



WHEN SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAPPENS

CHILDREN CAN LEARN TO COPE WITH GRIEF

written by Marge Heegaard to be illustrated by children

With special thanks for the suggestions from professionals who work with victims of violent trauma, this book is dedicated to the children who have something happen early in their lives that most people never experience.

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This book was designed to use the art process to teach children who have witnessed or experienced a traumatic event some basic concepts about trauma and provide an opportunity to learn about and express related feelings. Misconceptions may be revealed, conflicts resolved and self esteem increased while coping skills are developed. The following objectives are included in the text and can be stressed with additional reading from the suggested books. (Check your local school and public library for titles relating to specific trauma.)

I. SUDDEN CHANGE AND LOSS p.1-5

Remember life before crisis
Learn about disaster and trauma
Acknowledge personal trauma
Recognize personal losses

ADDITIONAL READING

Disaster Series, Children's Press
Taste of Blackberries, Doris Smith
The Accident, Carol Carrick

II. GRIEF: A NATURAL REACTION TO LOSS p.6-10

Discover Misconceptions
Discover Feelings of blame
Discuss concepts of criminal justice
Learn concepts of grief

ADDITIONAL READING

Arvy Aardvark Finds Home, Donna O'Toole
What Makes Me Feel This Way, Eda LeShan
Coping With Death & Grief, M. Heegaard

III. LEARNING ABOUT FEELINGS p.11-15

Accept all feelings as O.K.
Recognize and name basic feelings
Identify repressed feelings
Discover feeling & behavior relationship

ADDITIONAL READING

Feelings, Alike
I Have Feelings, Terry Berger
Sometimes I'm Afraid, Joan Prestine

IV. DRAWING OUT DIFFICULT FEELINGS p. 16-20

Identify angry behavior
Learn ways to express difficult feelings
Identify feelings of guilt
Encourage communication of concerns

ADDITIONAL READING

I Was So Mad, Mercer Mayer
Grownups Cry Too, Nancy Hazer
The Colors I Am, Cilla Sheehan

V. SOOTHING PAINFUL MEMORIES p.21-26

Identify fears and guilt feelings
Find power over nightmares
Experience healthy role reversal
Find words for unspeakable events

ADDITIONAL READING

Go Away Bad Dreams, Susan Hill
Scary Night Visitors, Irene & Paul Marcus
Children Facing Grief, Janice Romond

VI. GROWING STRONGER p.27-31

Gain confidence and security
Identify support systems
Recognize personal strengths
Increase self esteem

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Families, Meredith Tax
Your Family, My Family, Joan Drescher
Help, Laura Greene

Reading for professionals: Trauma In The Lives Of Children, Kendall Johnson, Ph.D., Hunter House
for parents: Helping Your Child Handle Stress, Katharine Kersey, Ed.D., Acropolis Books
Self Esteem: A Family Affair, Jeanne Clarke, Harper Collins

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book was designed for children ages 6-12 who have experienced loss, victimization or family dysfunction caused by natural disaster or human violence. It will give help to almost any overwhelming event that creates anxiety and helplessness that impairs a child's functioning.

Art in crisis intervention can prevent denial, alienation or repressing patterns that occur when children are overwhelmed with feelings they can neither understand or express. Promoting healthy coping skills in children is important because those patterns often continue into adulthood.

Children can learn to recognize and express anger, fear, guilt and other feelings common to trauma. Role reversal and new behavior skills help children develop mastery over repeated dreams and nightmares. They will gain confidence and security as they recognize personal strengths and identify support systems.

This book can be used individually or with a group of children facilitated by someone prepared to understand the specific trauma, accept the feelings and gently encourage verbal communication. It is an opportunity to review the event and discover misconceptions.

Using this book just once weekly for 1-1¹/₂ hours is suggested but individual needs may vary. The educational concepts are divided into six units with specific objectives with additional reading suggestions. Each child will need a small box of crayons. Crayons are suggested because they are more effective for expressing feelings than markers which flow easily regardless of pressure.

Invite children to draw the picture that first comes to their mind as they read the words on the page. Do not make suggestions. Trust the child to make decisions about what and when to draw. Children have a natural tendency toward growth, order and integration. Emphasize ideas, children often regress and scribble, erase, cross-out, draw something unrelated or leave the page blank. This is all right. It is the beginning of giving voice to unspeakable thoughts and feelings.

ADULT FAMILY MEMBERS CAN HELP CHILDREN

Take care of yourself and find support to overcome personal fears and anxieties. Children model behavior and coping skills from the adults with whom they live.

Insecurity often leads to hyperactivity and behavioral problems which can be reduced by providing more structure in the child's life.

Avoid any unnecessary changes. Each change adds additional stress. Try to maintain as normal a routine as possible even though this is very difficult.

Explain the crisis and how it will be handled with basic honest facts. Remember that a child's fantasy can often be more traumatic than reality.

Don't force children into situations they fear. Don't ignore their fears or overprotect them with pity making them feel helpless or overdependent.

Share feelings to help children label and name their own. Emphasize that all feelings are normal and O.K. Help children learn healthy ways to express themselves through movement, play, music and art materials. Teach positive ways to express negative feelings.

Encourage communication. Don't assume lack of questions means lack of interest. Be available to observe, listen and talk to detect misconceptions. Expect more separation anxiety fears.

Expect regression and problems. Learn what services are available for your situation and needs through churches, schools, hospitals, community agencies and professional counseling.

Reassure children that nothing they did or didn't do caused the problem. Find time to give additional love and comfort. Encourage extended family and friends to provide comfort.

Locate helpful age appropriate books in the library and bookstores for more information. New situations introduce confusing new words and meanings. This is especially true when law enforcement and criminal justice is involved.

Help children to see police, medical personnel, teachers, counselors, community leaders, clergy, neighbors and other adults as people who care about children.

Age appropriate death education including funerals and burial customs is needed in many situations and is offered in other books listed at the back of this book.

FOR CHILDREN

This is your book. It was written to help you during a difficult time when something terrible happened. You will learn that terrible things do happen in our world. . . . But there are people around who care and want to help you. You will learn about the many feelings that are part of loss and change.

I think you will find it easier to draw about some things than it is to talk about them. This is your book and you can decide what you want to do and what you don't want to do. Some of the pages may seem difficult to do at first. You may decide to wait awhile to begin, but most children find that big ugly pictures in the mind seem less fearful when they are put on a small piece of paper. You are in charge of your book and your drawing.

No one can tell you what to draw. Draw the picture that comes into your mind as you read the words on each page. Don't worry about how well you can draw or how your pictures look. This is not supposed to be a pretty picture book. Just use colors, lines and shapes to tell a story that is hard to talk about.

Begin at the beginning and do the first five pages and decide if you would like to share your work with an adult who cares about you. You will feel better when you do. Wait awhile before you do the next five pages. It may take a long time to finish this book. . . . But when you do, you will have learned many helpful things.

Sometimes the world is a very wonderful place where good things happen. I remember a happy time... and can draw a picture of it.

Things can change suddenly! Sometimes a terrible thing happens. It is called a natural disaster. It could be a flood, tornado, earthquake or..

2. These things don't happen very often.

Other terrible things may happen because of something people do. They may or may not have wanted it to happen.

Something terrible happened in my life...

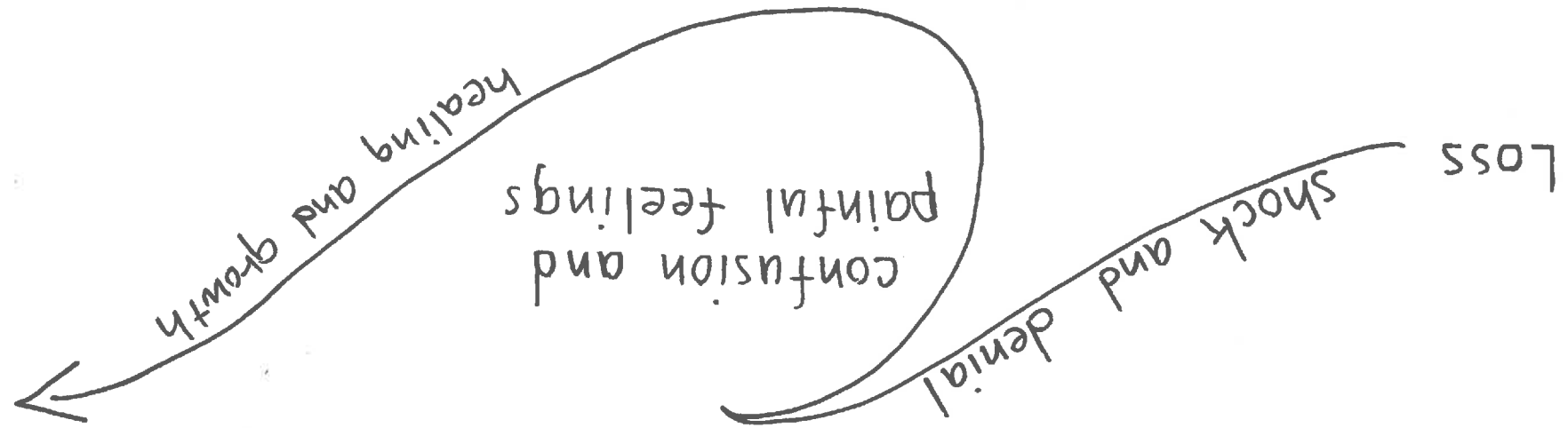
My life has changed. Some things are different...

The terrible thing happened because...

6. Sometimes there is no answer to the question, "WHY?".

People may ask many questions. Someone may have acted against the rules of the world and may need to be punished. It can be a very confusing time.

Grief comes and goes like waves in the ocean. There will be stormy times... There will be calm times... Grief comes and goes.



The pain from loss and change is called GRIEF.

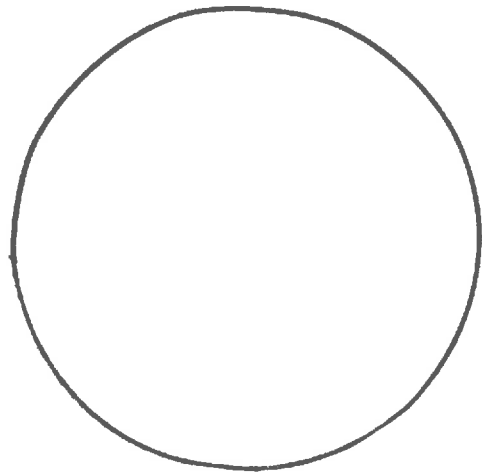
When something terrible happens, it may not seem real at first. This is called "shock".

Feelings seem frozen and people may act as if nothing has happened... or find it hard to believe something has happened.

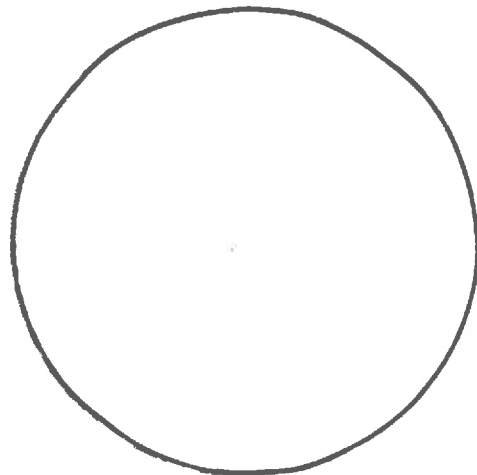
Or... people may have strong feelings and do strange things. They may feel and act crazy for awhile!

10. This is normal. It will change.

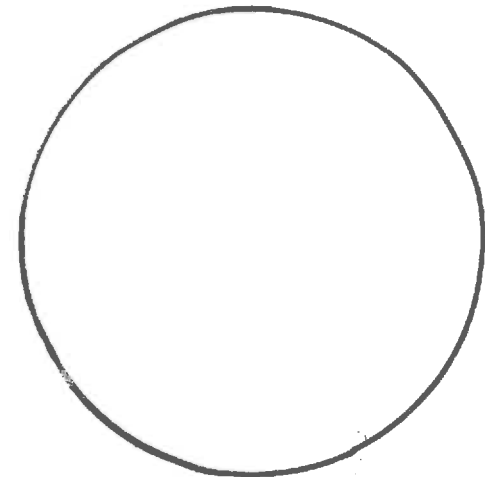
There will be many kinds of feelings. They may show on faces.



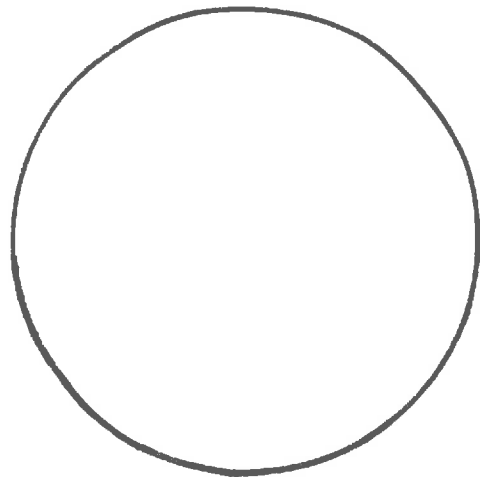
Angry



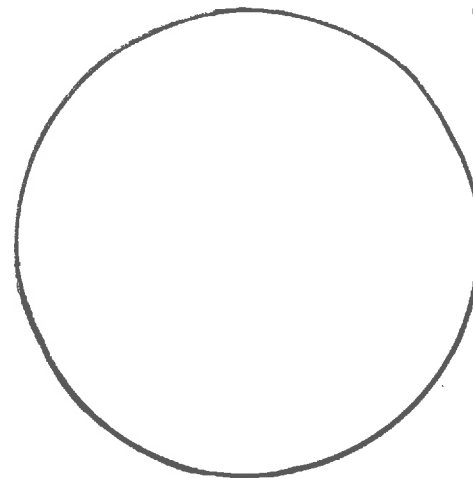
Sad



Afraid



Worried

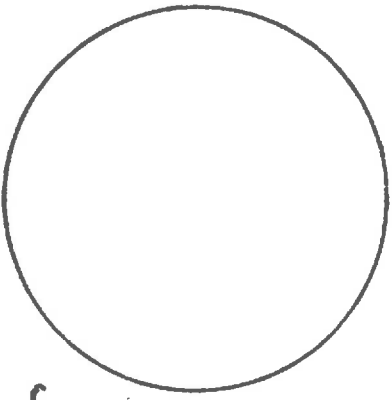
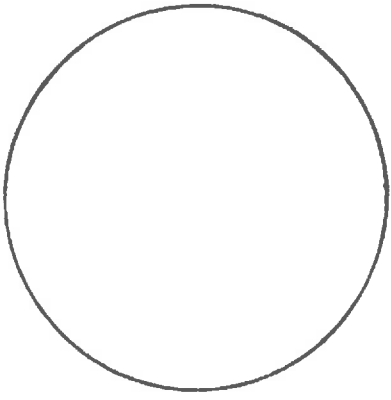
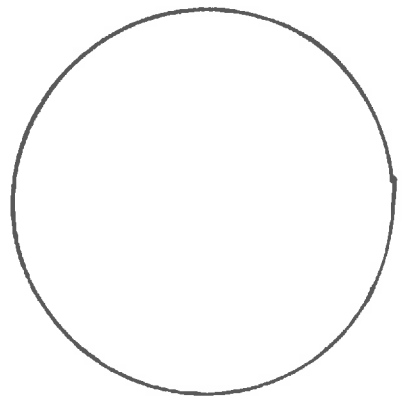


Happy

But sometimes people put on pretend feelings to hide real feelings.

Sometimes people put on a "mask" to hide feelings they don't like to show.

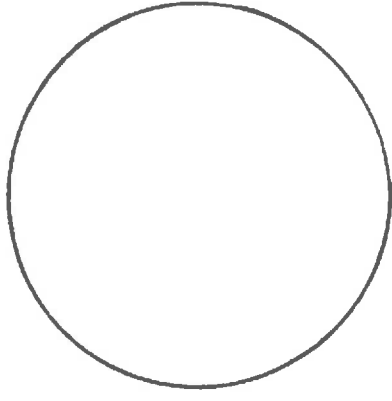
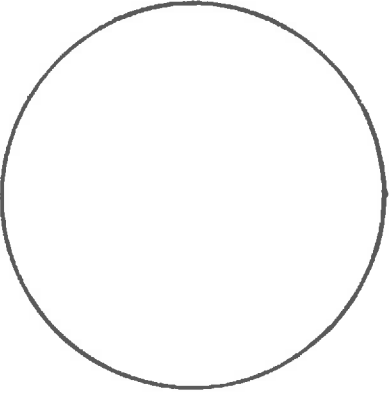
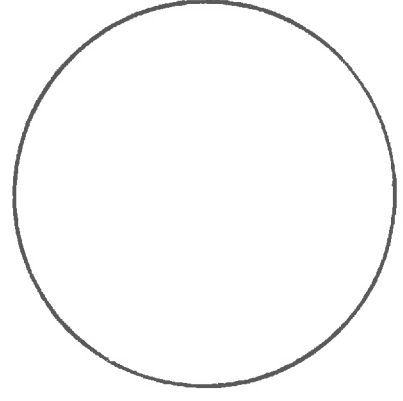
(name and draw 3 feelings you sometimes hide with a different feeling)



Name and draw the

"feeling masks"

you might use



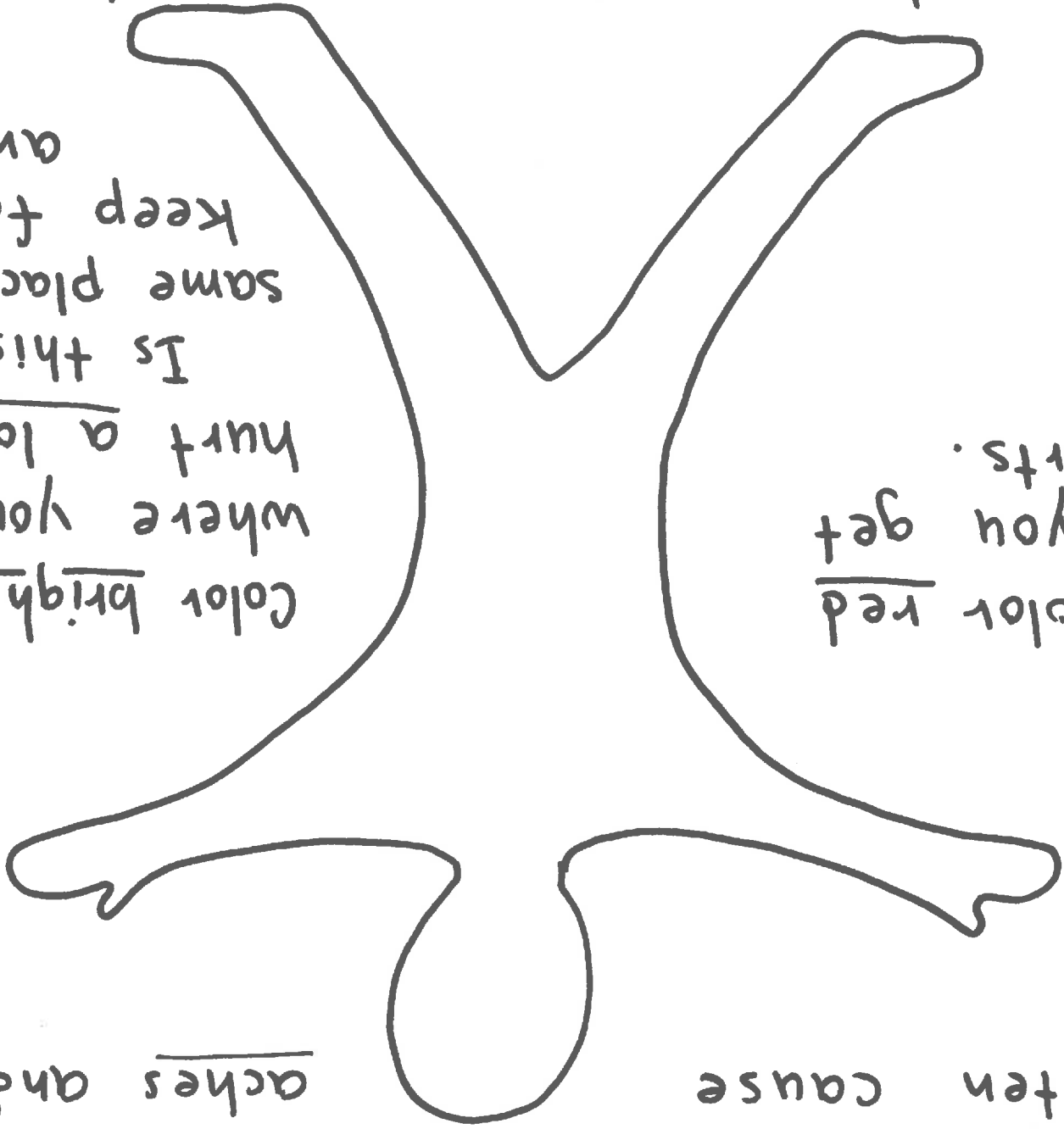
Feelings are something you feel in your body.

color the places
you feel your
feelings...



sad - blue
afraid - black
guilty - brown
angry - red
jealous - green
nervous - orange
happy - yellow

It feelings are stuffed inside too long
they often cause aches and pains.



Lightly color red
where you get
little hurts.

Color bright red
where you sometimes
hurt a lot.
Is this the
same place you
keep fear or
anger?

Exercise, sports, play, music, art, writing and
14. talking are all good ways to let feelings out!

When something terrible happens it may seem that everyone knows about it... or that no one does!

Almost everyone feels helpless and alone at certain times...

Many people feel angry when something terrible happens. I get angry at...

When I feel angry I ...

It is important to let anger out in ways that will not hurt people or things. OK ways are:

1. Saying "I am angry because..."
2. Punching a ball or pillow.
3. Yelling into a pillow or in the shower.
4. Stomping your feet or clapping your hands.
5. Writing an angry letter and tearing it up when you are done.
6. Writing in your journal.
7. Scribbling with a red crayon on an old newspaper (hard!) and scrunch it into a ball to toss at a wall.
8. Walking fast.

Something Sad

It is OK to cry when you feel sad. Crying
lets the sadness out. Everyone cries sometimes.

It may seem that someone or something could have kept this from happening. Who... or what?

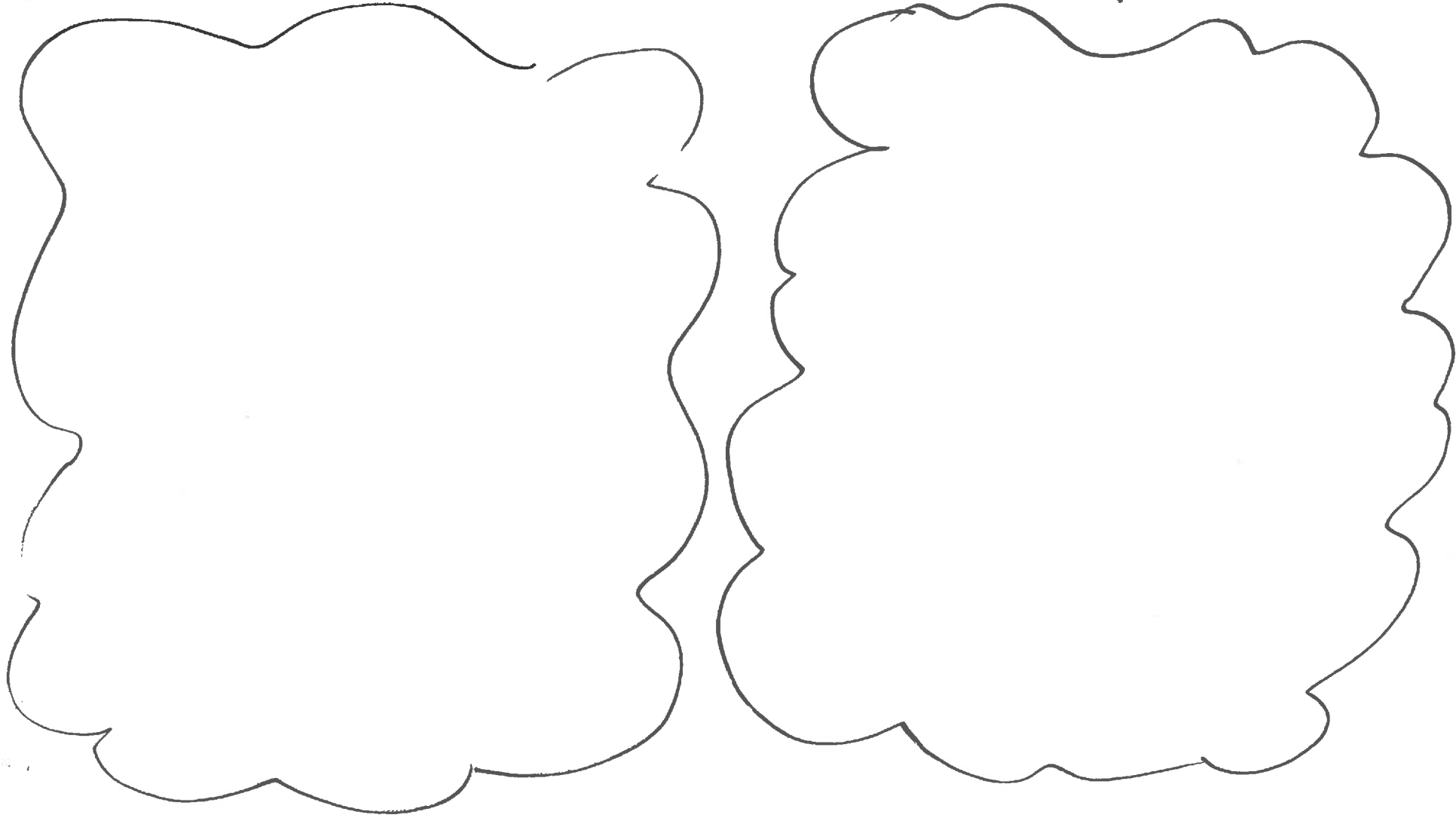
No one can change what happened but it helps to talk about it.

Wishes and thoughts can't make terrible things
ca. happen;

"It only..."
Is there something you wish
you had or hadn't done?

I remember where I was and what I was doing when this terrible thing happened... or where I was when I was told about it...

I feel frightened when scary pictures come into my thoughts or dreams.



Sleeping

Awake

(Draw this pictures again on a sheet of paper. Tear it up in small pieces. Throw it away!)

You can change your dreams. Draw your scary dream again... but add someone or something to make you feel safe.

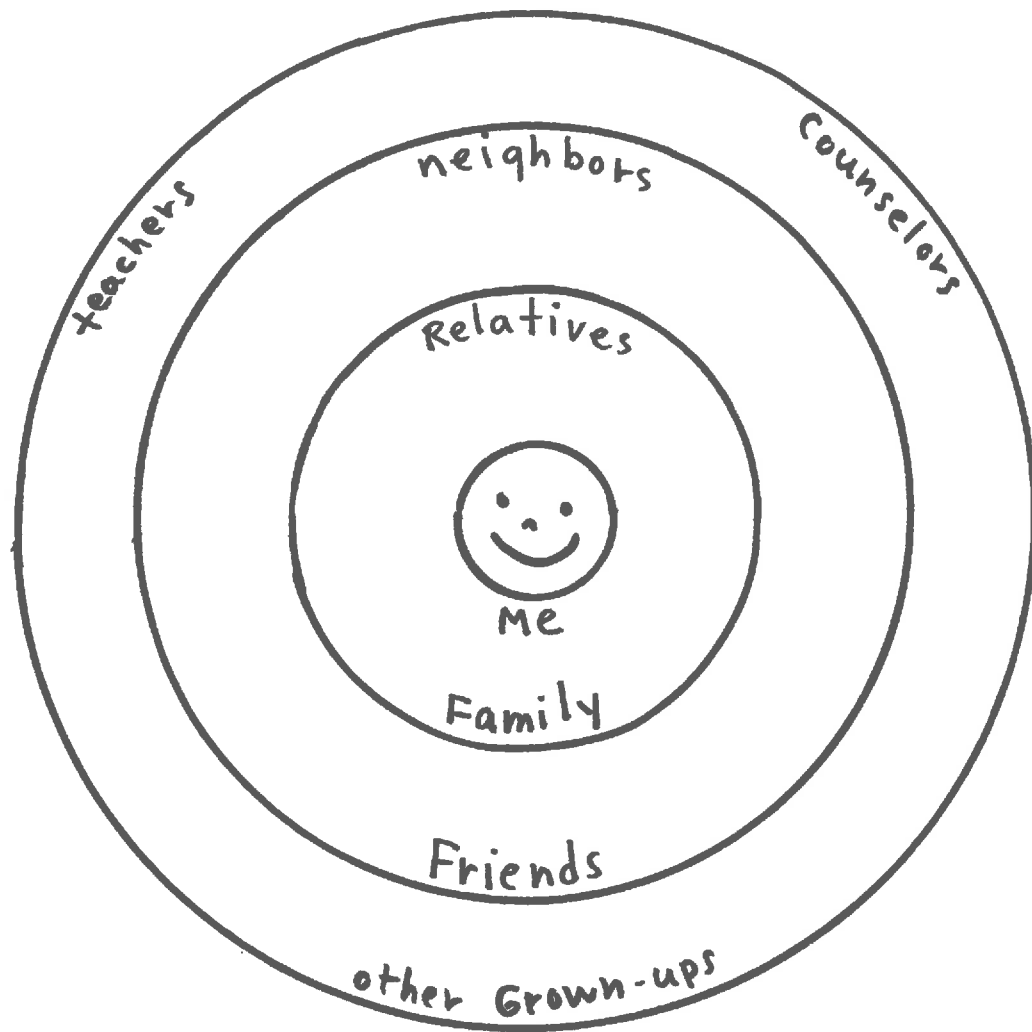
Now... ask the picture what you can learn from it ! 25.

It is important to have a place that feels
very safe. This can be a real place... or a pretend
place to think about.

Some people believe they have a higher power,
God, or a guardian angel to watch over them.
Do you?

I have people I care about... These people are important to me.

Many people care about me and I will always be taken care of! (List names and write numbers in this "caring circle".)



1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____

There are things I like about me ... (1:st)

There are things I do well ... (1:st)

There are things others tell me I am good at ... (1:st)

30. No one is perfect... but everyone is good at something.

Those who live through terrible times will often be able to help others... and someday may do something to make the world a better place!

Even terrible things can teach some good things like understanding, caring, courage and how to be O.K. during difficult times!

32. The world can be a happy place again!

This is me... I'm O.K.