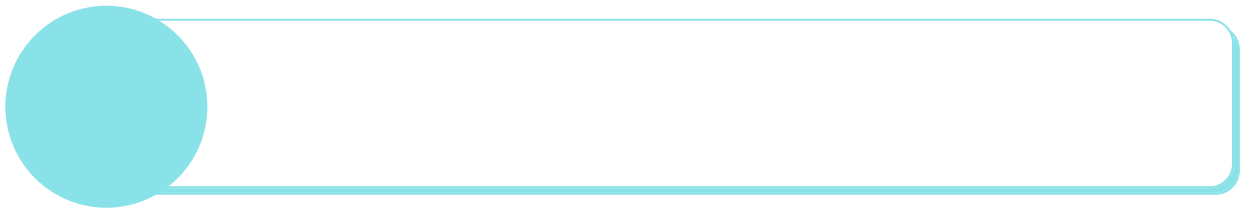
WRGDNIA

APLY UISCM

LINTAGK HTIW SDFRNEI

HEALTH

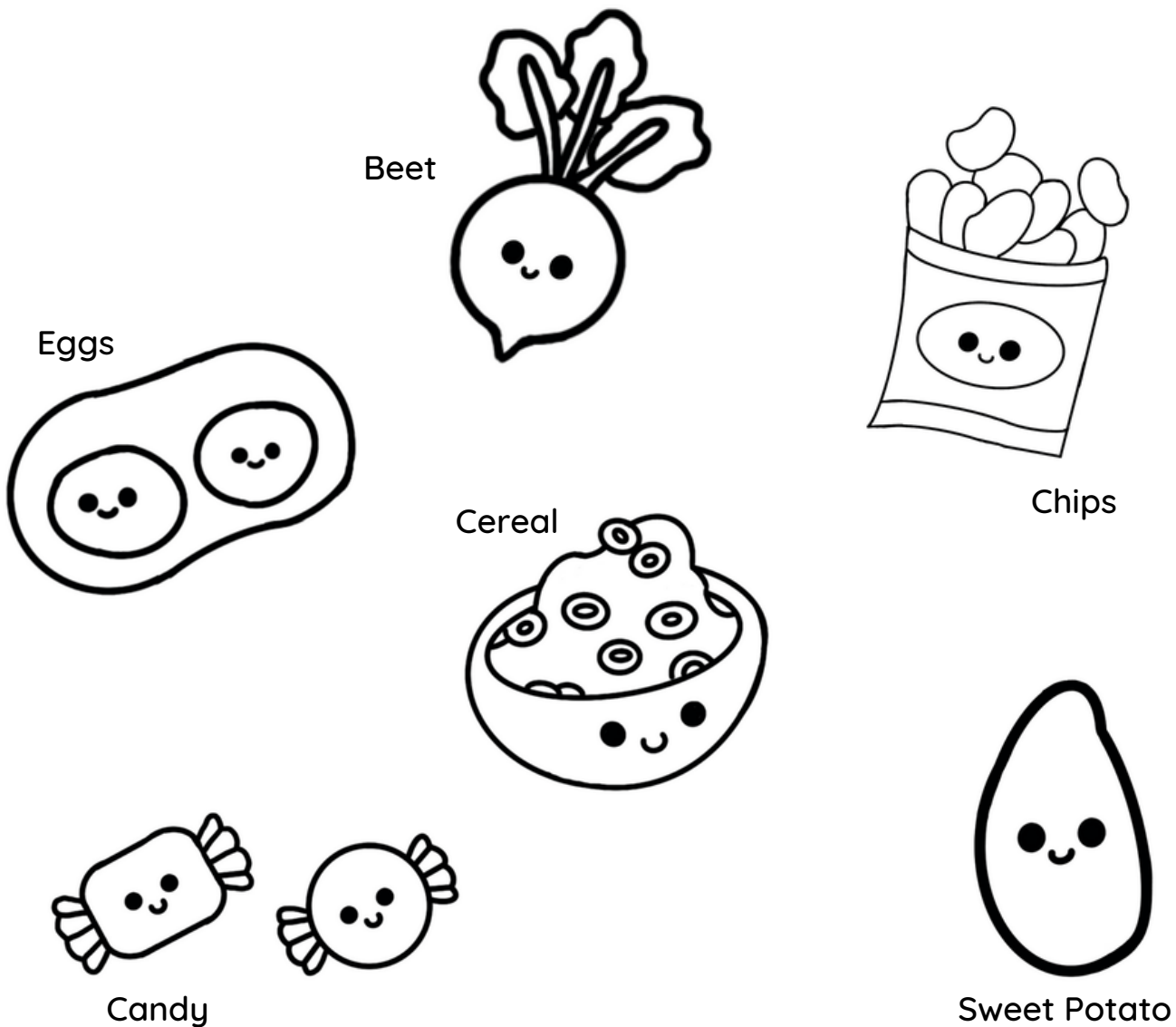
Think about what you do every day. You probably have breakfast and brush your teeth in the morning and eat dinner and fall asleep in the evening. It is important to do things everyday to support your health and hygiene. Take this space and make a list of what you do every morning.



Nutrition

You have probably been told by so many people to eat healthy. This means to eat your fruits, vegetables, protein, and grains. Did you know eating good food is not only great for your body, but also for your brain. Nutritious food fuels your brain so you can learn more. Most importantly, good food helps with your mental health. A balanced diet provides energy to improve your attention and become less tired.

Below you will find images of different foods. Color in the ones you think will benefit your mental health.

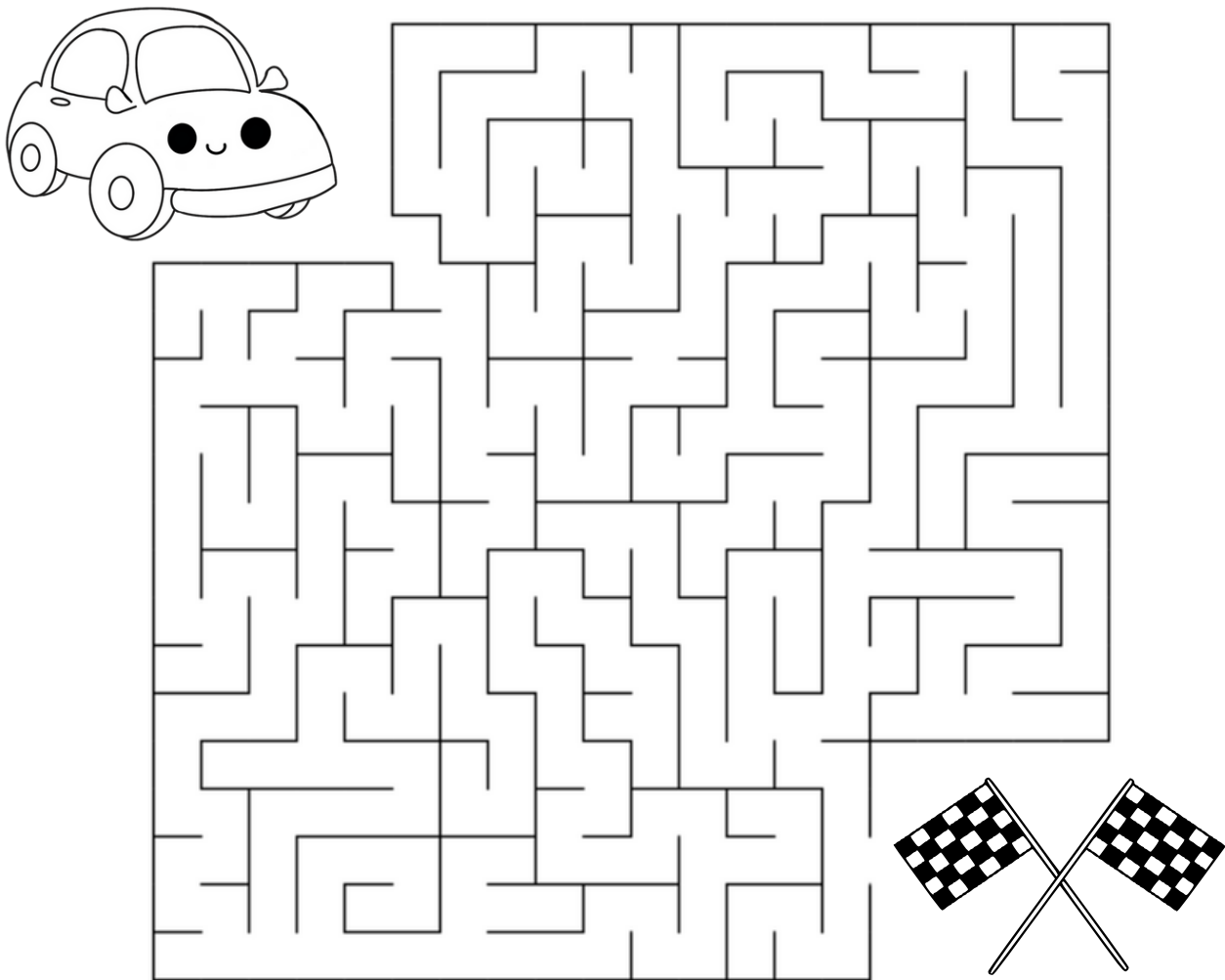


Exercise

At school you probably go to gym class or maybe you play a sport like basketball or gymnastics. Those are really fun ways to exercise and get your body moving. Maybe for some of you sports and exercise is not your thing. However, exercise is good for not only your body, but for your mind. Exercise helps your body release chemicals that make you feel good!

Maybe you can try going out for 30 minutes every day and walking or riding your bike. If you want to stay inside, you can stretch or do yoga to get your body moving. Dancing is also a fun activity that will benefit your body and mind.

The car does laps around the track every day!
Help him exercise by getting him to the finish line!

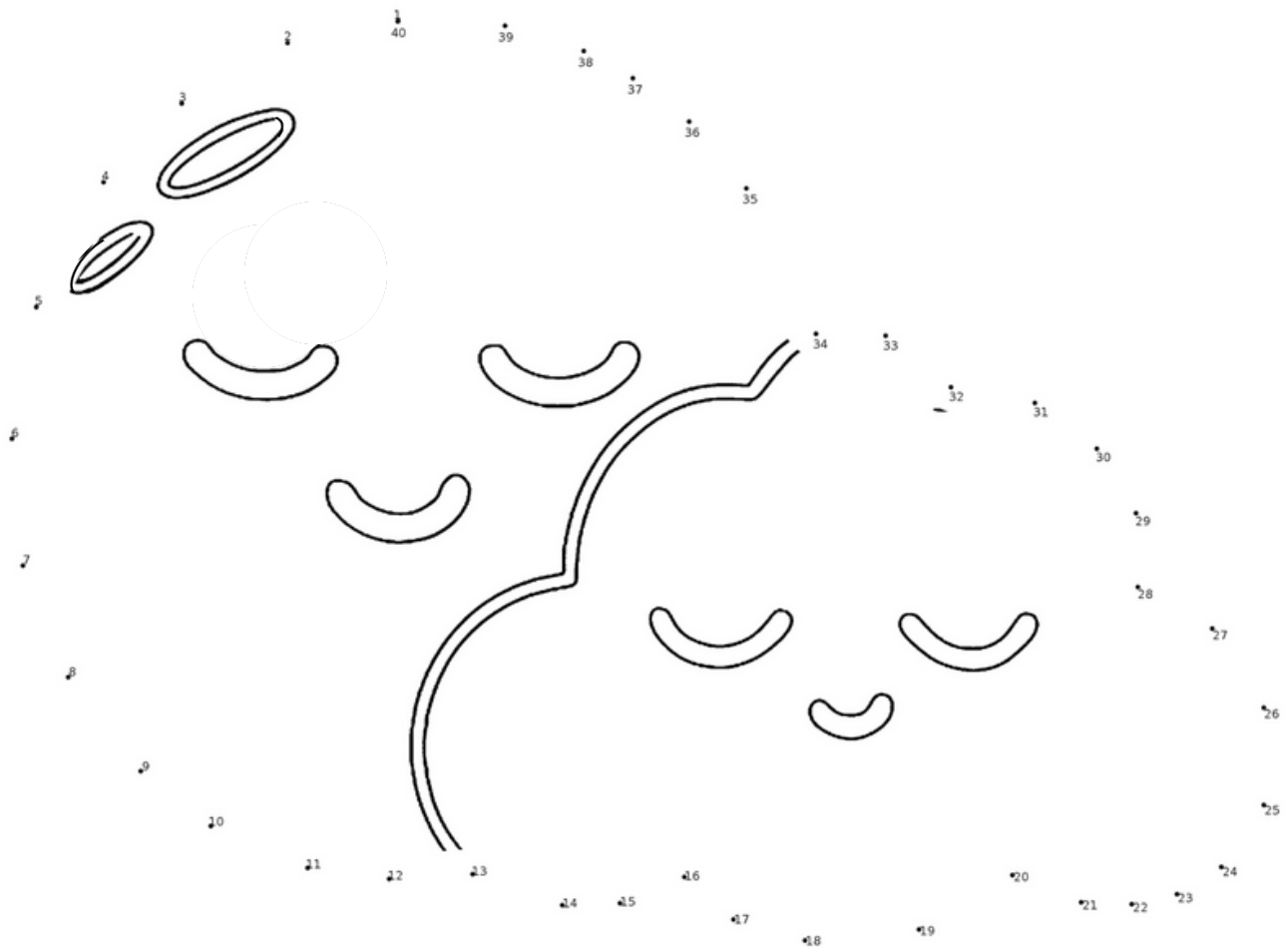


Sleep

Sleep is very important to your development, especially for your brain. Around your age, experts recommend getting at least 9 hours of sleep. That seems like a lot, but it may greatly benefit you in the end. Sleep can improve your mental health.

Getting too much sleep can also cause harm. If you sleep over 12 hours it could hurt your mental and physical health. It might be difficult, but make sure to go to sleep and wake up at the same time almost every single day, while getting the appropriate amount of sleep.

The cloud and the moon have fallen asleep to get a full 9 hours. Connect the dots



SOCIAL SKILLS

Who do you talk to every single day? Most likely your parents and your friends. You may have teachers at school you talk to every day, and your siblings if you have them. The relationships we have with others are really important. It helps us with communicating with others in the future. Did you know that being actively social can improve your physical and mental health?

Draw a photo of those who are close to you. This could be your family or your friends.

Communication

Have you ever walked around in a room with your eyes closed? If you have, you probably bumped into some things. When we don't have good communication, it kind of is like having our eyes closed. Communication guides us when we are with other people and talking to them. Talking about what you need and how you feel boosts your mental health. Most importantly, surrounding yourself with good people is really helpful! Life would be hard without communication.

To show this, try the following activity:

You need someone in your family and something to cover your eyes. Cover your eyes and walk around a room in your house to try and find the door. Make sure there is someone in the room with you so you don't get hurt.

Was that easy to do?

Did you run into things?

You experienced what it kind of feels like to not have communication skills. Communication is something that is always developing so maybe one day you can easily talk to anyone if you had to.

Problem-Solving

There will be a lot of moments in your life where you might have a difficult situation and you need to find a way to solve it. Problem-solving also helps in group projects at school where you are given a task and need to find a way to figure it out.

The following activity puts your problem solving skills to the test. Good luck!

Your boat is sinking! There is a deserted island nearby you can swim to, but you can only bring 1 bag. Select 4 items to bring with you to survive the island. Write your answers and your reasoning on the next page.

Lantern



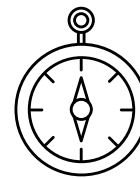
Tent



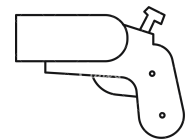
Toilet Paper



Compass



Flare Gun



Axe



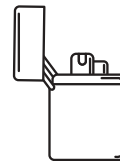
Rope



First Aid Kit



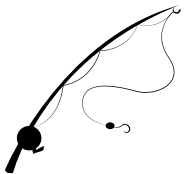
Lighter



Inflatable Raft



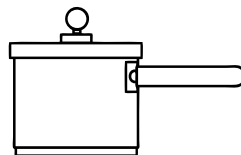
Fishing Rod



Spear



Pot



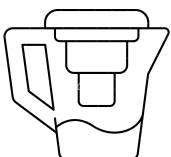
Bow



Insect Repellent



Water Filter



Hiking Boots



Mirror



Sunscreen



Arrows



Write down the 4 items and your reason for selecting them.

Item 1: _____

Reason: _____

Item 2: _____

Reason: _____

Item 3: _____

Reason: _____

Item 4: _____

Reason: _____
