



Life is filled with ups and downs, but if the downs are extra low and the ups don't last, you might be experiencing depression.

The next few pages provide some tactics to try when you're feeling down. This book isn't meant to take the place of talking to a counselor or therapist, so please reach out to a trusted adult if you're feeling depressed. The weight of depression is heavy, but it's not something you have to carry alone. There is help, and there is hope.

# WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

Mental health has been a hot-button topic lately, so let's review the facts to make sure we're all on the same page.

**Mental health** is a general state of well-being that enables us to cope with life's ups and downs. Strong mental health helps us realize our abilities, learn and work well, and contribute to our communities.

## MENTAL HEALTH: MYTH VS. REALITY

### MYTH

"Mental health" and "mental illness" are the same thing.

People with mental illnesses are dangerous.

Asking for help with mental health is a sign of weakness.

It's easy to tell when someone is struggling with a mental illness.

### REALITY

"Mental health" refers to a person's overall emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It's a part of everyone's life, whether they feel good or bad.

"Mental illness" is a broad term for a group of conditions that require a professional diagnosis. A mental illness can limit a person's ability to function, so it's important for a person with a mental illness to get help. Unlike mental health, not everyone has a mental illness.

Most people with mental illnesses are not violent or dangerous. Stereotyping people with mental illness can lead to stigma and discourage them from getting support.

Reaching out for help takes strength and courage. Everyone needs support sometimes.

Mental illness doesn't have a "look," and lots of people hide their struggles. That's why checking in on your friends and taking mental health seriously is important.



# WHAT'S A COPING STRATEGY?

You saw the words “coping strategies” in the introduction, and you’ll see them a lot more over the next sixty or so pages. But what exactly is a coping strategy? How does it work? Basically, a **coping strategy** is a method a person uses to manage stress and difficult situations.

There are two categories of coping strategies:  
problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping.



A **problem-focused** coping strategy involves actively addressing the source of your stress. For example, if you’re stressed about an upcoming test, you could study extra hard so that you feel ready to tackle the exam when the time comes.



An **emotion-focused** coping strategy aims to regulate the emotions you feel during times of stress. Keeping with the test example, an emotion-based coping strategy might mean journaling about why you’re stressed. Are you worried about grades? College? Letting yourself down? Naming these feelings can help you tame them.

The coping strategies in this book are mostly emotion-focused strategies, such as breathing exercises and journaling activities. Some might feel a little funny at first, but give them a shot anyway — it never hurts to try! You might be surprised at what works for your unique brain.

# WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

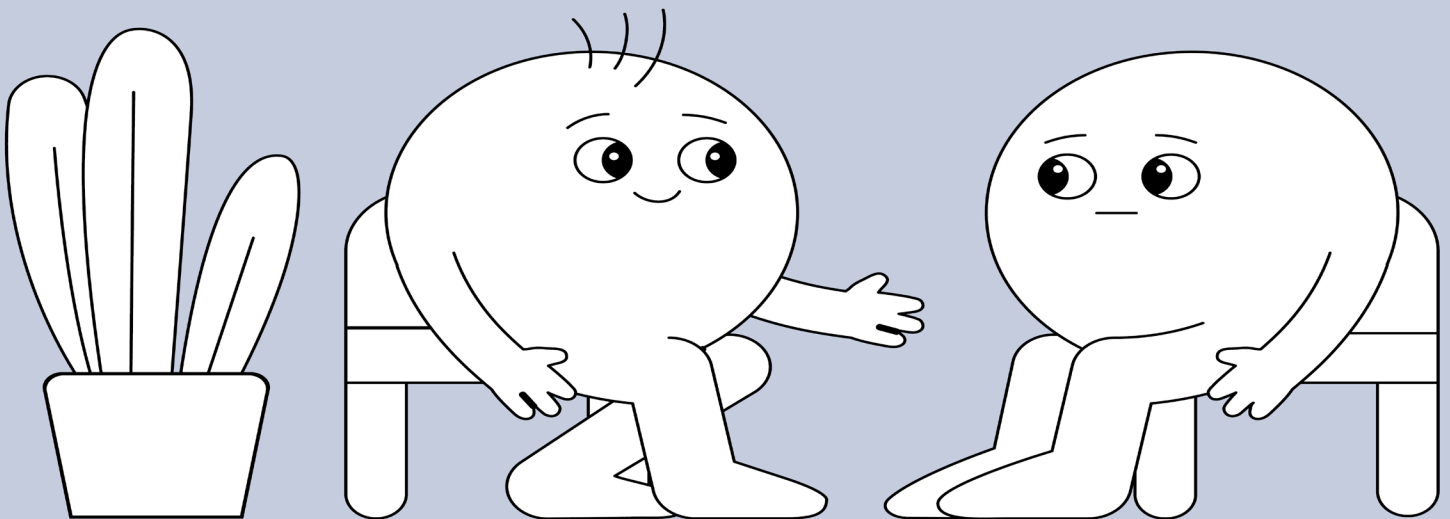
## DEFINITION

**Depression** is tricky to define. Some people with depression feel very sad or hopeless, and many experience a loss of interest in normal activities or just feel like they don't have the energy to do them.

Other people may not identify as "sad" but notice feeling down. That can look like indifference, hopelessness, or irritability. No matter what depression looks like, it's important to get help.

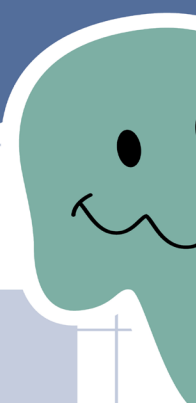
## THERE IS HELP. THERE IS HOPE.

You didn't choose or cause this. Depression is not a weakness or something that can be fixed by willpower. It is a serious mental health problem that often requires long-term treatment, usually in the form of therapy and/or medication.





# DEPRESSION CAN LOOK LIKE...



Emotionally or physically  
withdrawing from family  
and friends

Fighting with family and  
friends more than usual

Feeling that life and the  
future are pointless

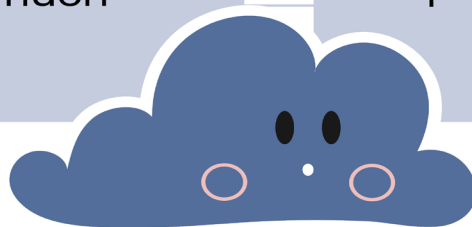
A sense of  
worthlessness or guilt

Trouble thinking,  
concentrating,  
making decisions, and  
remembering things

Thoughts of self-harm  
or suicide

Sleeping too little or  
sleeping too much

Use of alcohol or drugs to  
cope with difficult feelings



# I THINK I'M DEPRESSED. NOW WHAT?



Talk to someone you trust.



Make an appointment to see a doctor or mental health professional. If making a call sounds overwhelming, ask a reliable adult for help.



If you're experiencing thoughts of self-harm, suicide or you need immediate support, text or call 988, or chat online at [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org).

## WHAT IF I'M WORRIED ABOUT MY FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER?

If you're worried that a friend or family member is struggling with depression, there are ways you can help.



Tell them  
you care.



If it's another teen,  
talk to an adult you  
trust, like a teacher or  
guidance counselor.



Remember:  
You can always  
reach out to  
the Suicide and  
Crisis Lifeline  
on behalf of  
another person.



# MY THOUGHTS MATTER



Negative thoughts aren't just a buzzkill — they can also make you feel like there are no signs of positivity in your life. Make time to balance negativity by focusing on what's going well.

1. Each day of the week, write down one good thing that happened (adding more is a bonus!). It can be big or small, as long as it made you feel happy or hopeful.
2. Then, answer one or more of the following questions about what happened:
  - a. Why did it happen?
  - b. Why was it meaningful?
  - c. How can I experience more moments like this?

**MONDAY**

**TUESDAY**

**WEDNESDAY**

**THURSDAY**

**FRIDAY**

**SATURDAY**

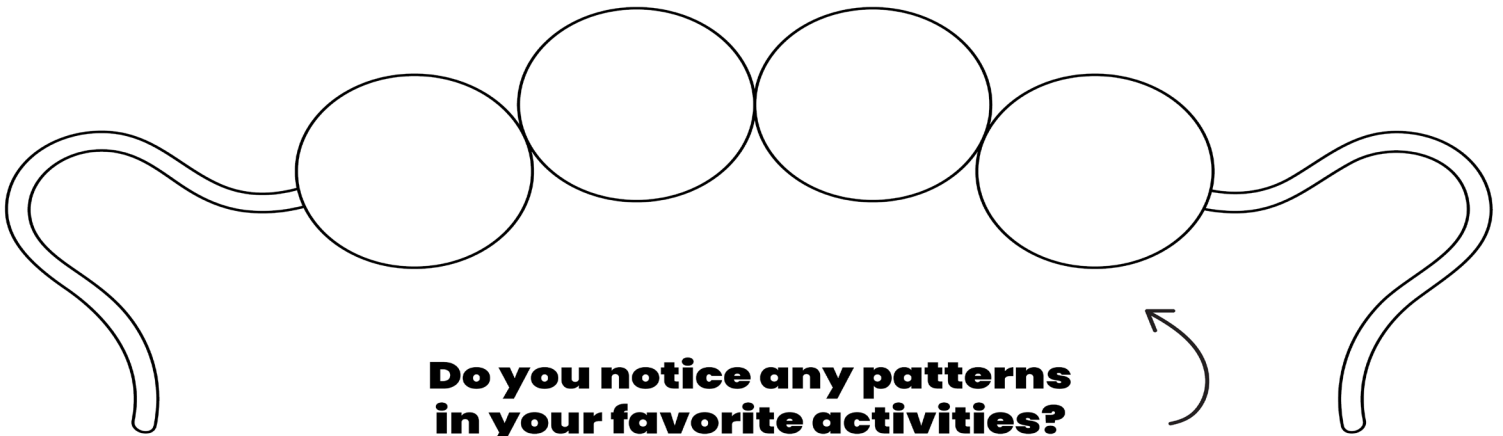
**SUNDAY**



# MY THOUGHTS MATTER

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**Take a moment to look through all of the good things that happened this week. Fill the bracelet below with a few of your favorites.**



**Do you notice any patterns in your favorite activities?**

**Who were your favorite people to spend time with?**

Shoot them a text or give them a call to let them know you're thinking of them.

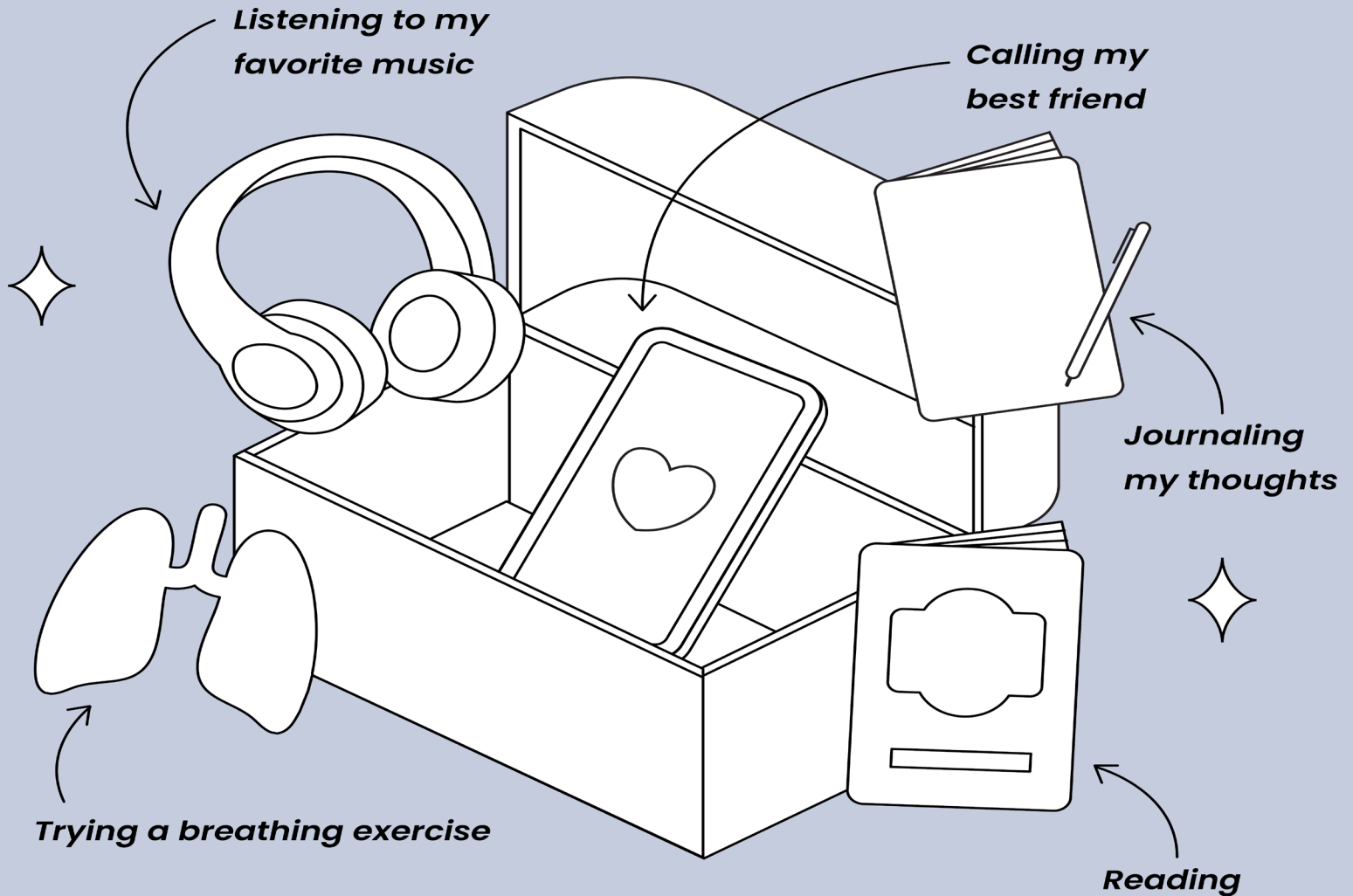
**Where were you when good things happened?**

Draw your favorite place in the box below.

**What were you doing when you felt happiest?**

Draw or describe it. How can you keep having experiences that make you feel good?

# WHAT'S IN MY TOOLBOX?



Maybe it sounds a little silly, but a “toolbox” is a great metaphor for mental health strategies.

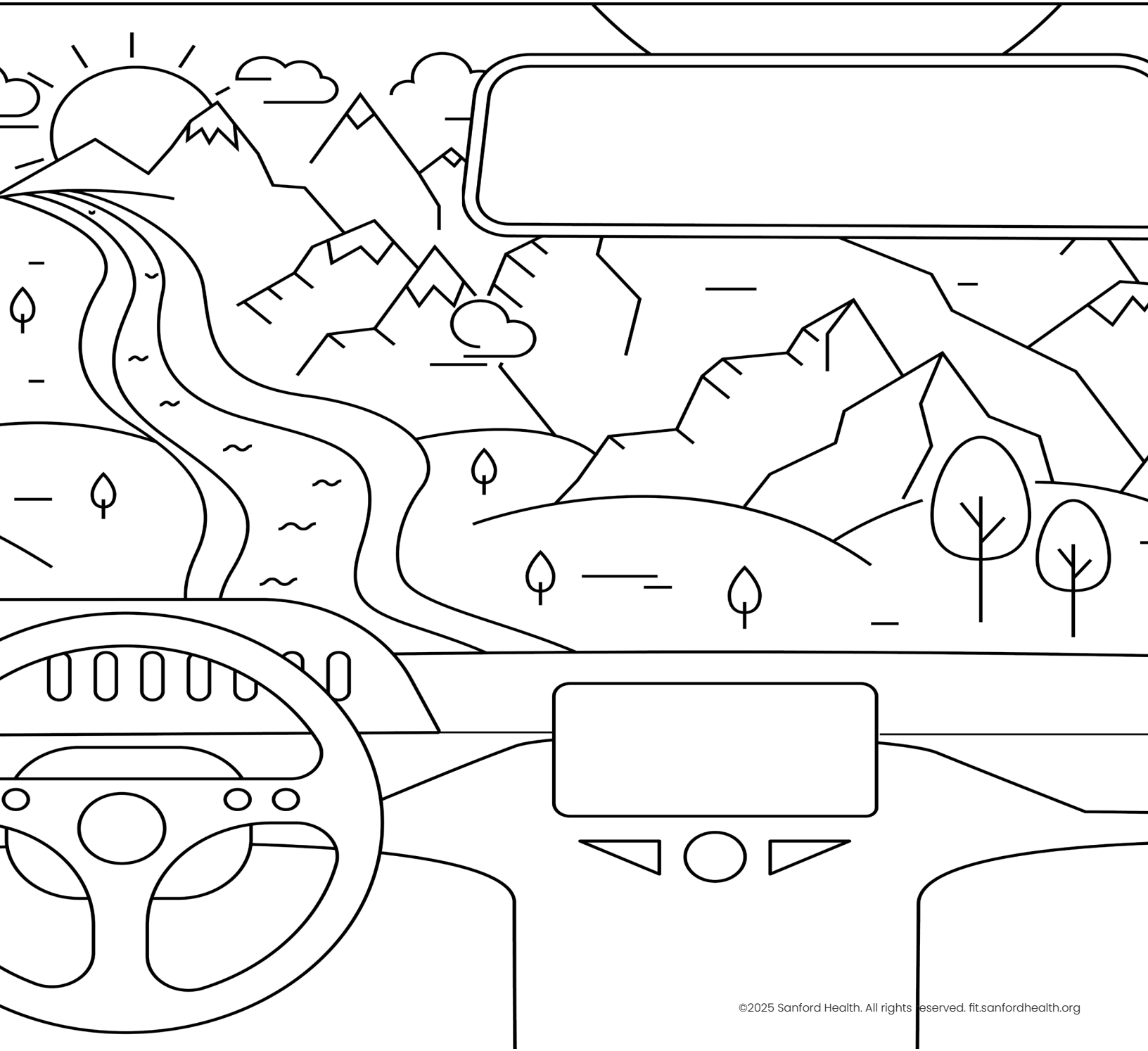
There are so many tools we can use to protect our mental health and help us feel better when we’re feeling down. Some are big tools that require professional help to use correctly — things like therapy and medication. Other tools are things you can pick up and use every day, like talking to the people you care about.

Take a moment to think about what’s in your toolbox. What are a few things you do that reliably make you feel better? Circle or color them in.



# LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD

In the rearview mirror, write about something you've overcome in your life. It doesn't have to be a big thing, just something you're proud of facing and conquering. Then, take some time to color in the bright road ahead.



# GROUNDING EXERCISE

When you're feeling down, it can be helpful to center yourself in your physical surroundings. So-called "grounding exercises" bring your awareness to the present moment, helping you stop anxious thoughts and redirect your focus to your environment and senses.

Next time you feel yourself getting lost in anxious or depressing thoughts, try this classic grounding exercise while taking some slow, deep breaths:

Name **FIVE** things you can see.



5

4

3

2

1



Name **FOUR** things you can touch.



Name **TWO** things you can smell.



Name **THREE** things you can hear.



Name **ONE** thing you can taste.

**SCAN THIS QR CODE TO  
EXPLORE EXPERT-BACKED  
RESOURCES ON DEPRESSION.**

