

Helping Children Manage Worry & Anxiety.



Care Pack
5-7 years



Introduction

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As we all move through these challenging times together, parents, carers and teachers have the added responsibility of supporting the young people in their care as they grapple with rapid change and uncertainty. Mindfulness is an active, practical and appropriate response to the sense of overwhelm many of us are currently feeling.

Mindfulness has been practised for centuries and in many different cultures around the world. Academic research shows that when we pay attention to what is happening in the present moment, with openness and curiosity, and without judgement, we activate many wellbeing benefits including higher self-awareness, higher emotional regulation and reduced stress. It can also be a very useful tool that allows us to focus on the positive elements of life as they happen.

Integrating mindfulness into everyday life with the children in our care can have profound benefits for both adult and child. Smiling Mind offers a range of engaging evidence-based experiences and activities designed by wellbeing educators. You are encouraged to experiment and explore the wide range of meditations and activities with your child.

This second module, *Helping Children Manage Worry & Anxiety*, contains four specific mindfulness topics to progress through with your child to assist them to turn towards the positive, especially in times of challenge:

- Unhelpful Thoughts
- Anxious Mind & Body
- Bouncing Back

These three topics combine to deliver a comprehensive toolkit to assist in supporting and boosting the emotional wellbeing of your child.



Here is a step by step guide to get the best out of this module designed specifically for 5–7 year olds:

1

Take a few minutes to read the topic overview written for parents, carers and teachers.

- This will orient you to the purpose and intention of each topic and set up some background for conversations with your child.



2

Listen to the mindfulness meditation with your child in a quiet place without distraction.

- Spend a few minutes afterwards inviting your child to share their experience and their thoughts and feelings following the meditation.
- Share your own experience, thoughts and feelings with your child.



3

Ask your child to select one of the activities at the back of the book.

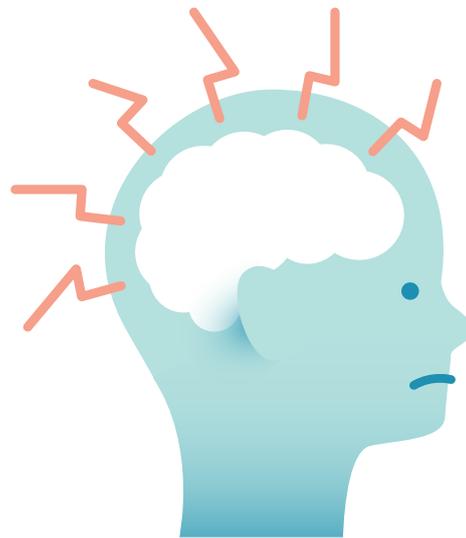
- Use the activity to collaborate and continue the conversation.



Unhelpful Thoughts

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Humans have a wonderful capacity to think. It is estimated that we have up to 60,000 thoughts each and every day. We love to turn ideas and wonderings over in our minds, examine them from many angles, predict, plan and imagine. In addition to these ‘forward focused’ thoughts, we are also particularly good at resting upon things that have already happened. We examine past events, press rewind in our minds, replay snippets of dialogue and re-experience emotions, ‘staying with’ the experience for some time after it has concluded.



This is especially true if the experience has been negative. Due to our evolutionary negativity bias, which is our tendency to notice and respond to negative stimuli more strongly than positive stimuli, we often find ourselves doing more mental work on the negative aspects of life. Ingrained beliefs and unhelpful thinking patterns are good examples of this. They can suddenly appear or be triggered by something we see or hear, and then begin to build in intensity, taking us away from the present moment and whatever task is at hand. Unhelpful thoughts can take us on a long and worrying journey unless we gently unhook ourselves and mindfully get back to what we were doing.

It is understandable that unhelpful thoughts may appear as we navigate our current environment and endeavour to stay safe and well and protect those we love. COVID19 represents a new and uncertain challenge for us all. Too much exposure to the unrelenting news cycle is especially triggering for both adults and children alike. In an attempt to feel more in control, we may seek out information that overwhelms us and makes things worse.

Children look to us as role models and guides on how to navigate change and handle new and possibly unsettling experiences. They intuitively know that there is a source of wisdom in trusted and caring adults. It is up to us therefore to confidently provide calm and emotionally stable support during these uncertain times. We can do this most

effectively through modelling effective ways of responding to difficult thoughts and challenging emotions. This doesn't mean ignoring, suppressing or trying to get rid of them. Instead, we learn to notice what we are thinking and feeling and respond to ourselves with care and kindness. Smiling Mind is here to help with this. Mindfulness is a way to shift focus, calm down and gently return to the present moment.

We invite you to practise the following meditation with your child as a way of cultivating the ability to turn towards one's own experiences with care and kindness. Doing this together is especially important if your child is struggling. Children thrive on caring and trusting relationships with others and you as their parent, carer or teacher have a vital role to play.

After sharing the mindfulness practice together, have a conversation with your child about how the experience felt and how mindfulness can help us to manage unhelpful thoughts and be kind to ourselves. After taking time to explore this together, we suggest downloading the companion activities appropriate to this topic and inviting your child to choose one as an activity. These resources can be found towards the end of the booklet. While the activities are designed so they can be done without adult support, we do encourage continued conversation and collaboration with your child as they complete them.



Listen to a mindfulness meditation. A good one for this topic is: The Wish Tree.

App Location:

- All Programs
- Kids & Youth
- 07 – 09 Year Olds
- Mindfulness 107 – A Wish For Me
- The Wish Tree

Web App Link:

<https://app.smilingmind.com.au/sessions/8/23/>



Continue the conversation using one of the activity sheets at the back of this booklet:

My Magical Wish Tree

By encouraging young children to make a wish, [this activity](#) builds awareness around our own ability to change our thinking when we feel a need to.

Float Away

[This activity](#) presents a calming way to imagine letting go of unhelpful thoughts and observing them in a neutral light. Young children can practise this, remembering the floating leaves.



Deepen the conversation by exploring these questions together. Remember, there are no wrong answers:

How can we help each other to stay in the moment and not worry too much about things that have happened in the past?

How can we help each other to stay in the moment and not worry too much about things that have not happened yet and might not even happen?

When we think of thoughts and feelings that upset us, what are some great ways you help them to gently move on and let you get back to what you are doing?

Anxious Mind & Body

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Humans have worried for millennia. Our brains have evolved over thousands of years, tossing thoughts, ideas, worries and emotions around, sometimes all at the same time! Worries are often about the future and how it might unfold for us. Sometimes these worries become more deeply lodged and are harder to budge. Mindfulness can help with this. Mindfulness is paying attention to the present moment with openness, curiosity and without judgement. It helps us get better at noticing where our attention is and choosing where we would like it to be.



Mindfulness helps us to train our mindfulness muscle by helping us get better at focusing on one thing at a time. As parents, carers and teachers, we can model this by focusing our own attention on the present moment and not allowing ourselves to be drawn into unhelpful thinking, especially during these challenging times. With a constant stream of negative news, many adults and children are feeling the effects of COVID19 and levels of worry and anxiety are rising.

For many children, worries manifest in their bodies. For example, a tummy ache can be an indicator that children are worried about something. They may not have the language to fully express what is on their minds, but unpleasant, felt sensations in the body can be a sign. Feeling anxious for much of the time can be very tiring and lead to poor sleep. Mindfulness is a way to regularly tune in and become aware of how thoughts and emotions are impacting us physically.

Through gentle conversations, children can be warmly encouraged to share their worries with a trusted adult rather than carry them alone. A conversation with a caring adult can help them to make sense of their worries and then let them go, knowing an adult is there as a source of support and reassurance.

We invite you to share the meditation with your 5–7 year old as a starting point. Doing this together is especially important if they are struggling. Young children thrive on caring and trusting relationships with others especially when they are finding things challenging.

After sharing the mindfulness practice together, have a conversation about how the experience felt and how mindfulness can help us to manage anxious feelings. After taking time to unpack this question, we suggest downloading the companion activities appropriate to this topic and inviting your child to choose one as an activity. These resources can be found towards the end of the booklet. While the activities are designed so they can be done without adult support, we do encourage continued conversation and collaboration as they complete them.



Listen to a mindfulness meditation.
A good one for this topic is:
Teddy Bear Breathing

App Location:

- All Programs
- Kids & Youth
- 03 – 06 Year Olds
- Teddy Bear Breathing

Web App Link:

<https://app.smilingmind.com.au/sessions/433/1184/2451/>



Continue the conversation using
one of the activity sheets at the
back of this booklet:

Teddy Bear Breathing

This activity shines a light on the special place that teddies and soft toys have in young children's lives. They can be a great source of comfort and play an important role.

Someone Special

This activity helps young children to name those adults around them that are able to support and assist them during the tough times. This knowledge builds trust and peace of mind.



Deepen the conversation
by exploring these questions
together. Remember, there
are no wrong answers:

How do things feel in your body when you are worried?

Who and what can help you when worries show up and won't
move away after a little while?

How does it feel when you hand your worries to an adult
and you can happily get on with being a kid?

Bouncing Back

We hear the word resilience a lot these days. Resilience is the ability to bounce back when we experience challenges or things don't go the way we planned. Resilient people find ways to cope when life gets tricky and uncertain. This happens to us all from time to time. At the moment, we are all feeling the effects of the global pandemic. Children need help to develop resilience, especially in the midst of so much uncertainty and stress. As teachers, parents and carers, we already know that life is full of ups and downs and the importance of having tools to manage this. Mindfulness is one such valuable tool that we can use to build resilience, lower stress and support our wellbeing.



Mindfulness is especially important when we experience setbacks and failures. Due to our evolutionary negativity bias, which is our tendency to notice and respond to negative stimuli more strongly than positive stimuli, we can often find ourselves doing more mental work on the negative aspects of life. When we mindfully focus on the present moment with openness and curiosity, and without judgement, we're able to step back and access a broader perspective and not get so caught up with anxious thoughts. This in turn helps us get on with the task at hand.

Having things go in unexpected or undesirable ways can be a learning opportunity. It is in these moments that we can let go of old ways of doing things and find new ways to overcome challenges. Mindful awareness of the present moment helps us do this by enabling us to assess challenges calmly and with a clear head. When children see adults doing this, it can be a powerful learning experience.

Positive self-talk at these times can also help and, as parents, carers and teachers, we can model this behaviour to children. When we tell ourselves that we'll be okay, that we are strong enough to deal with a situation and that there are better times ahead, we begin to build positive patterns of thinking that strengthen with practice. This positive

process allows our minds to think more flexibly and creatively providing access to a broader range of possible strategies and solutions.

We invite you to share the following guided mindful movement exercise with your 5–7 year old. This exercise is a great way to shift awareness from anxious thoughts to being more present and grounded in your body. We recommend doing this together as children thrive on caring and trusting relationships with others, especially when they are finding things challenging.

After sharing this mindfulness practice together, have a conversation about how the experience felt and how mindfulness can help us bounce back when things are challenging. After taking time to unpack this question, we suggest downloading the companion activities appropriate to this topic and inviting your child to choose one as an activity. These resources can be found towards the end of the booklet. While the activities are designed so they can be done without adult support, we do encourage continued conversation and collaboration as they complete them.



Listen to a mindfulness meditation. A good one for this topic is: Steady as a Tree.

App Location:

- All Programs
- Families
- Any Time
- Steady as a Tree

Web App Link:

<https://app.smilingmind.com.au/sessions/482/1374/2804/>



Continue the conversation using one of the activity sheets at the back of this booklet:

Bouncing Back

A ball gives young children a tangible object to imagine when deciding to bounce back after a difficult moment. Have a bouncy ball handy for [this activity](#) so that you can experiment with the concept together.

Picking Ourselves Up

[This activity](#) shines a light on a common challenge for young children and helps them to imagine positive coping strategies so that they can move on into the rest of their day.



Deepen the conversation by exploring these questions together. Remember, there are no wrong answers:

How do humans and other animals like pets manage when things are really tricky so that they can keep going and enjoy the rest of their day?

Can you remember a time when things have been hard and you have learned an important lesson? (if you can share a childhood experience of your own, this can be very helpful)

When your day is a bit up and down, what do you do to stay positive and calm?

My magical wish tree.



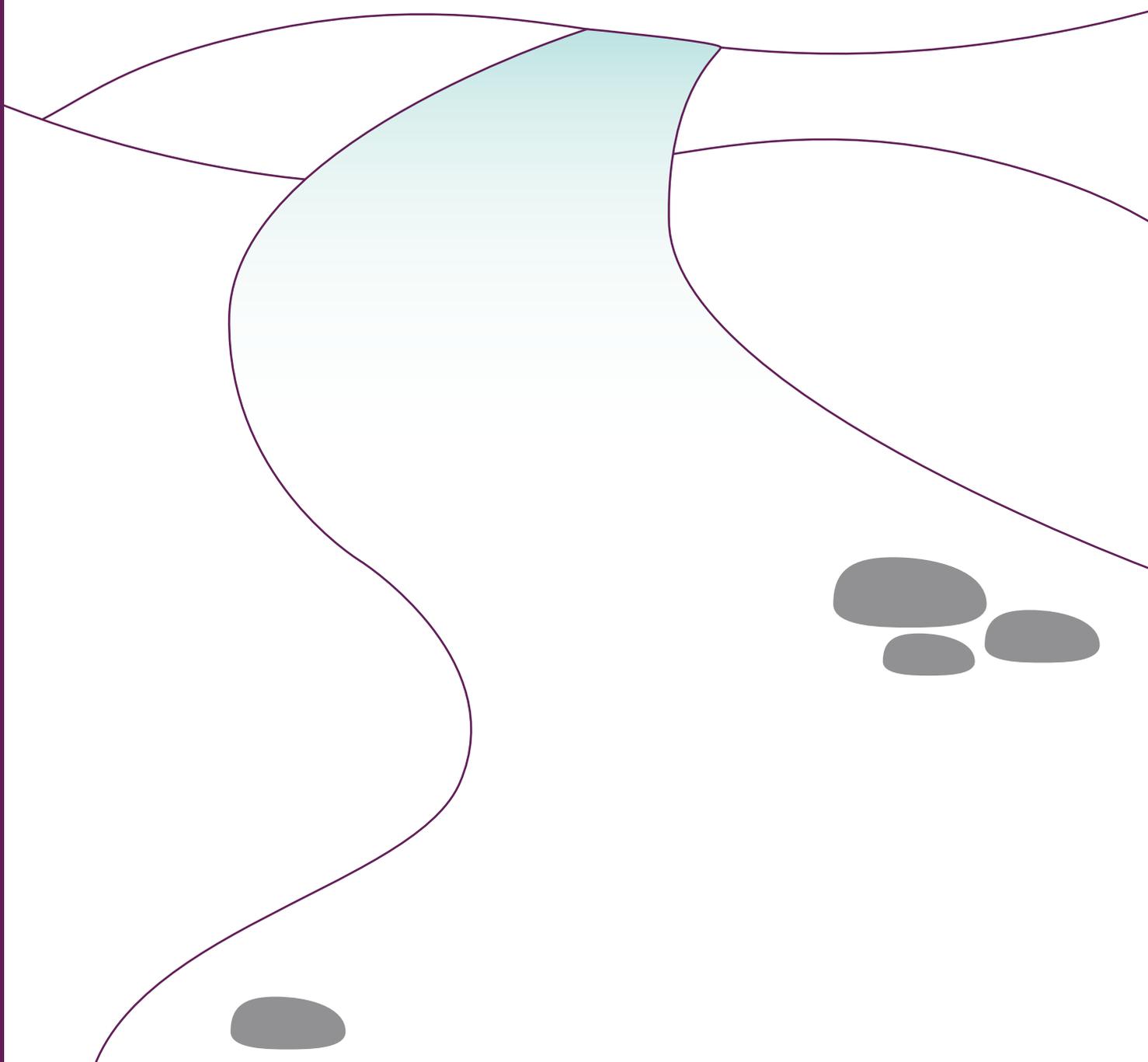
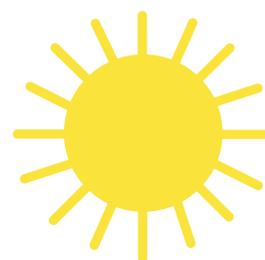
Think of a favourite tree, or imagine a favourite tree. Imagine it is filled with magical wish birds. What do you wish for today? Just choose something that makes you feel calm and happy. Draw your favourite tree and fill it with wish birds. Write your wish beneath your tree.



Float away.



Imagine sitting beside a beautiful creek. The sun is shining, the birds are singing and the cool fresh water is flowing past you gently and calmly. Pop your worries on leaves that are floating past and just let them float away. Draw and write what you are imagining right now.



Teddy bear breathing.

Do you have a favourite soft toy or blanket? If you do, go and get it now. How does this very special friend make you feel when you are together? Draw the two of you looking after one another and write some feelings words around you both.

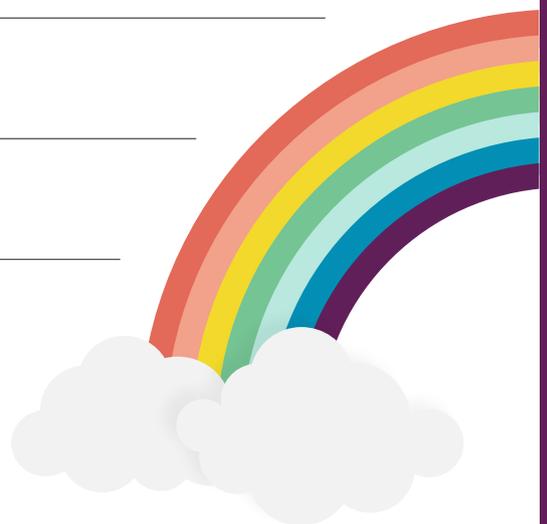


Someone special.



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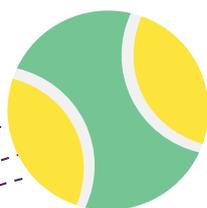
Think of someone you love very much who helps you out when you feel sad and unsure. Imagine being together and having fun. What do you love doing together? Draw a picture and add some feelings words around you both.



Bouncing back.



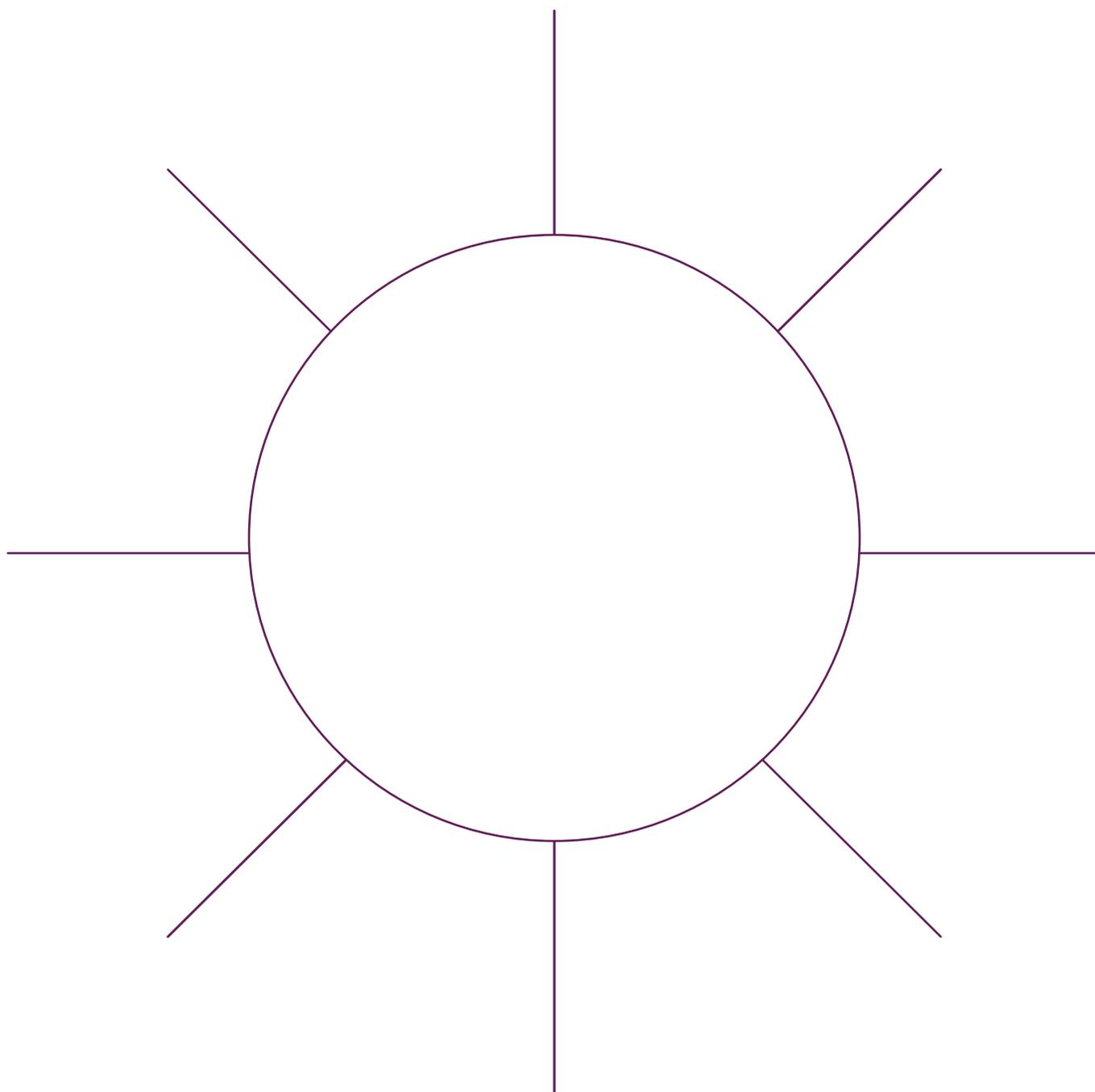
When we bounce a ball it can bounce way up high and it always comes down again. Draw yourself with some bouncy balls to show that life can be like this too. We have up and down bouncy days too, just like a bouncy ball.



Picking ourselves up.



We've all fallen in the playground and found ourselves on the ground. Life can be like this too sometimes and it can be very hard to get back up and keep going. But when we do, things begin to become clearer for us and we can see a way forward. Write and draw about a time you had to just pick yourself up and keep going.





Smiling Mind

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Smiling Mind is a not-for-profit organisation that works to make mindfulness meditation accessible to all.

Visit us online or download the free app to get started.

