

Central Toronto Youth Services
**FAMILIES
IN TRANSITION**

GENDER JOURNEY
Exploration

Envisioning the Future
Reflecting

TRANSITION

**COMING HOME TO MYSELF:
THE FIT GUIDE TO GENDER EXPLORATION**

FAMILIES IN TRANSITION
Coming Home to Myself: The FIT Guide to Gender Exploration

PUBLISHED BY CENTRAL TORONTO YOUTH SERVICES
MARCH 2021

CONTRIBUTORS:

Content

Lindsay Elin
Briar Rose Thom
LeeAndra Miller
Tristan Whiston

Design and Illustration

Tariq Sami

Copy Editing

David Yeh
Tristan Whiston

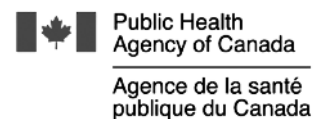
**With gratitude to the following Facilitators
for their feedback and input**

Nicola Brown
Jia Qing Wilson-Yang
Leslie Kirsh
Meaghan Moore
Sonny Berenson
Kai Cheng Thom
Tobie Marven
Marika Heinrich
Jordan Zaitzow
Reyan Anton
Larae Harbour
Tristan Whiston
Syrus Marcus Ware
Char Bondy
Terrence Rodriguez

And to the FIT Advisory Committee

Mason Smart
Allie Spangaro,
Joel Kadish
Giselle Bloch
Sandy Bobrow
Tabatha Dodge

And to all the youth, parents, and caregivers who have trusted us with their stories and journeys





page 2

Welcome to Families in Transition

page 3

How to Use This Book

page 4

The “Gems” of FIT: Key Things You Need to Know

page 6

UNIT 1: Your Gender Journey

page 10

UNIT 2: Gender Exploration & Coming Out

page 18

UNIT 3: Dealing with Transphobia and Transmisogyny

page 26

UNIT 4: Mental Wellness & Coping with Stress

page 32

UNIT 5: Relationships with Parents/Caregivers

page 36

UNIT 6: Relationships with Peers

page 42

UNIT 7: Transition Planning

page 46

UNIT 8: Transition & Decision-Making

page 58

UNIT 9: Envisioning The Future

page 60

UNIT 10: Reflecting & The Journey Ahead



WELCOME

TO FAMILIES IN TRANSITION!

Dear You,

If you're reading this workbook, then chances are you're a young person who is interested in exploring your gender identity and/or your relationship with your family. Maybe you and your parents are doing the Families in Transition Group Program with a local organization. Or maybe you were given this book by a teacher, counselor, or other professional. Whatever the case, welcome! It's great to meet you.

Families in Transition (FIT) is a program that was originally started at Central Toronto Youth Services by queer and trans counselors. One part of the work we do is helping parents learn how to be better allies so that young folks like you can focus on your own process. That's the other big part of what we do: supporting trans, non-binary, and gender questioning youth explore gender identity and expression.

We like to call this process a "gender journey" – often, we have to travel to great lengths in order find out who we are and what we need in terms of gender. Like the hero of an epic story, trans and gender questioning people accomplish great things and overcome daunting challenges. Some folks will transition from one gender identity to another socially, medically, or both. Some of us will navigate coming out to friends, family, and loved ones. And all of us have to grapple with figuring out exactly who we are in world that too often tries to force us into a box.

In FIT, we believe that trans and gender diverse people are magic. Over the years, we've worked with hundreds of youth, and every single one of them has shown amazing resilience, talent, courage, and creativity (though not all of them saw themselves that way at the time!). Our job is not to tell you what to do, but to help you discover your own incredible qualities, the "superpowers," special skills, relationships, and mentors that will help you on your journey. Because at the end of the day, it's your journey, and only you get to define your identity.

Gender journeys aren't always easy, and for some, they can be long and difficult. We are here to tell you that you are valid, your thoughts and feelings matter, and you are not alone. Trans and gender diverse people come from a long, deep history of strength, struggle, and survival. It's important that you know that it is very possible for trans and gender diverse people to live happy, meaningful lives in an infinite number of ways.

So go forth on your journey, brave one. If your road is long, may you meet many friends along the way. And wherever you go, whomever you become, remember that you are, and have always been, enough.

Sincerely
The FIT Team



HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This workbook is a teaching tool for the FIT Group Program, but it's also designed so that you can use it on your own. If you're not about to start the FIT Group, there are a couple of options that you could take:

1) You could do the activities in the workbook on your own. All of the readings and exercises can be done solo, at your own pace. The book follows a specific order of topics, but you can technically also pick and choose the exercises you want. (If you're a therapist or counselor reading this, then know that you can also select specific exercises/units for work with your clients!) If you find that the book is bringing up a lot of powerful feelings for you that you're having a hard time managing, we strongly recommend talking to a professional or adult you trust before continuing.

2) You can also do this book as part of a "DIY Families in Transition Program." This means that while you complete this workbook, your parents or caregivers will be completing the FIT Workbook for Parents & Caregivers. Both of the books have 10 units each, so you should be working at relatively the same pace, i.e., you'll finish your Unit 1 at the same time as your parents/caregivers finish their Unit 1. Some of the units are very full, while others are lighter, so feel free to skip exercises here and there. At the end of each unit, discuss how things are going. We suggest 1-2 weeks per unit. Again, if it seems like there are strong feelings coming up that are difficult to manage, we suggest asking for the help of a therapist or counselor.

HAPPY WORKBOOKING!

THE “GEMS” OF FIT: Key Things You Need To Know

- 1. GENDER EXPLORATION IS NORMAL AND HEALTHY: It is completely okay to change and experiment with the way you identify and express yourself in terms of gender.** Almost all human beings will experience some change in the way that they feel about and show their gender at some point in their lives. You and only you get to decide what your gender identity and expression are. Some people know “right away” that they are trans, others need time to think and experiment, and some might try gender transition for a while before deciding it’s not for them. All of this is valid and can be part of healthy growing through life.
- 2. GENDER DISCRIMINATION IS REAL: *Transphobia* (discrimination against all trans people), *enbyphobia* (discrimination against non-binary people) and *transmisogyny* (specific discrimination against trans feminine individuals) are an unfortunate part of the world we live in.** Historically, trans people have had to fight for their rights at school and work, in health care, in relationships, and at home. For many trans people, this continues today. Scientific research shows us that gender discrimination against trans people can have a negative effect on mental health and happiness. If this is something that you are experiencing, please know that you do not deserve to be treated badly, that gender affirmation is a human right, and that you are not alone!
- 3. GIVE YOUR FEELINGS SPACE: Exploring gender and transitioning can be very emotional experiences, and it’s okay to feel whatever you are feelings!** Even without transphobia and/or transmisogyny, being trans and questioning your gender can involve some complicated emotions, conversations, and relationships. Being trans and exploring gender can also be really fun, affirming, and empowering! It’s normal to feel many things at the same time in this process, and it can be helpful to reach out to supportive family, professionals, and peers.
- 4. EVERYONE DESERVES SUPPORT: Trans people have the right to be treated fairly, and also to have their gender identity respected and affirmed.** If you identify as trans, or if you are exploring your gender, you deserve to be fully respected by the people around you – especially your friends and family. This includes the pronoun(s) and name you are currently using, and being free from any kind of bullying or intimidation based on your gender. You deserve to be able to explore and express your gender freely, in every part of your life, and especially in the place where you live.

- 5. MANAGE IMPERFECTION: People will likely make some mistakes from time to time in the way that they try to support you.** Because we live in an imperfect world, even the people who love you may make mistakes in the way they respond to your gender identity and expression. For example, if your parents/teachers/coaches/friends were never raised with any knowledge of what it means to be transgender (or if they were raised thinking that being trans was wrong or a mental illness), they will likely have a period of adjustment as they learn about how to support you. This does not mean that it is “okay” for anyone to be hurtful. It should not be your job to teach others about gender. However, it does mean that you may need to find ways to get support, communicate your needs, and take care of yourself when hurtful things happen.
- 6. MAKE INFORMED MEDICAL CHOICES: You get to choose what happens to your own body, and you have the right to good medical information!** Some trans people choose not to medically transition, some trans people want only one or a few medical procedures, and some trans people want all the medical procedures they can access. You have the right to supportive, gender-affirming healthcare. Medical transition can involve making some big (and potentially permanent) decisions, and like any big decision, can involve anxiety and uncertainty. While you don’t have to be “100% sure” about medical transition (because this isn’t possible for everyone), you do want to have a strong sense of what your hopes and fears are. This is why it is important to try and make sure that you are getting all the information you need, so that you can make a choice that is right for you. Depending on where you live and how old you are, you may have the legal right to make medical choices for yourself, or you may need the permission of a parent or guardian. Whatever the case, your body belongs to you, and you deserve to have a say in what happens to it.
- 7. MAKE CONNECTIONS WITH COMMUNITY AT YOUR OWN PACE: Whether you identify as trans, non-binary, or gender questioning, it can be very supportive to connect with LGBTQ+Q2S+ community!** There are many IRL and online groups that offer support and social events in the LGBTQ+Q2S+ community. Depending on where you live, there may even be specific healthcare, counseling, and education opportunities for trans people. You may find that meeting and socializing with other trans and questioning folks your age is helpful when you are dealing with challenges, and also just fun! However, you and only you get to choose how much and when you want to get connected with the community.
- 8. SELF-CARE & SELF AFFIRMATION: Remember that your needs and feelings matter, and that you have your own “superpowers.”** Growing up trans, non-binary, or gender questioning isn’t easy. The fact that you’ve made it this far shows that you are resilient, creative, and strong – even if you don’t always feel that way. Taking time to take care of yourself by resting, doing things you like, getting help when you need it, and following your gender journey wherever you need to go is so important. The world needs the unique gifts that you have to offer.

UNIT 1

YOUR GENDER JOURNEY

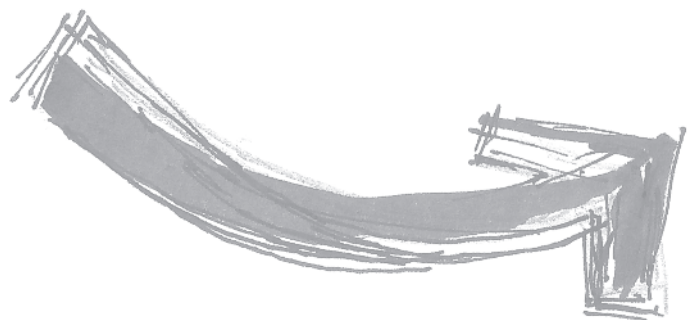
THE SECRET BASE: Building Internal Strength & Safety

What helps you to feel strong and empowered? What helps you to feel safer and more comfortable? As we start to explore topics that may be sensitive or challenging, it's important to also develop **resources** or tools you can use to take care of yourself. We invite you to fill the space below with words and images that portray a "secret base" – a place where you feel safe and strong. This could be a real place you've been to, or it could be an imaginary place. Spend some time developing your secret base. If you're ever feeling stressed or worried, know that you can always close your eyes and come back to this place.

FIVE GOOD THINGS: The Enchanted Circle

This is another resource-building activity. As a young trans, non-binary or gender questioning person, we are often confronted with negative stories about ourselves – and sometimes these stories can take up all of our mental space. Without thinking too much about it, write the following in the circle below:

- **1 thing you like about yourself (even if it's very small)**
- **1 good thing you've done in the past**
- **1 skill or talent that you have**
- **1 gift you've given someone – this can be a real, physical gift, or it can be metaphorical, ie a good experience you had with someone**
- **1 thing you'd like to do that you've never done before**



the Enchanted Circle

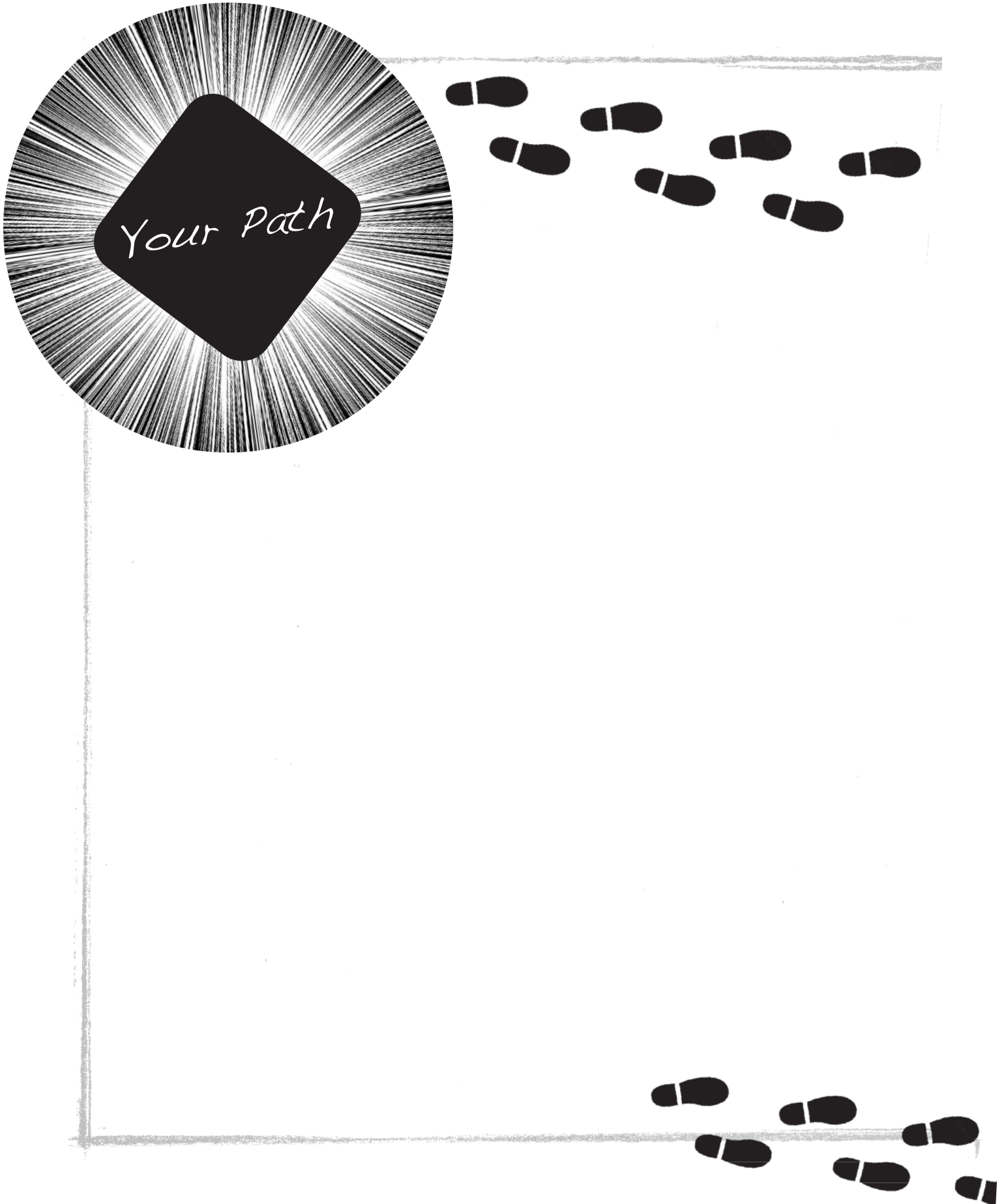


This is your “enchanted circle.”

Any time you are feeling overwhelmed by negative thoughts about yourself,
you can return to it to remember these five good things about yourself.

GENDER JOURNEY MAPPING

Use pictures, words, and/or symbols to draw a path in the space below and on the next page. This path should show key moments in your gender journey that have led you to this moment in your life. End the path in the box on the next page, and in the box, use pictures/words/symbols to represent your hopes. Take some time to look at your path. What story does it tell? Have you learned anything new about yourself?



pictures words symbols

HOPE

UNIT 2

GENDER EXPLORATION & COMING OUT

GENDER IS A MANY-SPLENDORED THING

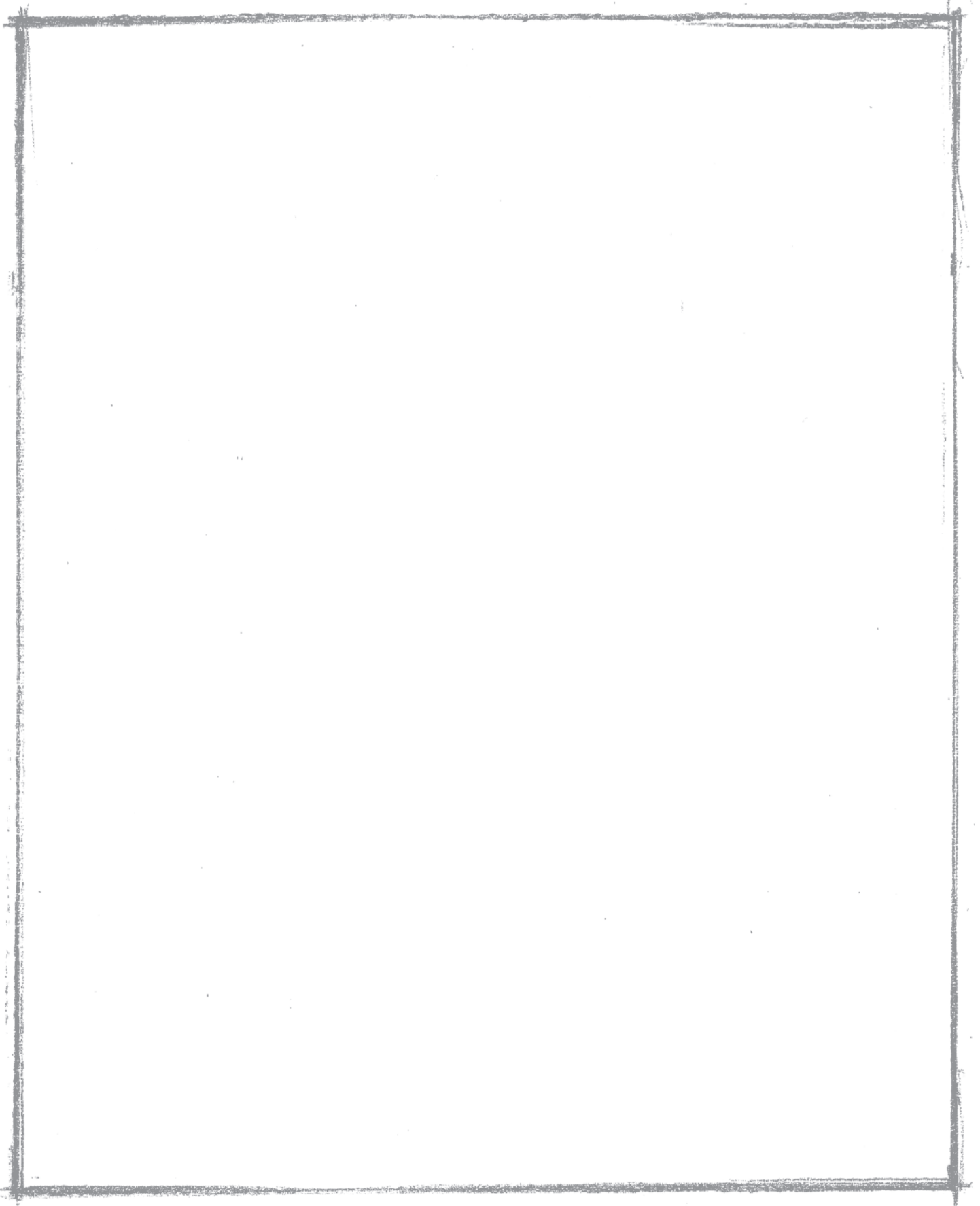
The society we live in is often very focused on getting it “right” when it comes to gender. “Male” and “female” are very specific categories that people often have to struggle to fit into. There is also little room for our gender identities and expressions to change over time – even in the trans community, there can be pressure to “know” what your gender is right away and transition as quickly as possible. This can make things very difficult for gender questioning and gender fluid people.

At FIT, we believe that gender exploration and fluidity are beautiful, powerful parts of human expression and development – everyone (including cis people!) needs time and space to explore our gender possibilities, just as we need time and space to explore our different interests, ideas, and life goals.



This activity is an opportunity to embrace gender fluidity and exploration in a low-stakes, fantasy-based way. In the space below and on the next page, use words and/or images to design a character (doesn't have to be a human being!) who has the ability to transform into several different forms, each with its own unique gender expression, strengths/powers, and weaknesses. Describe/depict each form in some detail.

What circumstances would cause this character to switch from one gender expression to the others? Is this ability a gift, a curse, or both?



THE GENDER SPECTRUM DANCE

There's no one way to be trans or gender nonconforming. This activity is meant to help you get into your body and feel into your own personal truths about gender. To do this activity, you'll need a room or space where you can be alone for a while without interruptions. Alternatively, you can do this activity with your family or a group of friends, as long as that feels good to you.

Start by designating one side of the room as the **YES** side. The opposite end of the room is **NO**, and the space between is **MAYBE**.

Read through the following statements. After each one, move to a spot in the room that best represents how **you** feel about the statements. If a statement is partly true for you, then you might want to be somewhere in the middle, but closer to the **YES** side. If a statement is mostly (but not entirely) false for you, then move closer to the **NO** side.

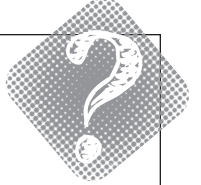
Pause to notice how each statement feels in your body. What is like to literally "stand in your truth"?

STATEMENTS

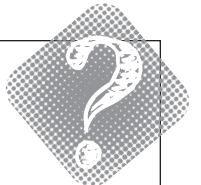
- I've always known, or known since I was very young, that I was trans or non-binary
- I identify as being part of the gender binary (i.e., male or female, boy or girl)
- My gender identity changes according to the people I'm with or the place that I am in
- I like to experiment and get creative with my gender expression
- "Passing" is very important to me
- I come out as trans/non-binary immediately to everyone I meet
- I don't to come out at all, and I would rather no one knew that I was trans except people I am very close to
- People always ask the most annoying questions when I come out to them
- There is someone I really want to come out to, but I don't know how
- It's very important to come out right away to people you are dating
- I need more support and strategies for coming out
- Coming out is something you only need to do once and then it's over

GENDER SPECTRUM DANCE REFLECTIONS

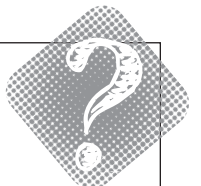
What was it like to literally “stand in your truth”?



Do you think there is such thing as a “normal” gender exploration, transition or coming out process? Why or why not?



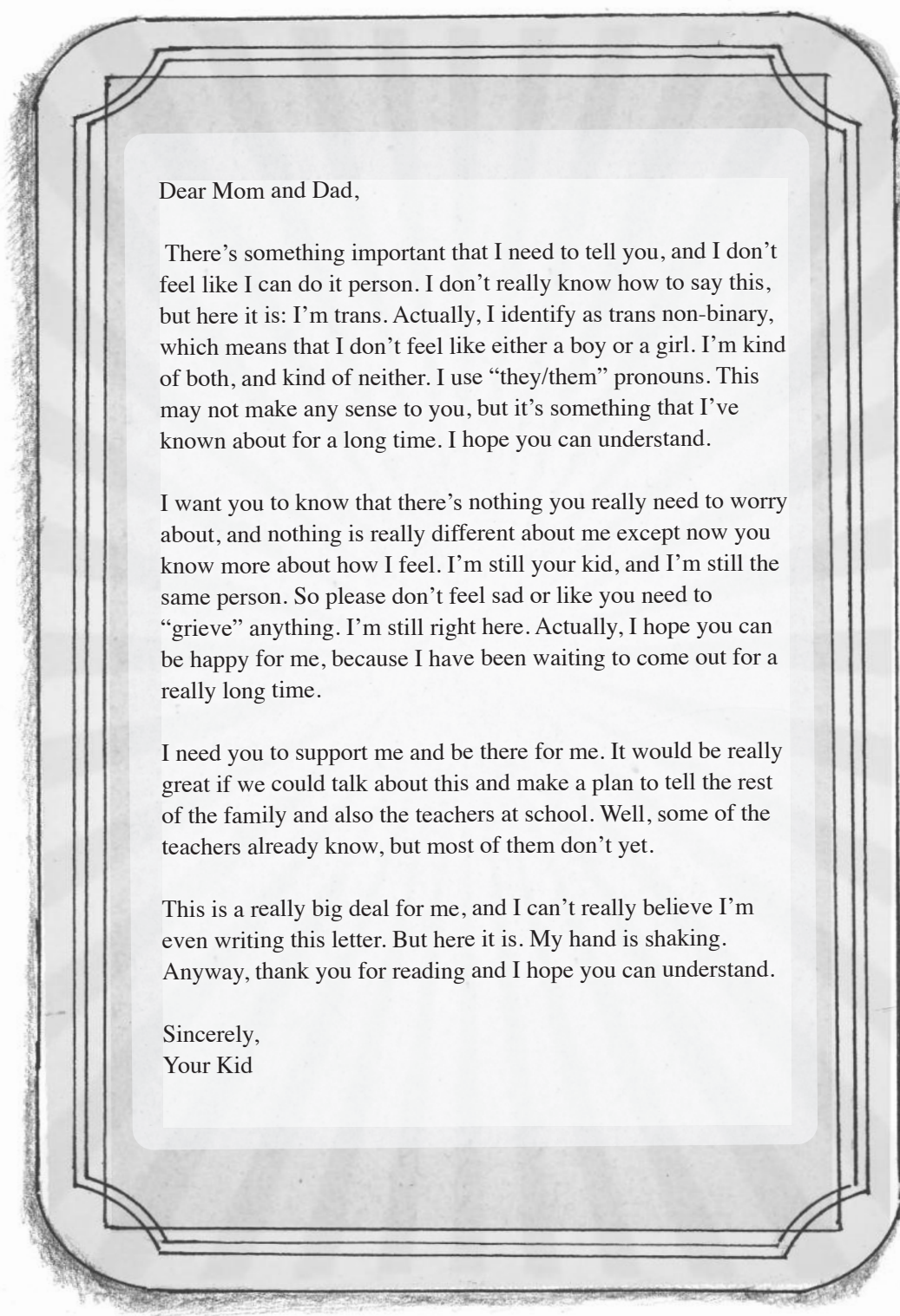
What does a “healthy” gender journey look like for **you**?

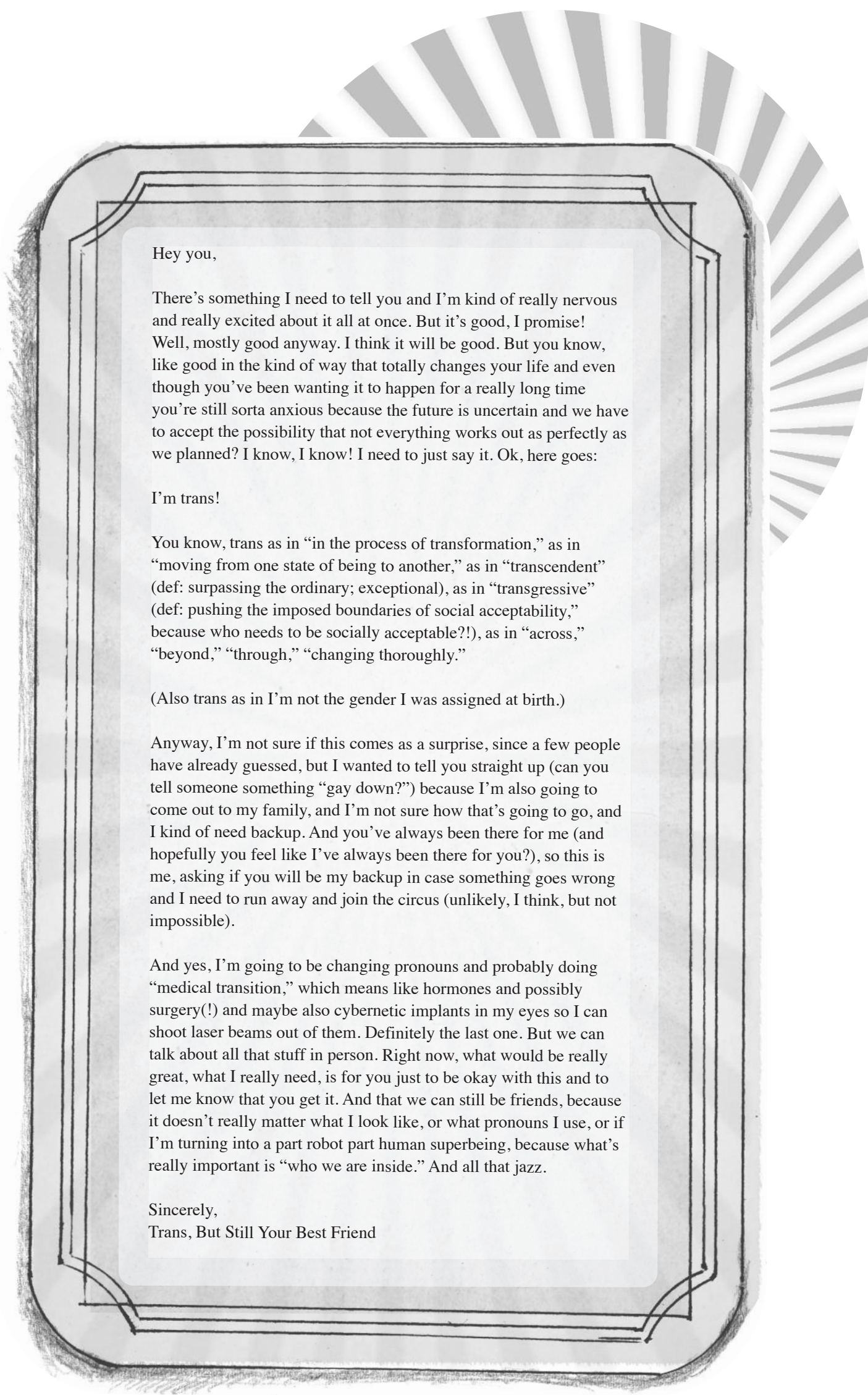


COMING OUT CARDS

Coming out as a trans, non-binary, gender questioning, or otherwise gender diverse is a personal decision that should be totally up to you. It's important that you feel as safe and supported as possible whenever you decide to come out to someone. Some people choose to come out to one person at a time, while others may make public social media announcements, or anything in between. There is no one way to come out, other than what is best for you at any particular time!

Below are two examples of "coming out" cards from trans people – one is written to family, the other is to a friend. What are your thoughts upon reading them? Is there anything that you relate to, or really don't relate to?





Hey you,

There's something I need to tell you and I'm kind of really nervous and really excited about it all at once. But it's good, I promise! Well, mostly good anyway. I think it will be good. But you know, like good in the kind of way that totally changes your life and even though you've been wanting it to happen for a really long time you're still sorta anxious because the future is uncertain and we have to accept the possibility that not everything works out as perfectly as we planned? I know, I know! I need to just say it. Ok, here goes:

I'm trans!

You know, trans as in "in the process of transformation," as in "moving from one state of being to another," as in "transcendent" (def: surpassing the ordinary; exceptional), as in "transgressive" (def: pushing the imposed boundaries of social acceptability," because who needs to be socially acceptable?!), as in "across," "beyond," "through," "changing thoroughly."

(Also trans as in I'm not the gender I was assigned at birth.)

Anyway, I'm not sure if this comes as a surprise, since a few people have already guessed, but I wanted to tell you straight up (can you tell someone something "gay down?") because I'm also going to come out to my family, and I'm not sure how that's going to go, and I kind of need backup. And you've always been there for me (and hopefully you feel like I've always been there for you?), so this is me, asking if you will be my backup in case something goes wrong and I need to run away and join the circus (unlikely, I think, but not impossible).

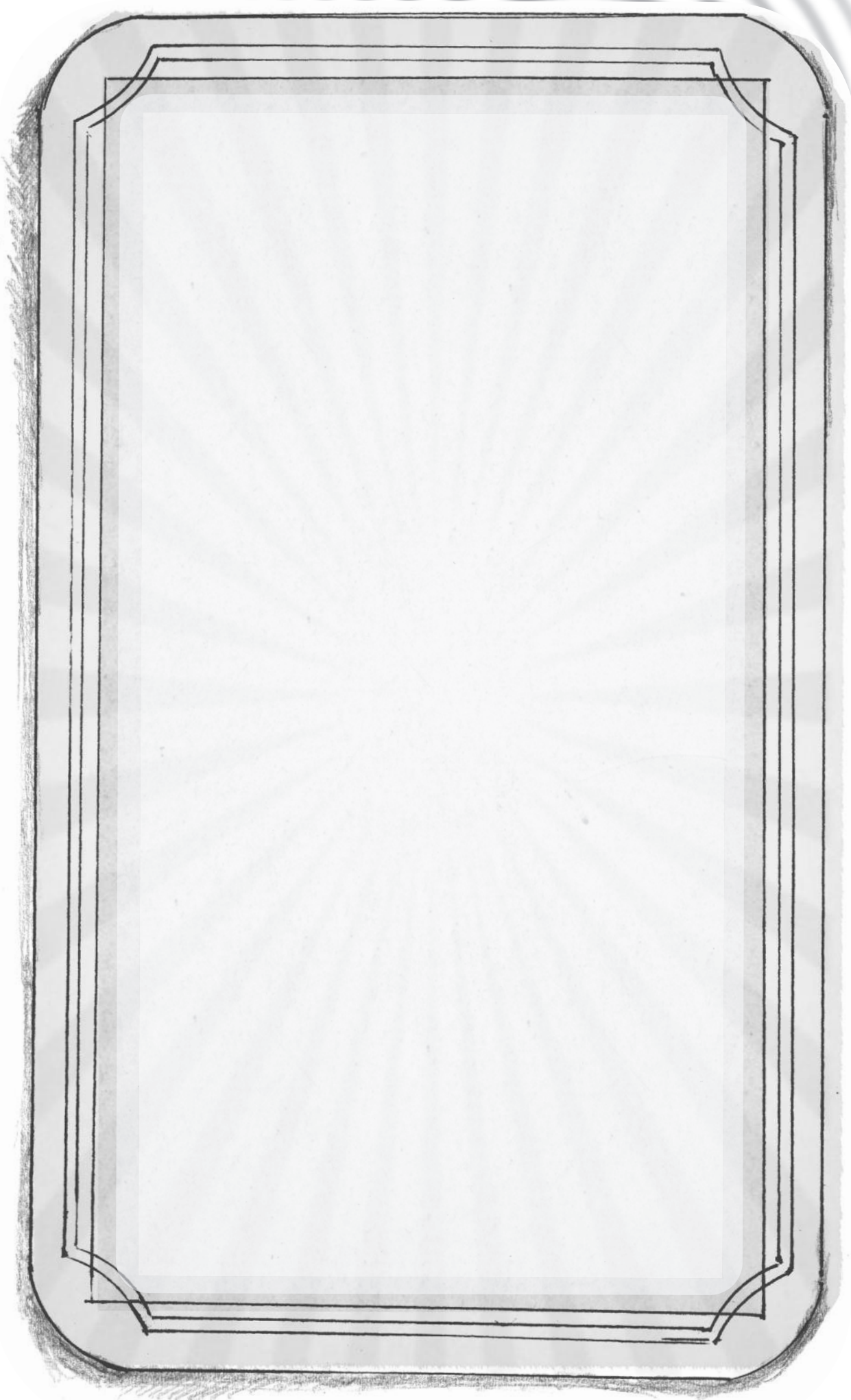
And yes, I'm going to be changing pronouns and probably doing "medical transition," which means like hormones and possibly surgery(!) and maybe also cybernetic implants in my eyes so I can shoot laser beams out of them. Definitely the last one. But we can talk about all that stuff in person. Right now, what would be really great, what I really need, is for you just to be okay with this and to let me know that you get it. And that we can still be friends, because it doesn't really matter what I look like, or what pronouns I use, or if I'm turning into a part robot part human superbeing, because what's really important is "who we are inside." And all that jazz.

Sincerely,
Trans, But Still Your Best Friend

Write and design your own “coming out” card/social media post in the space below (this is just practice – you don’t actually have to show it to anyone unless you want to!).

Take some time to get the look and feel just right. Make sure it’s addressed to a specific person or audience for maximum effectiveness.





UNIT 3

DEALING WITH TRANSPHOBIA & TRANSMISOGYNY

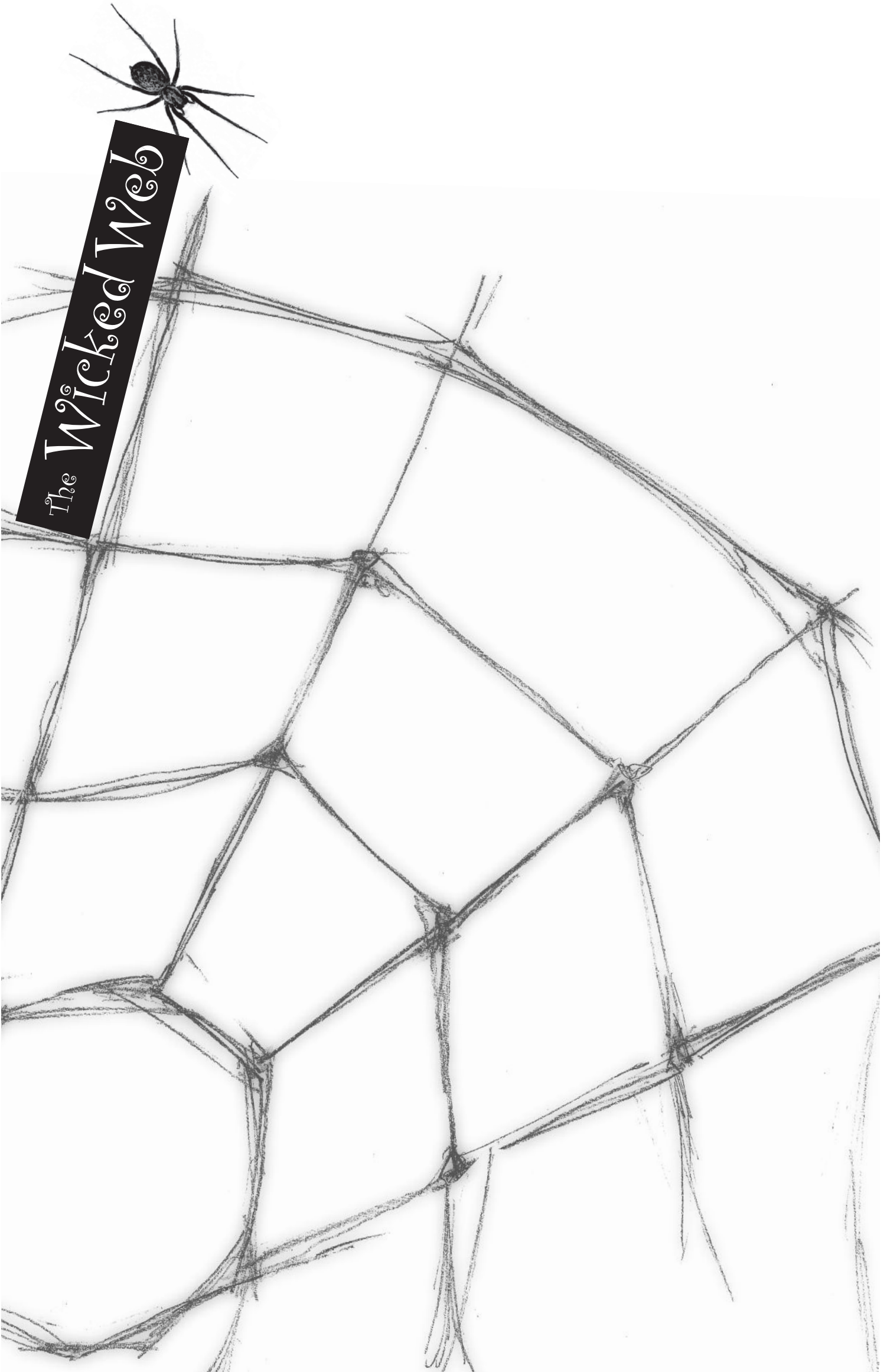
THE WICKED WEB

The gender journey, as with any epic journey, comes with its own challenges and villains. Trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people experience social *discrimination* and *oppression* in the form of **transphobia** (discrimination against trans people), **enbyphobia** (discrimination against non-binary people), and **transmisogyny** (discrimination against trans women and trans feminine people). Additionally, you may also experience discrimination and oppression if you are a person of colour, disabled, neurodiverse, not wealthy, or otherwise marginalized (meaning you aren't given certain privileges in our society).

Understanding how discrimination and oppression affect us can be helpful because it allows us to not blame ourselves for barriers that are not within our control. It can also help us to get motivated to push back against and fight for social change!

Use the web on the next page to illustrate how transphobia, enbyphobia, transmisogyny and other oppressions affect you:

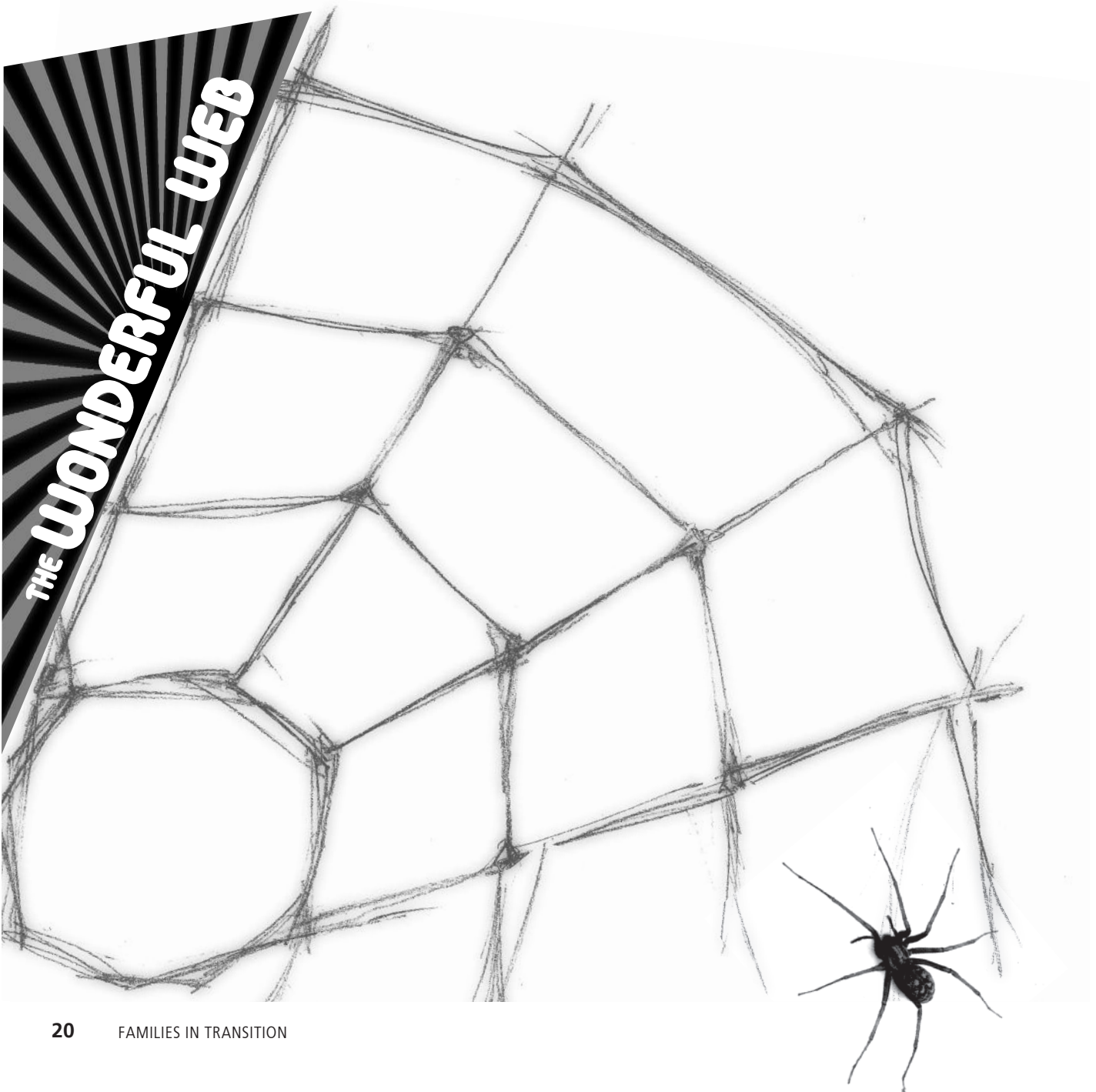
1. On the outside of the web, list types of discrimination and/or oppression that you experience. For example: transphobia, transmisogyny, enbyphobia, racism, ableism, ageism, etc.
2. On the inside edges of the web, write down some places that those types of oppression show up in your life. For example: school, work, home, extracurricular activities, etc.
3. Closer to the centre of the web write down some ways that these types of oppression show themselves to you. For example: misgendering, deadnaming, being called names/teased, missing out on opportunities, etc.
4. In the centre of the web, write down some of the ways you've responded or reacted to your experiences of discrimination and oppression – whether you think these ways are good or bad. For example: fighting back, getting help, giving in, making art, etc.



THE WONDERFUL WEB

Oppression and discrimination are a web, but so are **resilience** and **support**.
Make a “wonderful web” using the template below:

1. On the outside of the web, list some ideas, goals, and dreams that inspire you to stay on your journey. For example: starting my dream career, making my art, justice and equality for everyone, helping people who are in trouble, etc.
2. On the inside edges of the web, write down some resources, places, and things that have been helpful or supportive to you. For example: community centres/organizations, places in nature that you love, books and works of art that are important to you, websites/social media pages, activists or influencers that you admire, etc.
3. Closer to the centre of the web, list some people whom you care about and have been supportive to you.
4. At the centre of the web, list some qualities or traits in yourself that help you to stay hopeful and push past barriers. For example: stubbornness, kindness, courage, grit, wanting to stay alive, optimism, etc.



FAMILY PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

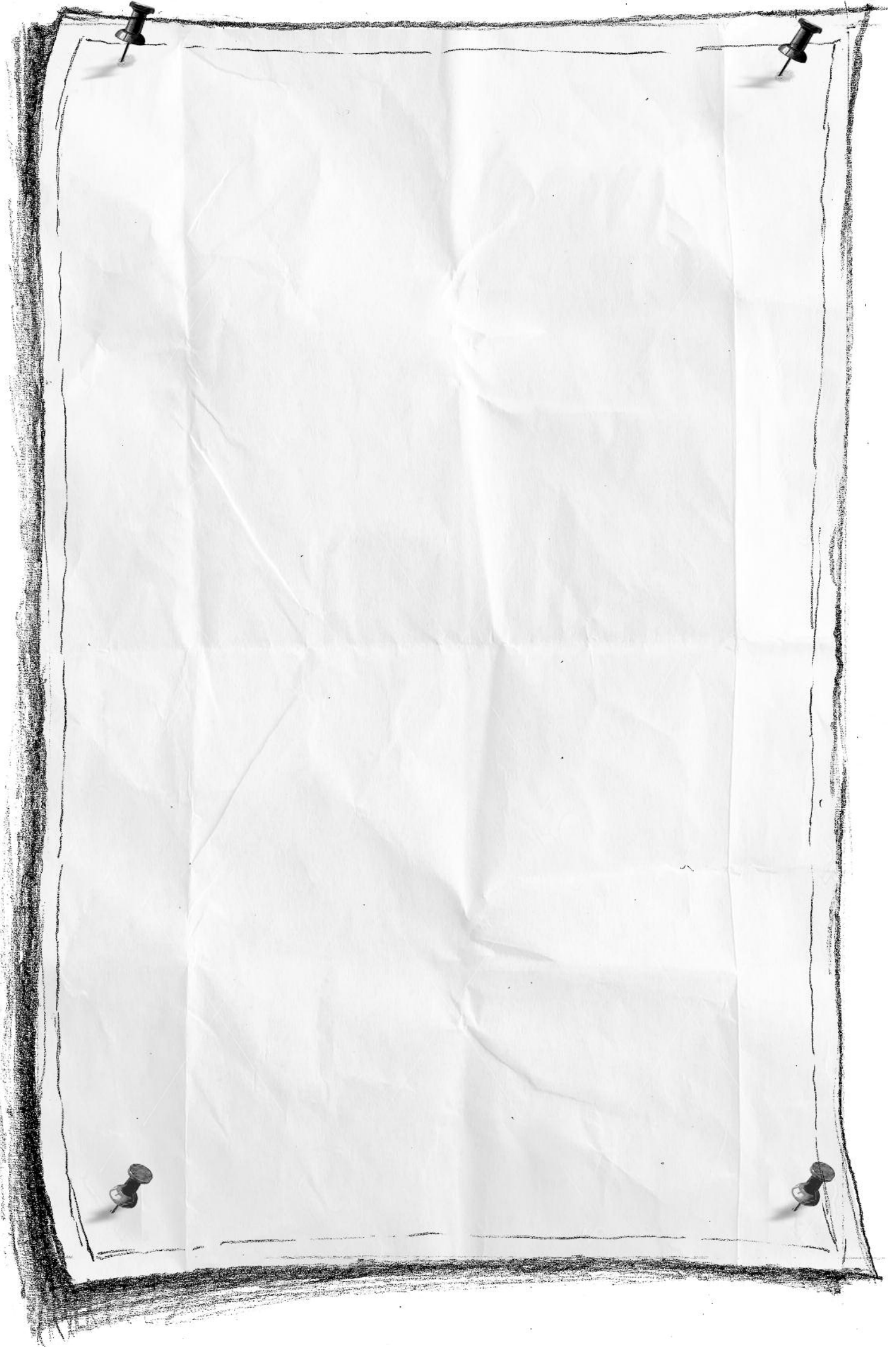
Sometimes, it can be hard to speak up and let our families know what we need them to do in order to support us! Have you ever felt like even when they have good intentions, your parents, grandparents, siblings, and/or other family members just don't get it? Did you tell them about it? If not, what stopped you – and if yes, how did that work out?

This activity is meant to help you practice thinking about what you need your loved ones to know and do to help you feel safe and supported in your family. Remember – you don't have to share this with anyone, so you don't have to worry about "being nice," understanding, or patient (these are great qualities, but try to set them aside just for the purpose of doing this activity). This is about getting in touch with you, your needs and feelings, and no one else's!

Use the space below or on the next page to design a poster (or a few posters) or meme that specifically addresses your family and specific issues that you wish they would work on when it comes to supporting your gender journey. If visual art isn't your thing, you could also use the space to write the script for a Public Service Announcement (think of an info commercial or other educational content).

Once you're done, take some time reflect – does your poster/PSA say exactly what you want it to? Would you ever consider sharing this with your family in real life?



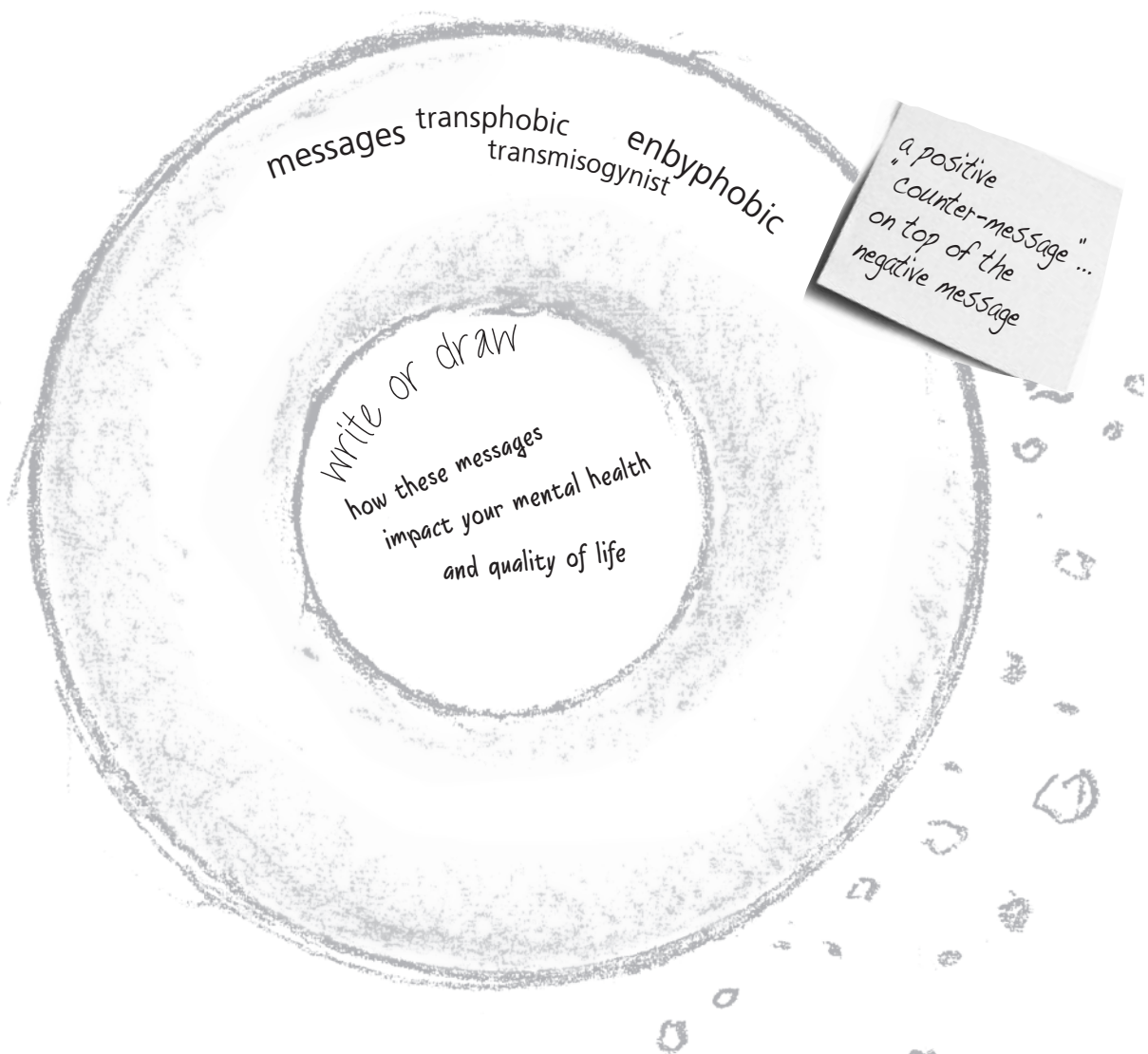


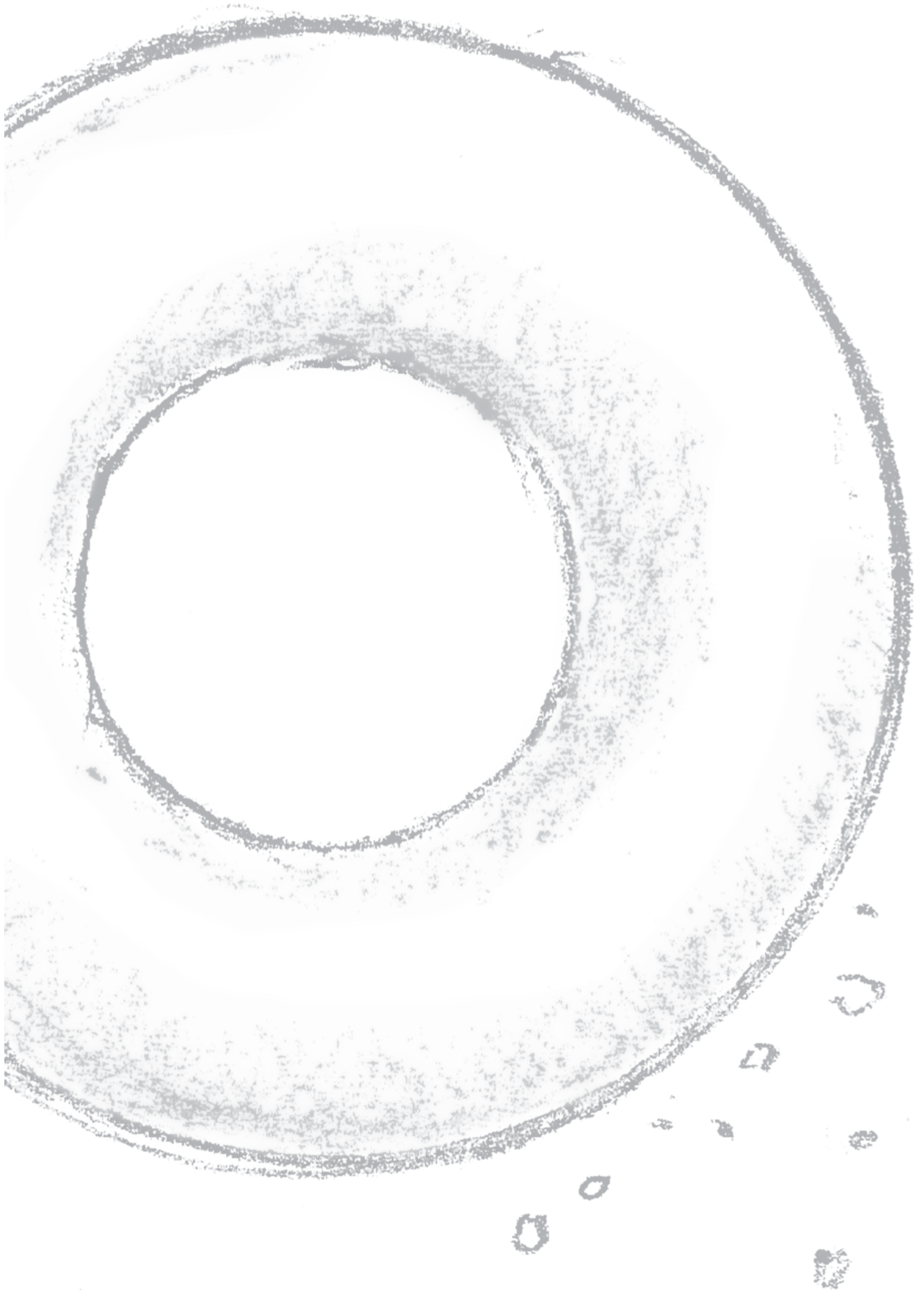


THE "DONUT" ACTIVITY: The Effects of Transphobia, Enbyphobia, and Transmisogny

1. Use the template on the next page or copy it onto another piece of paper.
2. In the outside circle write all the transphobic, transmisogynist and/or enbyphobic messages you have received at home, school, work, in the community, from social media and traditional media. Note that silence can also be a message – if you never see, hear, or read about trans people at school or on TV, what does that tell you about yourself? Write the messages down in the second person, i.e. as though they were being addressed to you. Example: "You are not normal."
3. On the inside circle write or draw how these messages impact your mental health and quality of life.
4. Read through some of the messages in the outside circle that most resonate with you. Write a positive "counter-message" on a Post-it or sticky note and stick it directly on top of the negative message. Repeat this process until most or all of the negative messages are covered – take your time with this process, so that the counter-messages you come up with are really resonant and feel true. You could also do this activity with a friend and have them help you come up with counter-messages if you're feeling stuck.

How did it feel to do this activity? Did anything surprise you? What counter-messages do you think are most important, and who do you need to receive them from? Write your thoughts in the space below.





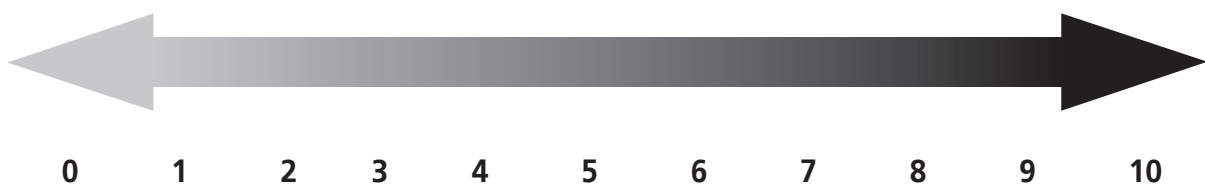
UNIT 4

MENTAL WELLNESS & COPING WITH STRESS

THE STRESS METER

So... life is stressful. This is true for everyone, but maybe especially true for trans, non binary, and gender nonconforming folks. This unit is about becoming aware of and dealing with stress in a way that is right for you.

Let's start with a simple exercise: The line below is a "stress meter."



1. Estimate your level of stress from 0-10 (0 being the most relaxed you've ever been in your life, and 10 being the most stressed you could possibly be) and mark this down on the meter.

DOWN-REGULATION

2. Now, if you're in the right place to do so, close your eyes and do a short meditation. Take some slow, deep breaths and imagine that you are a mighty oak tree with deep, deep roots and wide branches. Think of yourself as being as strong and calm as this beautiful tree that knows how to bend in the wind when it needs to. Stay in this meditation for at least 120 seconds.

How do you feel? Rate your level of stress again. Has it changed?

Down regulation is when we lower our stress level by doing something calming, grounding, relaxing. This works really well for certain people in certain situations, but not so well for others.

UP-REGULATION

3. Now, pick up a ball or other small, soft object. Toss it into the air and catch it. As you get comfortable with this, toss it higher and higher. Add complications – switch hands! Maybe try tossing it while standing on one foot! While jumping up and down on one foot! While jumping up and down on one foot with your eyes closed!

How do you feel? Rate your level of stress again. Has it changed?

Up-regulation is when we lower our stress level by doing something active, fun, exciting. This works really well for certain people in certain situations, but not so well for others.

THE WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

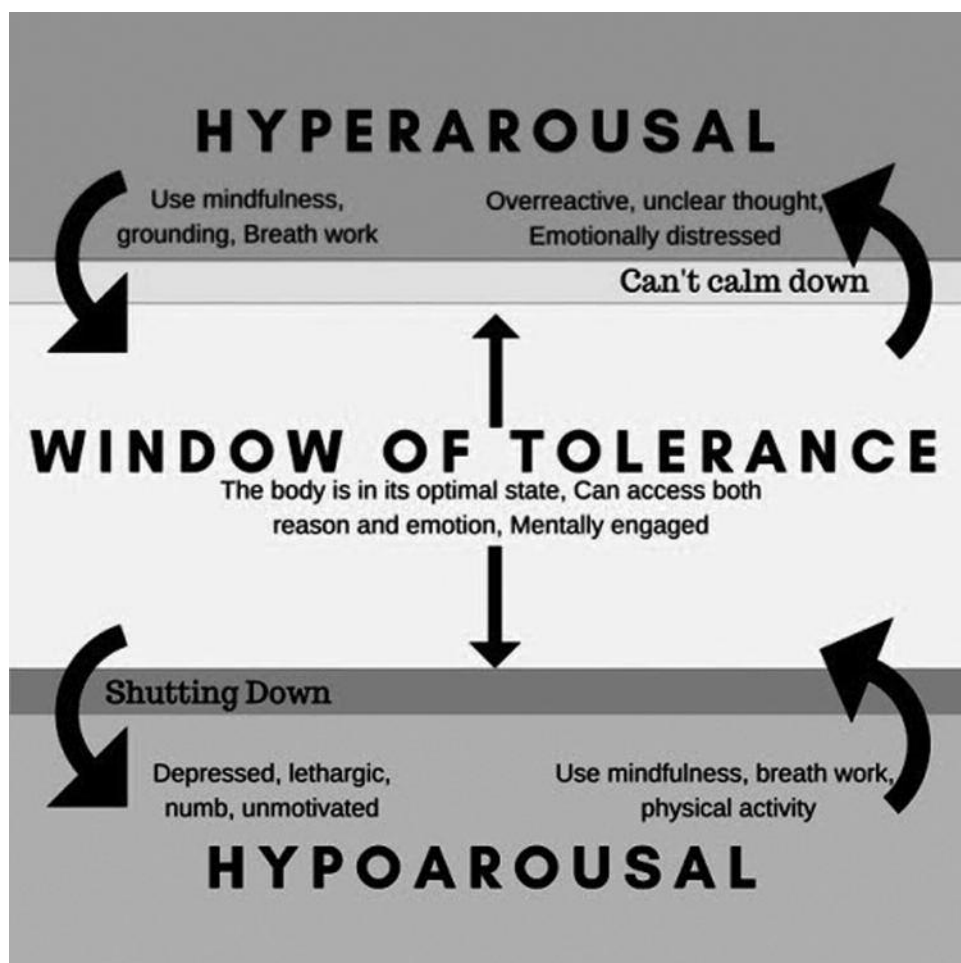
The following article describes a model for understanding what happens to our bodies and minds when we experience stress. We encourage you to get familiar with it as a way of gaining insight to your own experiences with stressful conversations.

According to Dr. Dan Siegel, MD and neurobiology expert, we all have a “Window of Tolerance” in which we are getting just the right amount of energy moving through our bodies – the type of energy we are talking about is called **nervous system activation** by scientists. In our Windows, we can feel all the different emotions, but we can also stay connected to our thoughts and to others. We feel connected to life when we are in our Windows.

Each person’s Window is different: for some people, sitting down and watching a documentary might be just the right amount of energy, and they can focus and get really into it. For others, that might be too little energy moving through the body. They might prefer to be playing hockey or dancing.

Sometimes when we are extremely stressed out, so much energy gets moving through our bodies that we leave our Windows. This is sometimes called **hyperarousal**. When we are hyperaroused, we can feel our hearts racing, sweating, shaking, and other physical sensations. We can feel panic or rage, and we might cry or scream or swear.

Hyperarousal is really useful in some situations – like maybe we’re getting attacked by a tiger and we need to run away! We need all that energy to get moving fast enough. But hyperarousal is not good if we feel it all the time because it burns us out. When we’re hyperaroused, we can really easily hurt other people’s feelings without meaning to.

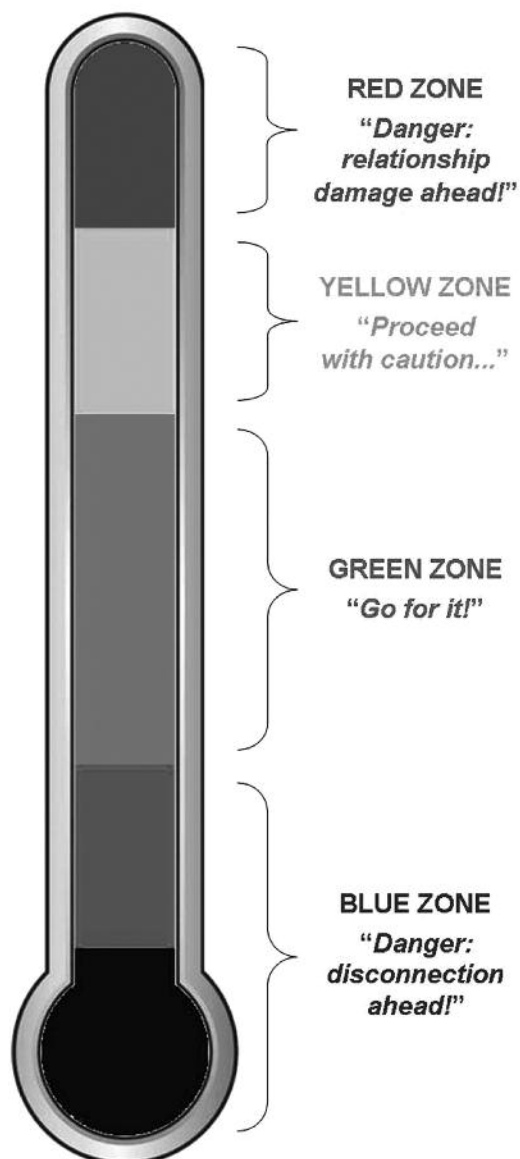


Another response to extreme stress is that the energy in our bodies slows down, almost like a “freeze.” This can be called **hypoarousal**. When we are hypoaroused, or “frozen,” our heartbeats might slow down, we might feel very heavy or like it’s hard to move. We might feel really “shut down” or numb. We might even feel bored or sleepy, like we don’t care about what’s going on – even though the world around us is really stressful!

Hypoarousal is like when someone is yelling at you, and you’re just like, “whatever dude.” Hypoarousal can be really good in some situations – like maybe the tiger from before is still chasing us, and so we need to hide and play dead so it will leave us alone. But hypoarousal is not good if we feel it all the time, because it makes us feel like we’re not connected to others. When we’re hypoaroused, it might seem to people like we don’t care about them when we really do.

We can use activities like meditation and physical activity to help us speed up or slow down the energy in our nervous systems so we can get back into our Windows of Tolerance. It’s up to you to decide just how much speeding up or slowing down is right – it’s your Window.

The other thing that tends to help us get back into our Windows is getting the right kind of support from others. But it has to be the right kind of support, because the wrong kind of support can make us feel worse. Has anyone ever told you to “just calm down!” when you’re really upset? Probably didn’t work! But maybe someone just listening to you with an open mind or giving really good advice or playing basketball with you has helped you calm down before. That’s the difference between the right and wrong kind of support. And everyone’s support needs are unique.



When thinking or talking about gender, note your own physical and emotional responses: Does your heart start to race? Do you suddenly feel cold and numb? Or do you feel warm, steady, and engaged?

Talking to others when hypo-aroused (“Blue Zone/frozen”) can come off as disconnected and uncaring.

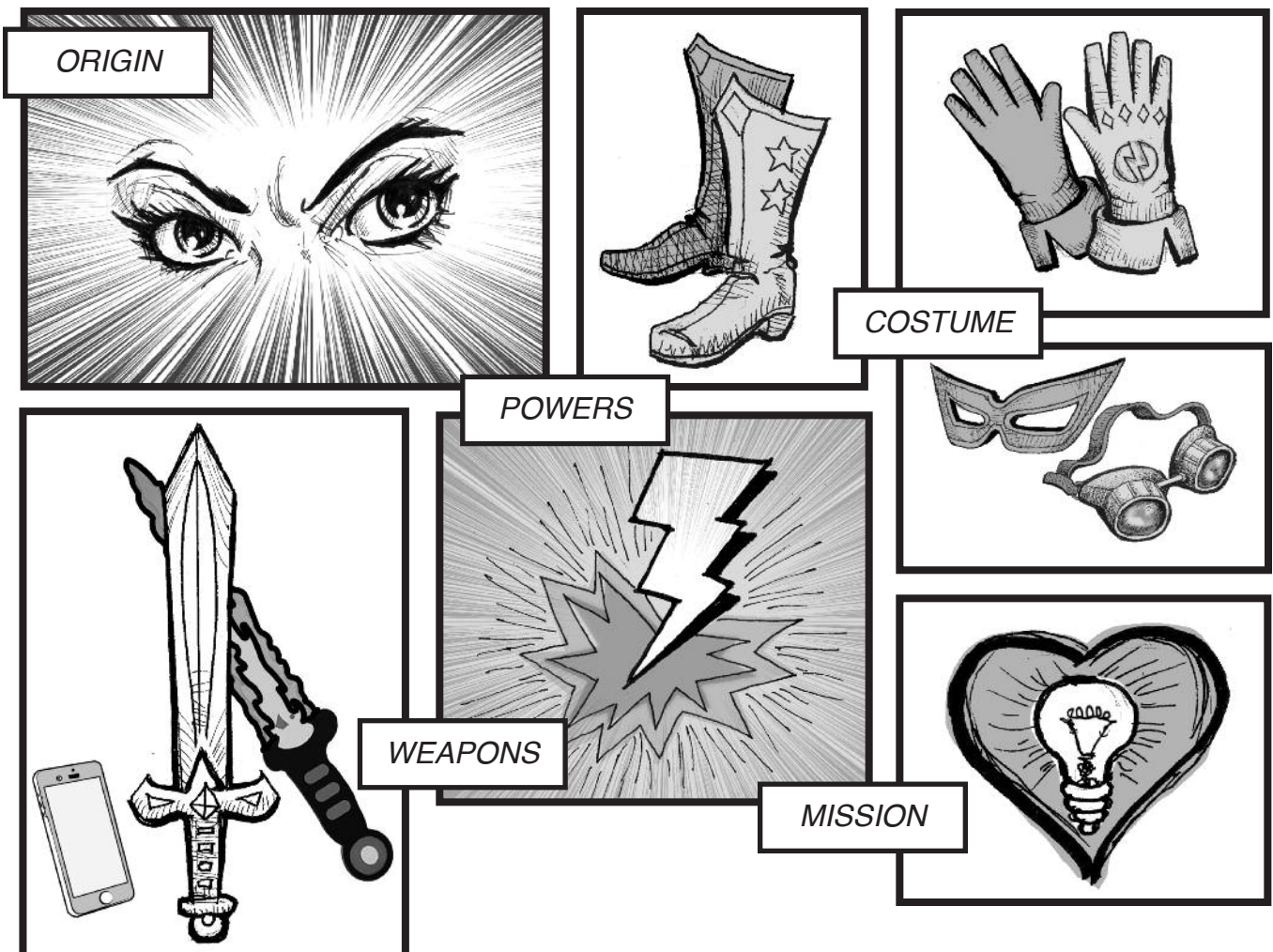
Talking to others when hyper-aroused (“Red Zone/hot”) can result in high conflict and saying regrettable things.

Connecting while in the Window of Tolerance (“Green zone/just right”) allows for authentic emotional expression, connection, and resolution. In the Green Zone, we are able to feel curious and compassionate - towards ourselves and towards others. When we are in their Window of Tolerance, other people can sense this, and it helps them to feel “emotionally regulated” (not necessarily calm, but safe enough to talk and open up) as well.

STEP INTO YOUR POWER

Instructions: Illustrate and/or write about the following.

1. Imagine yourself as a super hero – what shape would you be, what details on your costume, what features, what gender?
2. What are your super powers? Consider what you already possess and what you want to develop. These might be very literal, for example: "I have laser vision" or more conceptual, for example: "My super power is being able to really tap into others' feelings and make them feel listened to."
3. What are your weapons? Secret weapons, enchanted weapons? What tools do you have that you use to get through life? A magic sword? Your phone, which allows you to get away from stressful conversations while still being physically present?
4. What is your origin story? How did you get your super powers, secret weapons, mission in life? What factors influenced you and made you who you are today?
5. What is your "kryptonite" or Achilles Heel, your vulnerability? What are the tender spots or old wounds that sometimes get you down?
6. Who are your allies or super hero team? Who helps you and fights with you? Does anyone mentor and protect you?
7. Who are your villains or Rogues Gallery? Who or what gets in your way? This could be a real person, or it could be something like anxiety or depression. What would mental health issues look like as a supervillain or monster? And is there any way that your villains could be transformed into allies?



ORIGIN

COSTUME

POWERS

WEAPONS

GENDER

VULNERABILITY

ALLIES

ENEMIES

TOOLS

MISSION

UNIT 5

RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

HELPING OR HURTING?

Believe it or not, parents and caregivers are usually trying to help when it comes to gender – even when they are saying or doing the wrong thing. There are a lot of reasons for this, but the biggest ones are:

- 1) They are really stressed out or overwhelmed and not thinking clearly. (Has this ever happened to you?)
- 2) They are trying to protect you from something because they are afraid of you getting hurt. Many people, especially those who are older, were raised with absolutely no idea that gender diverse people existed – or only negative ideas about gender diversity. It was once very common for people to believe that trans, non-binary, and gender questioning people were sick, confused, and doomed to live an unhappy life (spoiler alert: this is *not* true!) As a result, a lot of parents and caregivers today can get very caught up in their worries.

Let's be clear: it's ultimately not your responsibility to educate your parents about your gender. However, it can be very useful to get clear on the difference between what is *helping* and what is hurting you in your gender journey. This is because love is confusing: sometimes it may seem like your caregiver is trying to help you, but the impact on you is hurtful. How are you supposed to feel?

It's totally normal and valid to feel simultaneously **grateful** to your parent for caring and **angry/upset/hurt/disappointed** because what they are doing is not actually helpful. It is also very normal to simultaneously want to be close with your parent while also needing **space** to do things on your own. Being clear on what you want and need can help you to have honest, healthy conversations.

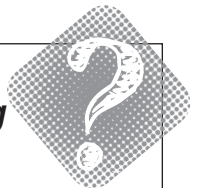
In the space below, write down as many words or phrases as you can think of that would complete this phrase:

If you _____, then you are helping me.

In the space below, write as many words or phrases as you can think of that would complete this phrase:

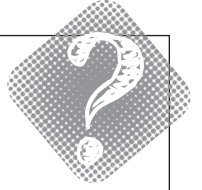
If you _____, then you are hurting me.

What, in your opinion, is the difference between someone *wanting* to support us and actually *feeling supported* by that person?

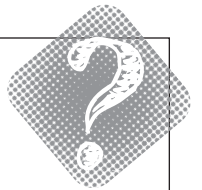


PARENT WHISPERING

Imagine a conversation with a parent/caregiver about something they are doing that you wish they would change OR something that they are not doing that you wish they would start. What is this conversation about? How do you think it would go? What are some things you could do or resources you might need to help this conversation go better?



Imagine and describe the "perfect" outcome to this conversation – what would happen? How does it feel to think about it?



TRANS BILL OF RIGHTS

A **Bill of Rights** is a declaration of the rights of a group of people. What do you think **your ideal** "Trans Bill of Rights" would say? Use the starter phrases below to write your ideas down. Do you think you could show this to your family? Friends? School? Even if you never show this to anyone, how does it feel to write down? To read out loud to yourself?

I HAVE THE RIGHT TO



I HAVE THE RIGHT TO



I HAVE THE RIGHT TO



I HAVE THE RIGHT TO



I HAVE THE RIGHT TO



UNIT 6

RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEERS

CHOSEN FAMILIES

There's a saying that goes, "you can't choose your family, but you can choose your friends." For a long time, LGBTQ2S+ communities have created chosen families based on shared interests and mutual survival. Chosen families can include romantic partners and/or friends. This activity is just to help you think through what healthy relationships with friends and partners might look like:

I know that a friendship or romantic partnership is healthy when:

I know that a friendship or romantic partnership is unhealthy when:

These are the qualities I look for in a partner or friend:

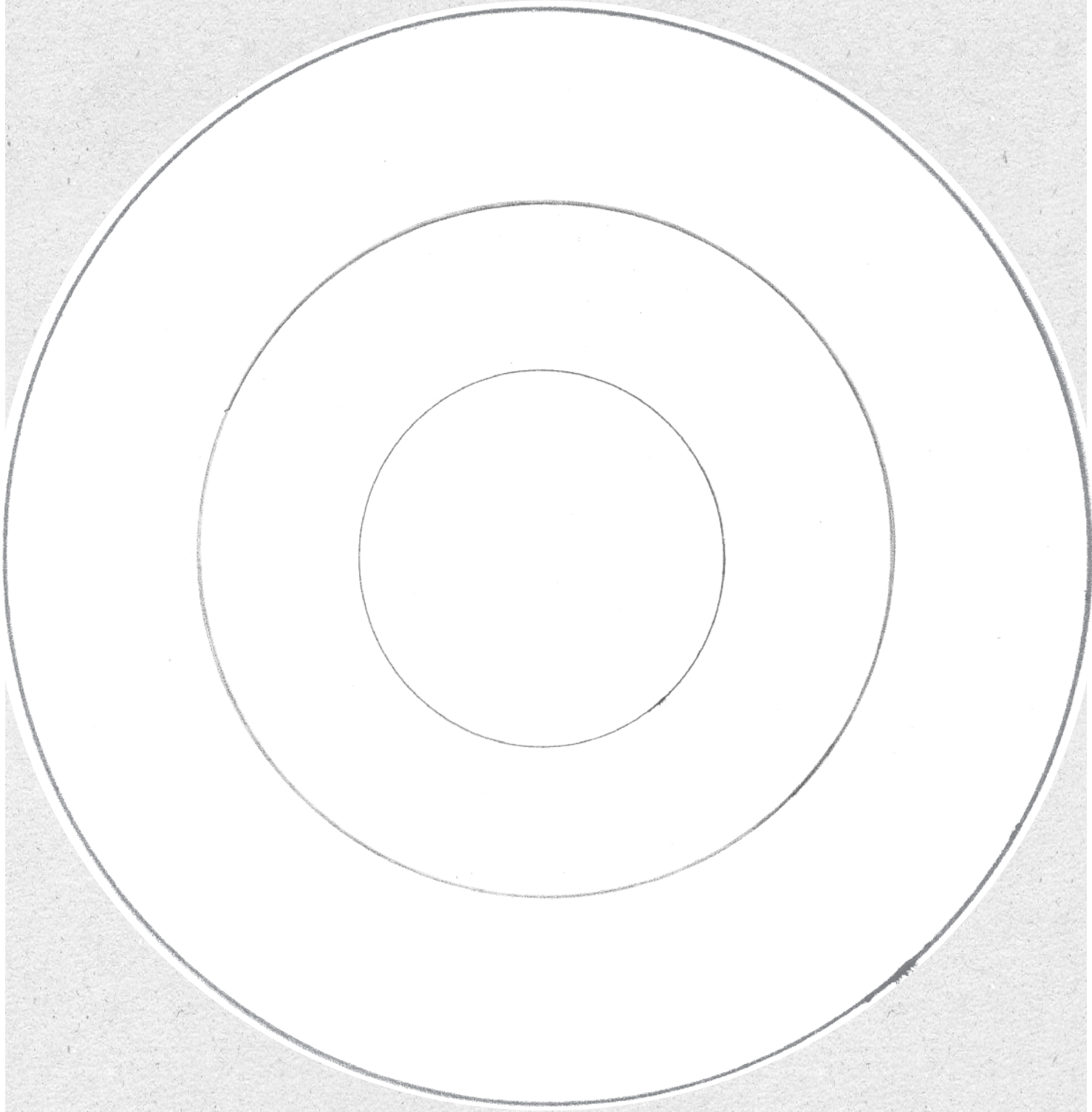
Healthy disagreement/conflict with friends or partners looks like:

SOCIOGRAM

Use the template on the next page, or draw your own on a larger piece of paper to complete the next activity:

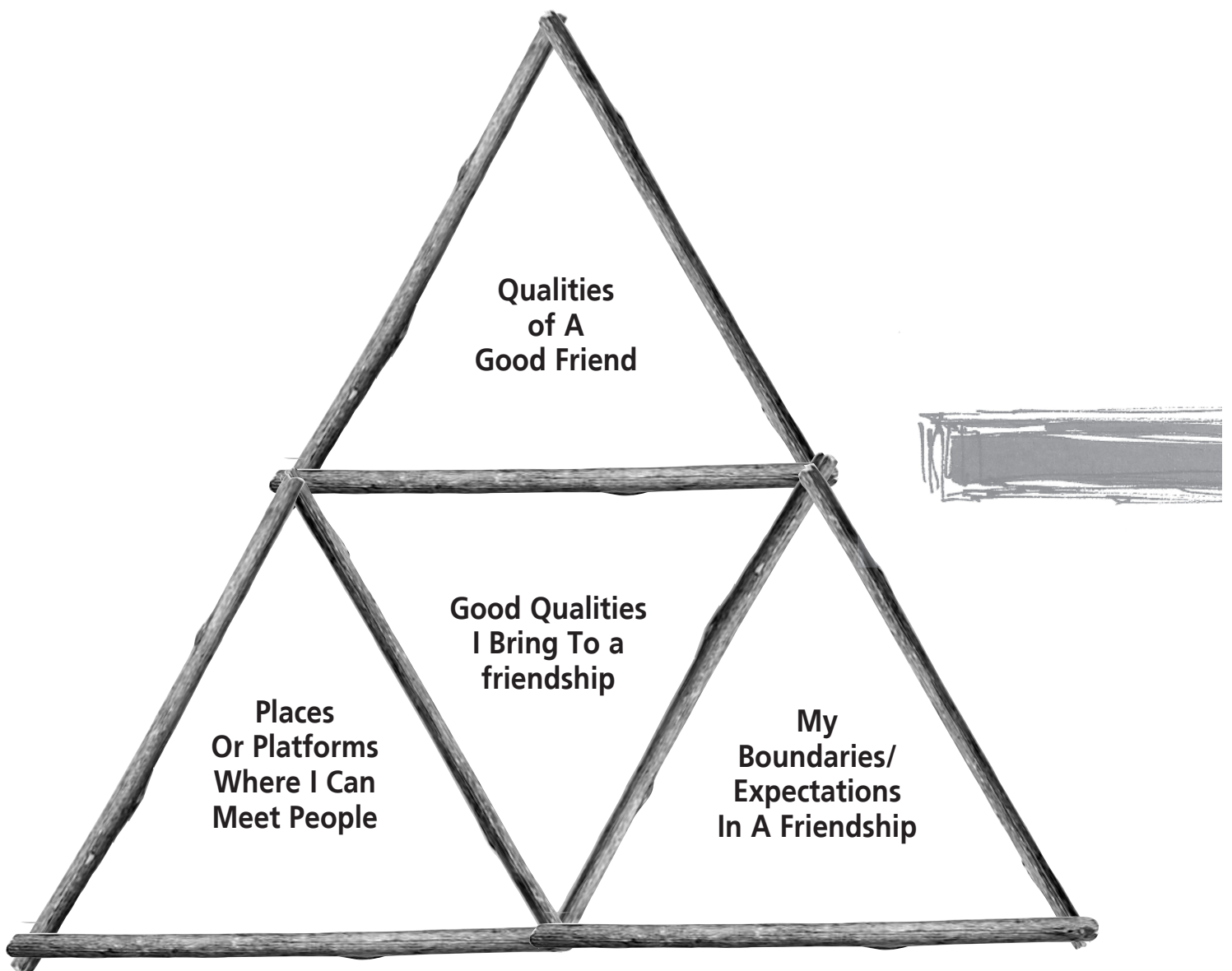
1. This exercise is about identifying the people in your life and the type of relationships you have with them.
2. In the smallest circle, write your name or draw a picture of yourself.
3. Think about all the people in your life – family, friends, pets, classmates, teachers, neighbors, coaches, professionals, everyone!
4. Just outside the smallest circle, write the names (or draw simple pictures) of the people who are closest to you emotionally.
5. In the next outer circle, put the names (or pictures) of those who are not as close, but still in your life a bit.
6. In the space outside the circles, put the names or pictures of people who are just barely in your life – people you see very occasionally, in passing.
7. In a different colour, write some words that describe what you value in the people in the closest circle.
8. Draw a star beside the names or pictures of people you are “out” to as trans.
9. Draw a triangle around the names or pictures of people who are fully supportive of your gender identity and expression.
10. Select anyone you would like to have move closer toward the inner circle, and draw an arrow in that direction.
11. Is there anyone you would like to move further away from you? Draw an arrow indicating that.
12. Reflect. What has doing this activity shown you?

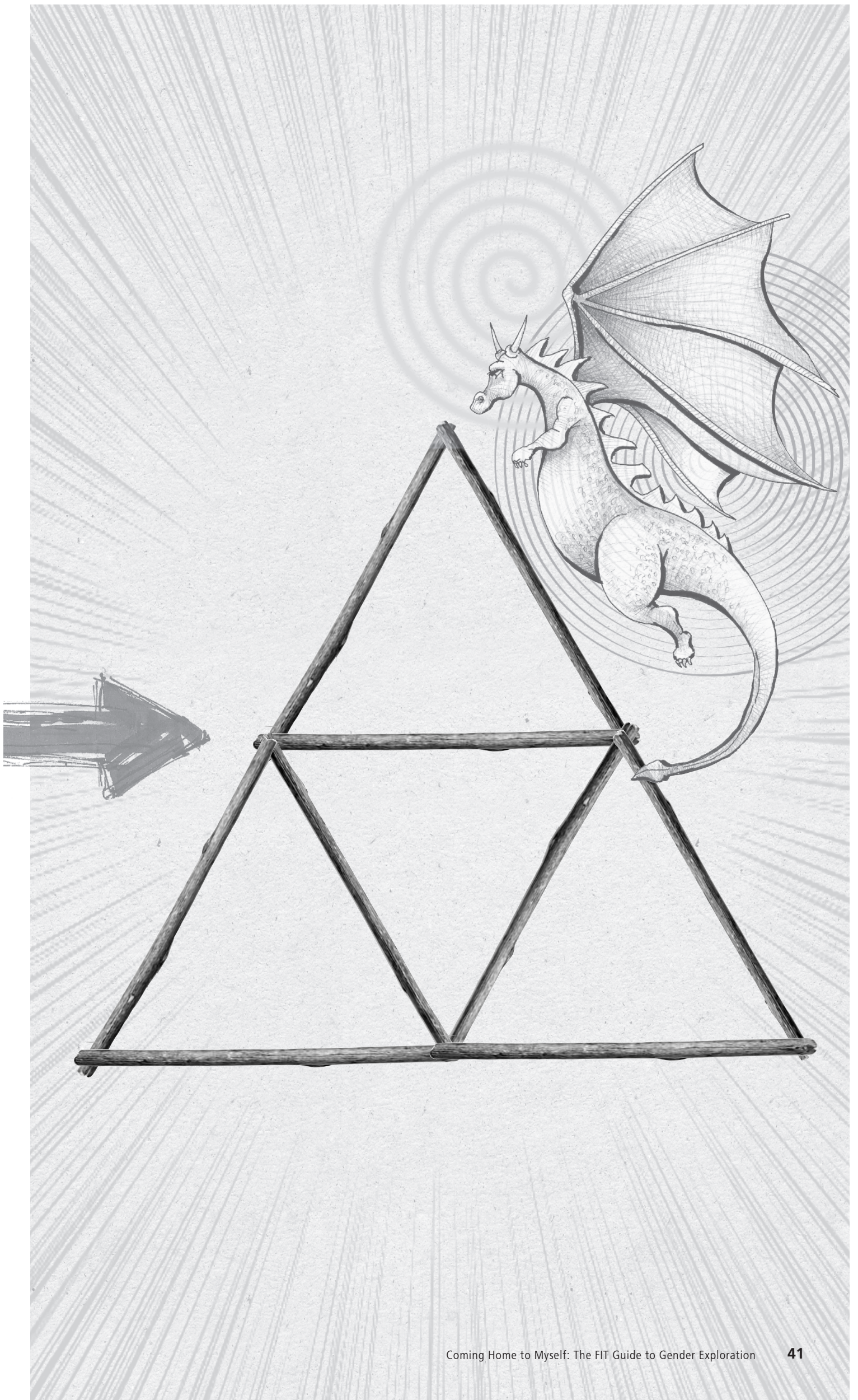




WHERE ARE THESE "FRIENDS" YOU SPEAK OF?

Sometimes, people talk about making meaningful connections with peers as though it's the easiest thing the world. The truth is, almost everybody struggles with making and maintaining friendships at some point in their life. Fill in the diagram below with words and/or images that feel right to you:





UNIT 7

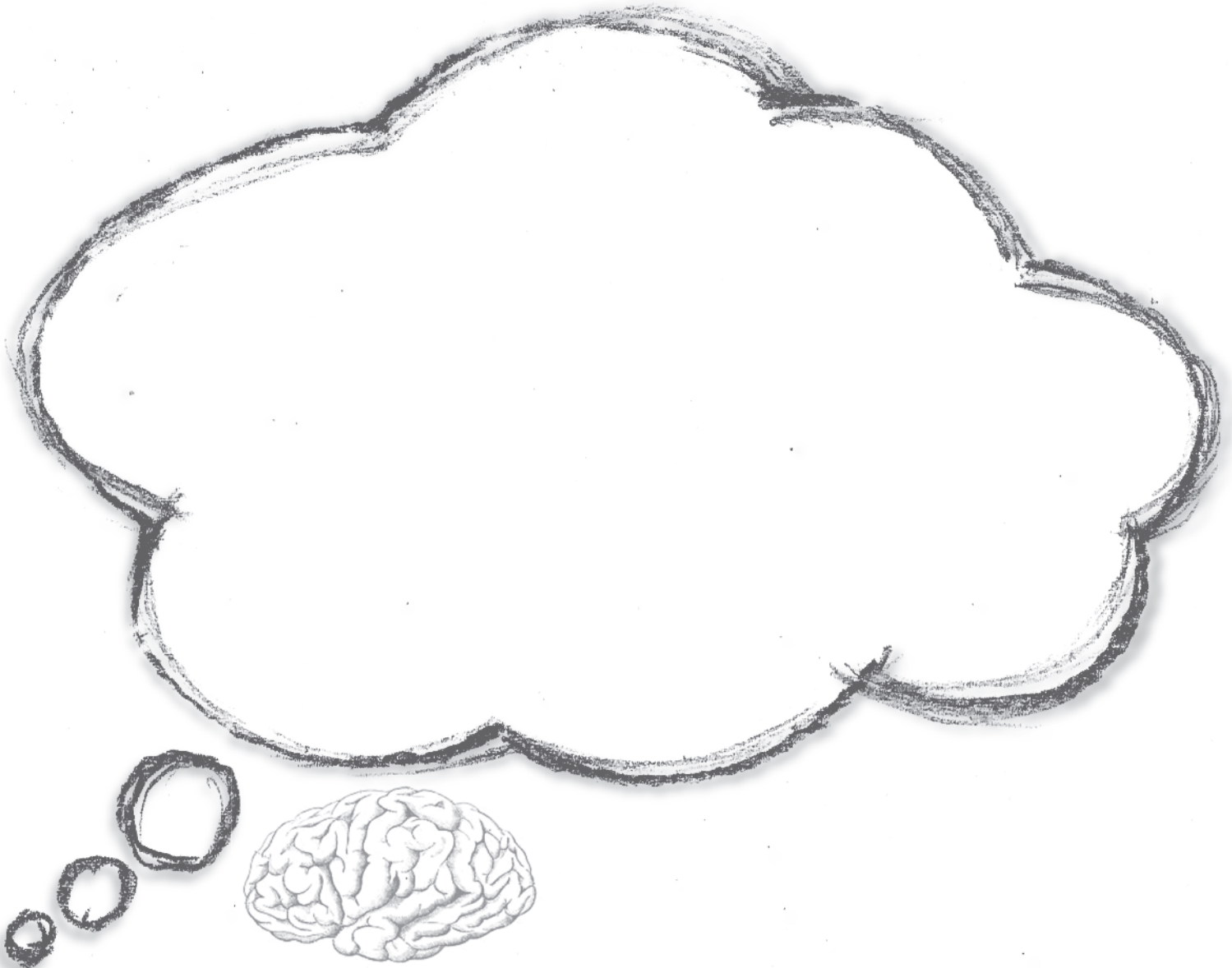
TRANSITION PLANNING

GENDER JOURNEY BRAINSTORM

Gender exploration and transition can be very simple or very complex – it's different for everyone. In the cloud below, use words or images to brainstorm all of the possible steps that could be included in a "transition" (not just for you, but for anybody): legal, social, medical, and more.

Circle all of the step that **you** would like to take, **cross out** the ones you definitely don't, and put a **star** beside the ones you're not sure about (remember, this can always change later).

Put **numbers** beside the circled steps to show the order in which you'd like to take them – again, this is just an exercise, and it can always change in the future.



LIVING YOUR BEST LIFE: Gender Euphoria Mood Board

The whole “transition” conversation can get very emotionally heavy very quickly – sometimes it’s hard to remember that transition can also be a very joyful experience. **Gender euphoria** is a term used by some trans communities to describe the feeling of joy in one’s gender expression – the opposite of gender dysphoria. Use the space below to create a “mood board” or collage that shows what gender euphoria looks like for you: cut and paste images from magazines/newspapers, or print them from the Internet.

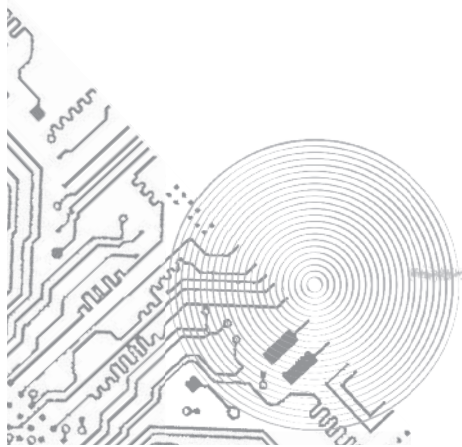
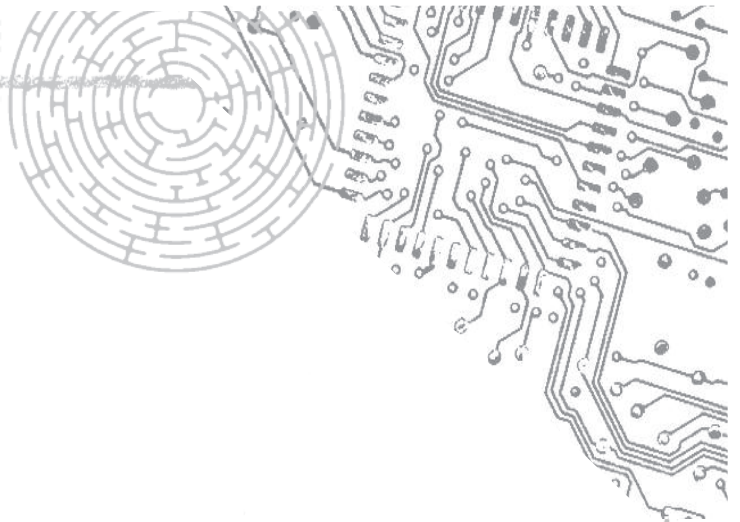


BODYMAP

This activity is an opportunity for you to express how you feel about your body. This can be a very emotional exercise since our relationships with our bodies can be extremely personal and sensitive, so you may want to make sure you have someone to talk to about this, or perhaps wait until you're sure you're in a good mental space.

Add colours, words, captions, and symbols on the outline below to express how you feel about each part of your body – what story does each place in your body have to tell?





UNIT 8

TRANSITION & DECISION-MAKING

THE GENDER TRANSITION TIMELINE

Sometimes the most difficult part of change is waiting for it to happen – and wondering if things are going to turn out the way you want them to. This activity is meant to help you clarify the “timeline” of your transition or gender exploration process. This can help with both the planning and waiting process. *If you are not planning on doing a transition, you may still be able to use this exercise to map out a less “conventional” journey gender exploration – if not, feel free to skip! We all have different needs, and that’s okay.*

Remember, this is a “living” timeline. It’s very possible that the plan will change along the way – and that’s perfectly fine.

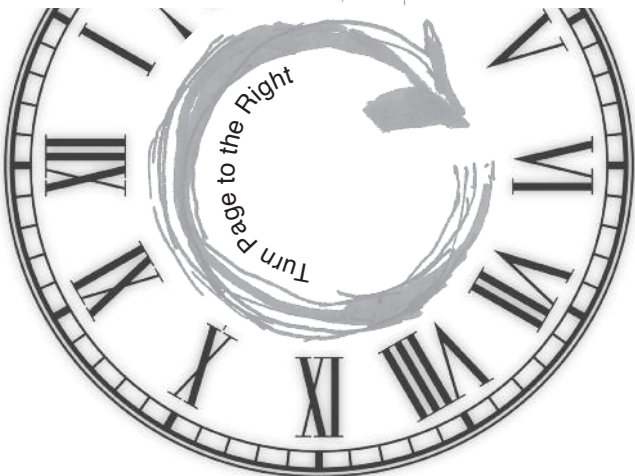
Directions:

1. Use the template on the next page, or copy it onto a large piece of poster paper or Bristol board (this activity can take up a lot of space, so we recommend the latter if you have access to art supplies).
2. Identify the practical transition actions/interventions you are planning on doing in the middle section of the diagram and put them in order – use the “Gender Journey Brainstorm” activity you did earlier in this unit to help with this if you need to.
3. As you complete the actions/interventions in real life, mark these milestones on your timeline by using words, images, photos, collage materials, symbols and colors in order to express your feelings.
4. Draw your fears about each of these milestones in the bottom section.
5. In the top section, draw your hopes for each of these transition interventions/actions.
6. Place words and symbols around the places in your timeline where you will need the most support and identify what kind.
7. Keep this timeline “alive” as you continue/complete your transition. Add more images, “selfies” and words as you move along in the process. Add symbols, words, stickers, etc. that will celebrate each accomplishment no matter how little it may seem.
8. Regularly check in about this map as it will continue to guide you as well as maintain the feeling that your transitioning process is not on hold but continues to move forward.
9. If there are places that you feel are stuck and not moving forward, creatively brainstorm ideas that can move you forward. Identify where you need more support, where you can take an advocacy role, and places where you can engage in activism.

HOPES

TRANSITION
ACTIONS

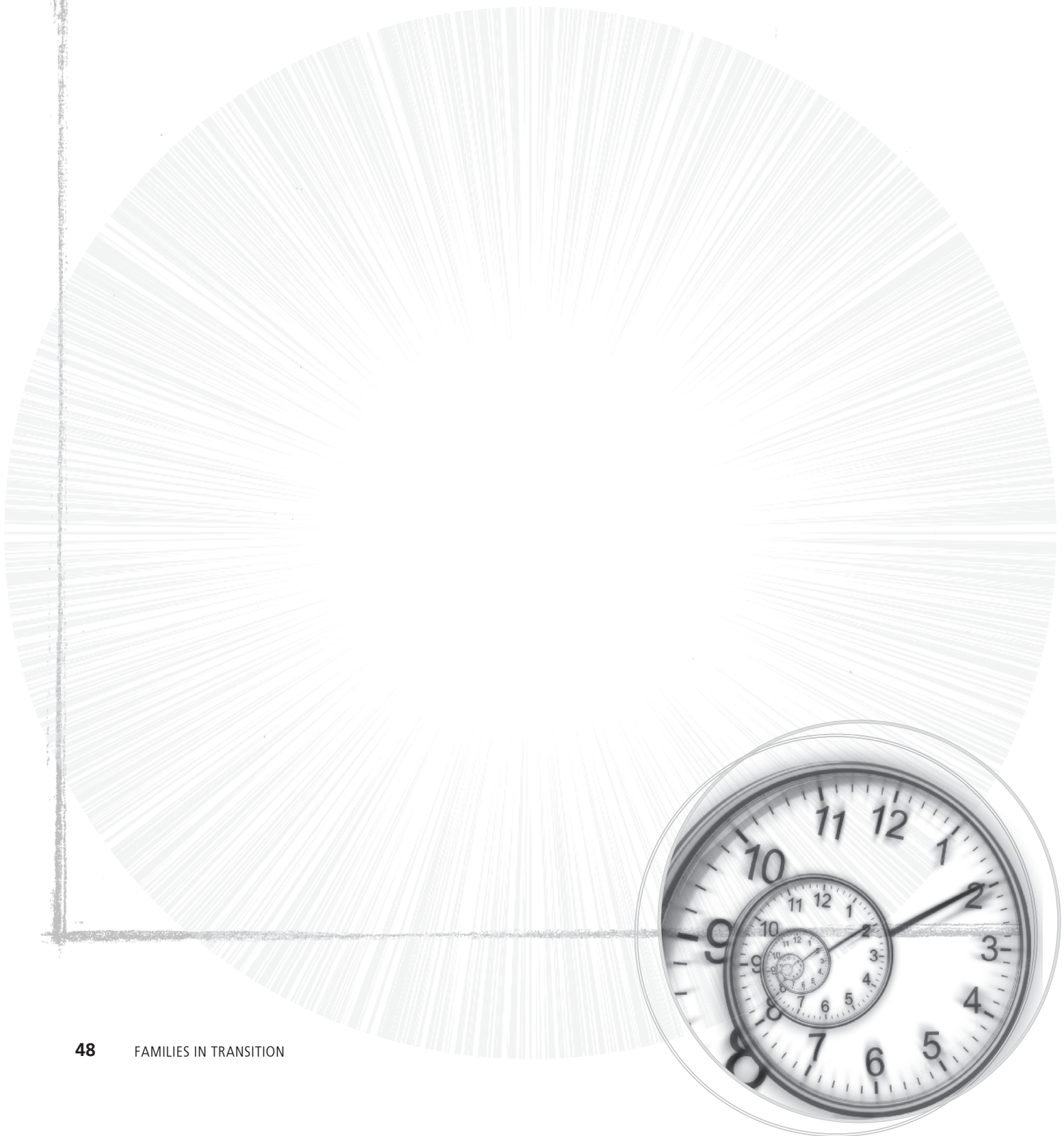
FEARS

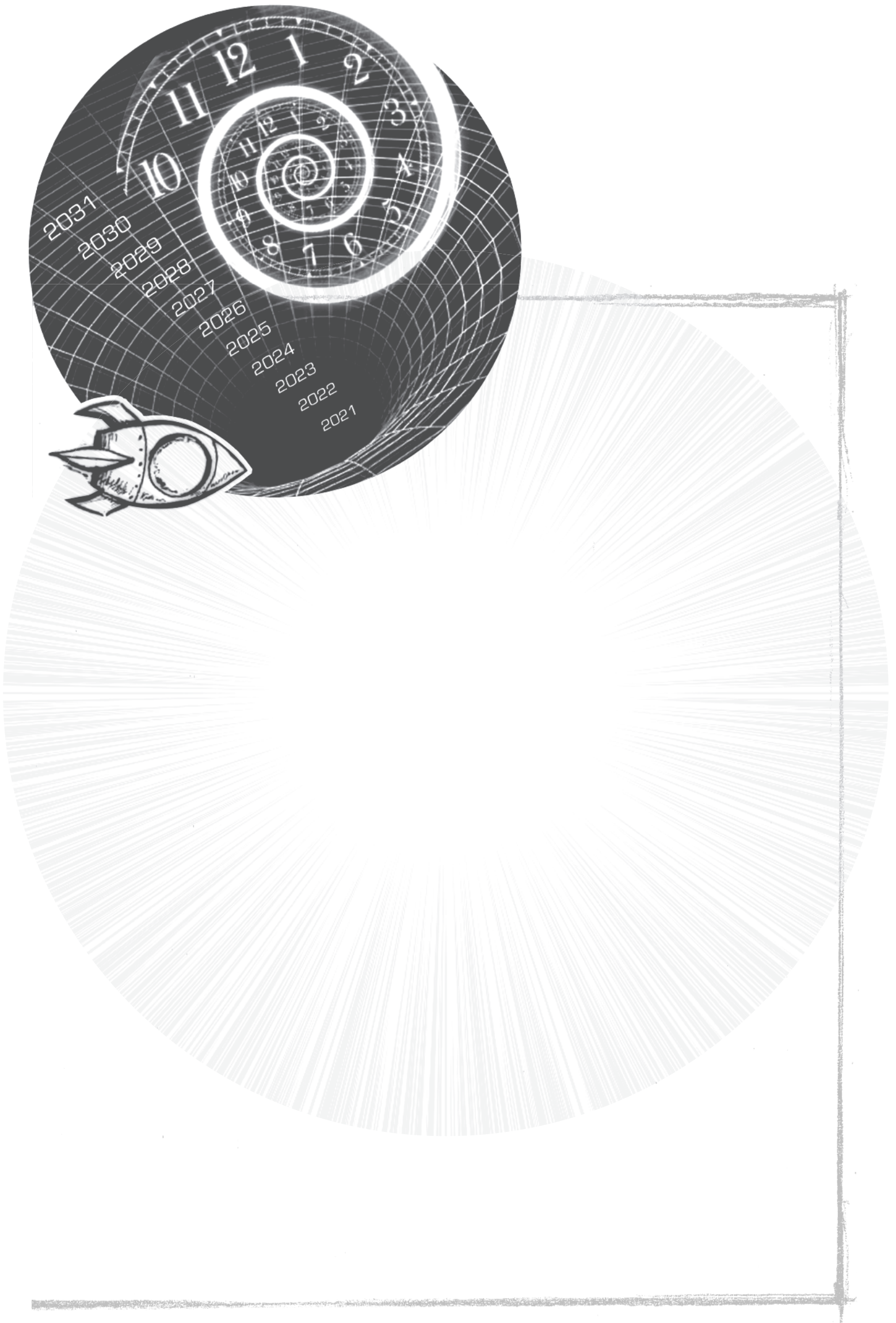


BACK TO THE FUTURE

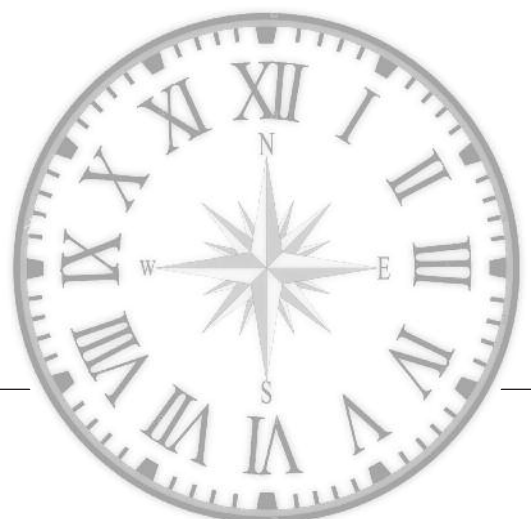
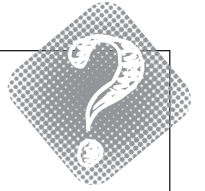
This is an activity about visualizing the future – which can be hard for some trans folks, since we are rarely given examples of ways for trans people to grow into happy, healthy futures.

Part 1: Imagine that you are ten years in the future, and you have had any legal, social and medical interventions that you might want. You are thriving and doing well. Use words (point form is fine!) or draw in the space below to describe a typical day in this future life. Get specific! You look into the mirror and what do you see? You go to the closet to get your clothes on. What do you reach for? Who do you live with? What do you do with your day? Include all aspects of a day in your life.





Part 2: What thoughts or feelings came up as you did Part 1? Were there any challenges or difficulties with imagining the future? (This is very normal, for trans folks, and for young folks in general.) What is one small thing that the group can do to help each other get to the future that they want?



Part 3: Write a letter to yourself from the future that you imagined. What does your future self want to say to the you in the present? Have your future self tell the story of “how it all happened” – what steps did your future self need to take to get to where they are in terms of gender? What challenges and barriers did you overcome? What words of encouragement or wisdom does future you have for you now?



FIT TRANSITION MYTHS AND FACTS

MYTH: When you come out as trans and change your gender expression, you can never “go back.”

FACT: Everyone’s gender journey is unique. Some trans people come out and transition once, and others may do it many times. It is perfectly okay to transition to one gender and then to another, or to go “back” to an earlier gender identity/expression.

MYTH: There is a “right” way to transition.

FACT: Each trans person’s gender journey is up to them. There is no “right” way or particular order that a transition needs to follow. However, transition experiences tend to be more positive when trans people have access to supportive family, friends, and healthcare!

MYTH: You need to experience gender dysphoria in order to be “really” trans/access medical transition.

FACT: Being trans means different things to different people. Some trans people experience gender dysphoria and others do not. Many people who access medical transition experience dysphoria, but many don’t. Sometimes, medical transition can be more about accessing safety, or about experiencing gender “euphoria.”

MYTH: All trans people want to medically transition and “pass.”

FACT: All people, cis and trans, have a unique gender journey. Some trans people may want to medically transition, others do not. Some people may want to “pass” and others don’t.

MYTH: Puberty blockers are a hormone/I can stay on puberty blockers forever/Puberty blockers are dangerous.

FACT: Puberty blockers are not a hormone. They are chemicals that stop your body’s natural hormones from taking effect. Puberty blockers can “buy time” for trans people who want more time to think about their medical transition, but they cannot be continued for a person’s entire life. According to most medical authorities in North America, puberty blockers are safe when prescribed by a qualified medical professional.

MYTH: Hormone therapy causes permanent changes, so you have to be 100% sure you want it before starting.

FACT: Hormone therapy has a wide range of effects depending on many factors. For both “masculinizing” and “feminizing” hormone therapy, many effects are reversible and some may be permanent after a period of time. Talk to a doctor, nurse, or other qualified medical professional to learn more. Starting hormone therapy is a big decision, and like any big decision that may have permanent results, it can be hard to “be 100% sure.” Many trans people try out hormone therapy with the help of supportive medical care providers to see if it is right for them.

MYTH: Hormones will definitely change my body in a specific way that I want/don’t want.

FACT: Hormone therapy is a very complex medical process, and no specific effect is guaranteed. Your primary care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) should be able give you a sense of what is likely to happen, but it is not possible to know for sure how your body will change or not change.



MYTHS

FACTS

MYTH: Hormones will make me feel/act more like a stereotypical “man” or “woman.” For example, testosterone will make me more aggressive and angry, estrogen will make me more emotional.

FACT: Although hormones do affect our mood and mental health, we are all unique people with unique relationships to our feelings! It’s impossible to say how hormones will affect any specific person’s mood and mental health, but many trans people report that they feel less stressed and more mentally healthy on hormones.

MYTH: I need to have therapy and get permission from a psychologist/psychiatrist before I start hormone therapy/have surgery.

FACT: It used to be a requirement for trans people to receive a lot of psychotherapy before starting medical transition, even when they didn’t want it. Now, many trans people make their own decisions about starting hormone therapy or having surgery with the support of their primary care providers. In many places, it is no longer necessary to get the permission of a psychiatrist or psychologist. However, many trans people also do feel that they would benefit from going to therapy while making their decisions.

MYTH: Gender affirming/gender reassignment surgery is very dangerous and not likely to be successful.

FACT: Like any major surgery, gender affirming/gender reassignment surgery has serious risks as well as benefits. For people who already have certain health conditions, the risks may be higher. Additionally, some surgeries may have more risks than others. However, the great majority of trans people who have gender affirming surgery report that they are satisfied with the results, including when it comes to sex and relationships. Talk to a medical professional to get more information, or discuss your specific situation.

MYTH: Medical transition will solve all my problems/completely cure my gender dysphoria/make me attractive to the people I want to date.

FACT: Most trans people who go through medical transition do report that they experience some improvement in their quality of life and/or reduction in dysphoria. However, medical transition is not a “miracle” solution to struggles with body image, mental health, or relationships and is not likely to solve major life problems on its own. Connecting with peer groups, gender-affirming mental health professionals, and other social supports may be an important step in addressing these issues.

MYTH: I have to go through my transition alone/transition is shameful/I shouldn’t talk about my transition/My transition is hurting my family.

FACT: You deserve support and care during your transition process! You cannot hurt people by transitioning, and it is not your fault that we live in a society that discourages transitioning. We encourage you to talk to supportive friends, family, and professionals as much as you need to. Connecting with trans community IRL or online can also be very helpful.

REAL TALK: INFORMED CONSENT AND MAKING CHOICES

For many generations, trans and gender diverse people have had to fight for their right to express their genders and access medical transition. Still today, we can spend so much time and energy advocating for ourselves, that it can be difficult or even impossible to find a safe space to consider our own doubts and fears about how to make the “right” transition choices (note: there is often no such thing as a 100% “right” or “wrong” decision when it comes to complex life decisions).

At FIT, we believe that everyone deserves all the space and support they need to consider: How do you know what is right for them in terms of medical transition? Has anyone ever tried to convince them that they “needed” to either take a certain transition step or NOT take a particular step? Unfortunately, even trans communities are not free of peer pressure – and we’ve often seen young people who told us that their trans friends or influencers have said that there is only one right way to transition.

Has a trans person you know ever changed their mind about what kind of transition they wanted? Or have you? This is also perfectly normal and part of the **gender development process** – as you get older and more sure of certain parts of your personality, you will likely change your mind and evolve on many topics and personal values. Our society – sometimes even health professionals – will say that you have to be “completely” sure about being trans in order to be valid. But of course, many people are not “completely” sure about any big decision in life. In the past, this stance has been used to deny trans people healthcare and control over their own bodies.

Our opinion is that all people deserve to be supported and validated as they explore, change, and shift their gender. Transitioning, not transitioning, and trying out transition and then stopping/detransitioning are all valid experiences that people deserve to be supported through.

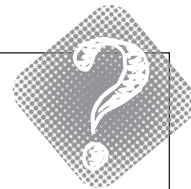
Because medical transition does involve making some serious choices about your body (some of which are **reversible**, and others of which are not), we think it’s really important that you are given opportunities to use **informed consent** in order to make the choices that are right for you – ideally, with the support of professionals and parents/caregivers who care about you.

Informed consent is the idea that people should be able to make their own choices, and that they should have all the important information they need to do so.

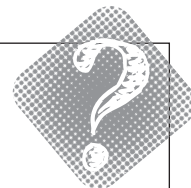
When it comes to healthcare, informed consent consists of three factors:

- 1) Having information about the risks and benefits of a particular process or treatment.
- 2) Being able to understand the risks and benefits. As people get older and gain more life experience, our understanding can sometimes shift and become deeper.
- 3) Being free from coercion or pressure from other people when choosing whether or not to go forward with the process. Note: Informed consent actually doesn’t involve being “100% sure,” and it acknowledges that you can’t really be 100% sure about most big decisions. Instead, it’s about having all the information you need, weighing the pros and cons, and having freedom to make your own choices.

What do you think about informed consent?



What kinds of support do you need to make decisions based on informed consent?





SCENARIO:

CAL

Cal is a 16 year old

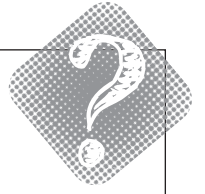
who was assigned female at birth.

At 14 years old, he came out as a trans guy. At that time, he was struggling in school and with his peers. He expressed having symptoms of depression and anxiety.

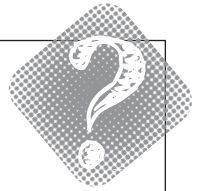
He spent a lot of time researching trans blogs and video blogs online. When he first came out, he was insistent that he needed to have access to "T" (testosterone) right away, as he was worried that he was getting "too old to pass." He was also insistent that he wanted to have top surgery as soon as possible, and bottom surgery (phalloplasty) as soon as he turned 18. He hoped that after a year on "T" and getting top surgery, could move to a new school and start a "totally new life" where he was stealth. He felt that medical transition would give him a chance "to be actually be happy for once."

Now, Cal feels more relaxed and also less sure about medical transition. He also has a group of trans friends that he finds really supportive, and a partner who is non-binary. He has been taking testosterone at a low dose for about six months, and while he is happy with the changes he has been experiencing, he isn't sure he wants to continue forever. He has a little worry about losing his hair, and he also really loves singing and isn't sure how T will affect his voice. Cal says that he is still considering top surgery. He says he doesn't want bottom surgery anymore, because he'd maybe like to have a kid someday. He's still thinking about trying going stealth after high school, but he also thinks that he might be okay with people knowing he's trans, which feels like a big part of his identity these days.

1. How did the previous scenario feel to read? Was any of it relatable or not relatable (either for yourself or maybe people you know)?



2. If Cal was a friend of yours, what could you do to be supportive?



UNIT 9

ENVISIONING THE FUTURE

POSSIBILITY MODEL PROJECT

Trans actress and activist Laverne Cox says that having “**possibility models**” (examples of successful, happy trans people) is essential for trans people. We agree! Use the space below or a larger piece of paper or cardboard to create a collage or “mood board” that features some “possibility models” of your own – you can cut and paste, write, draw, or do whatever else feels right to you. Get creative! To help you get started, we have created a list of famous and well-known trans people on the next page.

FAMOUS AND WELL-KNOWN TRANS PEOPLE

You may have much more up to date trans celebrities, influencers, and other important people of your own!

Performers, Actors, Models:

Laverne Cox, Michael D. Cohen, Alok Vaid-Menon, Chaz Bono, Ryan Cassata, Trace Lysette, Hari Nef, Harisu, Myo Ko Ko San, Candis Cayne, Hunter Schafer, Andreja Pejic, Alexis Arquette, Gigi Gorgeous, Nina Arsenault...

Athletes:

Thomas Beattie, Renee Richards, Veronica Ivy, Caitlyn Jenner, Fallon Fox, Mack Beggs, Patricio Manuel, Feagaiga Stowers, Schuyler Bailar, Parinya Charoenphol...

Writers, Artists, Filmmakers, Scholars:

Aiyyana Maracle, Awaeke Emezi, Chase Joynt, Leslie Feinberg, Meredith Talusan, Janet Mock, The Lady Chablis, Jordy Rosenberg, Smokii Sumac, Lindsay Nixon, Jack Halberstam, Lana Wachowski, Lilly Wachowski, Casey Plett, Ryka Aoki...

Inventors, Scientists, and Doctors:

Lynn Conway, Ben Barres, Deirdre McCloskey, Julia Serano, Audrey Tang, Rebecca Allison, Joan Roughgarden, Marci Bowers...

Political Figures:

Victoria Kolakowski, Lauren Scott, Morgan Oger, Jamie Lee Hamilton, Tomoyo Hisoda, Dean Spade, Chelsea Manning, La Don Henry, Geraldine Roman, Michelle Suarez...



Q&A



Imagine that you have the exclusive opportunity to interview one of your possibilities in real life. What questions would you ask them? Write them down below. (Who knows? You might get to actually get them answered someday!)

A large rectangular area containing 25 horizontal dashed lines for writing.

UNIT 10

REFLECTING & THE JOURNEY AHEAD

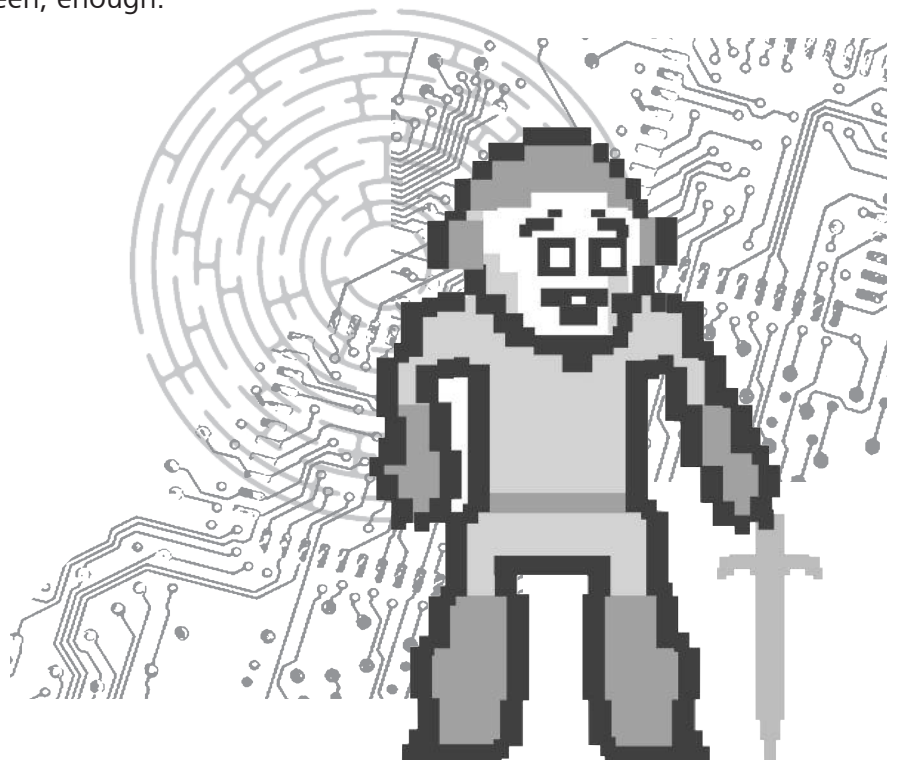
COMING FULL CIRCLE

Congratulations! You've come to the final unit in the workbook. Thank you for allowing us to provide you with some guidance in this part of your life. Hopefully you have found some of the information and exercises we've shared with you helpful, wherever you are on the path of your gender journey.

The FIT Program is partially based on the idea of the **Hero's Journey**, which is an archetypal pattern that the majority of epic and coming-of-age stories around the world are based on. This is because we deeply and truly believe that trans and gender diverse young people are heroes – you take on great challenges and discover incredible strengths on the quest that is finding a way to express your authentic self. And in every hero's journey, there are moments of great despair that give way to self-discovery. It is our mission to help folks like you uncover your own unique strengths so that you can write your own story.

The Hero's Journey takes the shape of a circle. This means that every quest, adventure, and story ends at the beginning of a new one. This is likely the shape that your life will take as well – you may or may not "finish" a transition but there will always be new challenges and opportunities to grow. The skills and relationships that you build over the course of your gender journey, however, will stay with you as you move forward in your life.

So go forth on your journey, brave one. If your road is long, may you meet many friends along the way. And wherever you go, whomever you become, remember that you are, and have always been, enough.



HERO'S JOURNEY



CALL
TO
ADVENTURE

PREPARE

THE
NEXT
ADVENTURE

THE
MAGIC
GIFTS

TREASURE

SKILLS

RETURNING
WITH
THE
ELIXIR

THE
LOYAL
COMPANIONS

COURAGE

SUPPORT

THE
DARKEST
MOMENT
THE
GREAT
DISCOVERY

POWER UP

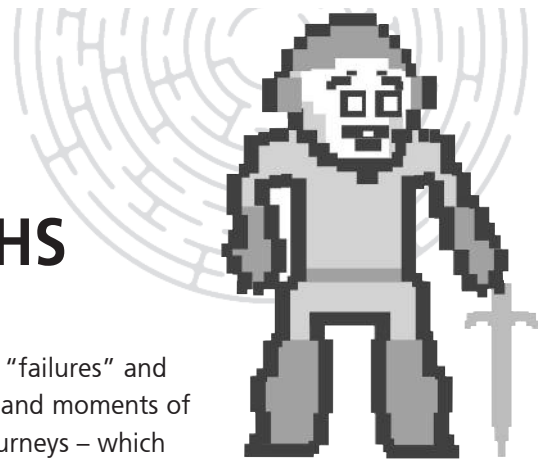
THE
WISE
MENTORS

THE
GREAT
TRIALS



Recounting Your Triumphs

RECOUNTING YOUR TRIUMPHS



When we look back at the stories of our lives, it's easy to only see the "failures" and regrets. However, each and every person also has goodness, triumphs and moments of strength embedded in their stories. This is especially true of gender journeys – which by definition require courage. Use this worksheet to help you remember the triumphs in your own story. If you get stuck anywhere, consider asking someone you trust to help – often, other people can see the "hero" in us more easily than we can ourselves.



THE CALL TO ADVENTURE – What was it that called you to explore your gender/transition, and what made you brave enough to start the journey?



THE MAGIC GIFTS – What inner qualities, traits, or skills have you discovered or developed since you started your gender journey? What has allowed you to keep going? What about gifts that other people may have given you?



THE LOYAL COMPANIONS – Have there been any friends or companions – including characters in fictional media, animals, and other non-human beings – that have accompanied you and supported you on your journey?



THE WISE MENTORS – Who have your mentors and teachers been? This could be adults in your real life, but also celebrities, influencers, spiritual figures or deities, and other types of "teachers."



THE GREAT TRIALS – What are the great challenges that you have lived through? How did you get through them? Even if you didn't "beat" these challenges, what actions did you take that showed courage, strength, endurance, intelligence, or other admirable qualities?



THE DARKEST MOMENT & THE GREAT DISCOVERY – In many heroic epics, there is a moment or many moments of "descent into the underworld" – a moment where all seems lost. This is also true of many people's lives. We know that we overcame these moments because we are still here, though perhaps not unchanged. Powerful insights and deep knowledge can come from our darkest moments. What have you learned from your own darkest moments?



RETURNING WITH THE ELIXIR – When we complete a journey, we often have something new to offer the world. In heroic stories, this is often a treasure or magical "elixir" that can cure illnesses or solve problems. In real life, we might simply have a new outlook on life, a new idea about who we want to be, or a desire to help others in specific way. What do you want to offer the world? This doesn't have to be something "big" – it can simply be about wanting to bring a little more kindness, understanding, or some other valuable quality into your family or community.



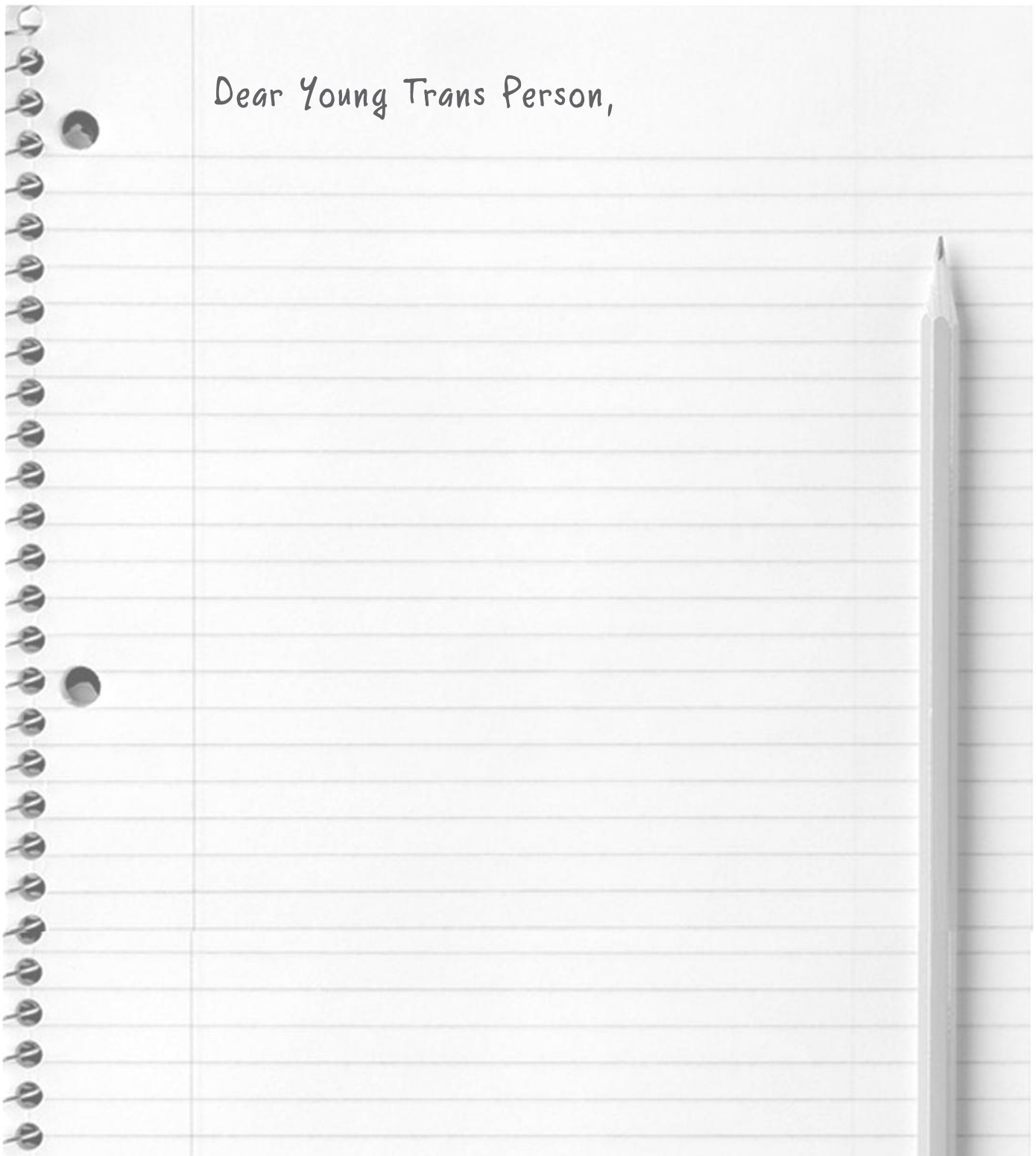
THE NEXT ADVENTURE – What are you still looking forward to in life? What goals, hopes, dreams, or plans do you have? You might have some very specific career plans in mind, or you might have something more values-based, like "learning to be a brave and compassionate person." Or you might simply want to stay alive and enjoy yourself a bit during your time on Earth. All of these are valid.



THE LETTER

Now that you have completed this workbook full of exercises about self-care and self-discovery, we invite you to start thinking about how you might offer some of your skills to other members of the community. Think about what you've learned so far about what trans, non-binary, gender diverse, and gender questioning people need to **survive** and **thrive**. What do trans people need to know when they are going through a hard time, experiencing oppression, struggling with mental health?

Part 1: In the space below, write a letter to a young trans person who is going through a hard time. Offer this young person **compassion** and encouragement while also being real and staying true to the challenges that living as a trans person in the world can present.





PART 2: Read over your letter. Now go back to the top, cross out the words “Young Trans Person” and write your own name. Surprise! What is it like to offer yourself compassion and kindness? What would it be like to receive this letter from a peer? What does this tell you about the need for self-compassion and the importance of community?

A large rectangular box containing 25 horizontal dashed lines for writing.



CENTRAL TORONTO YOUTH SERVICES

65 Wellesley Street East, Suite 300

Toronto, ON, M4Y 1G7, Canada

(416) 924-2100

www.ctys.org

