



Pain In Perspective Workbook

A cognitive therapy workbook
By www.keepyourchildsafe.org
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Name: _____

Class: _____

Everyone will have unpleasant experiences from time to time. That's just part of being human. But while we don't always get to choose what happens to us, we CAN decide how much we let these things affect us.

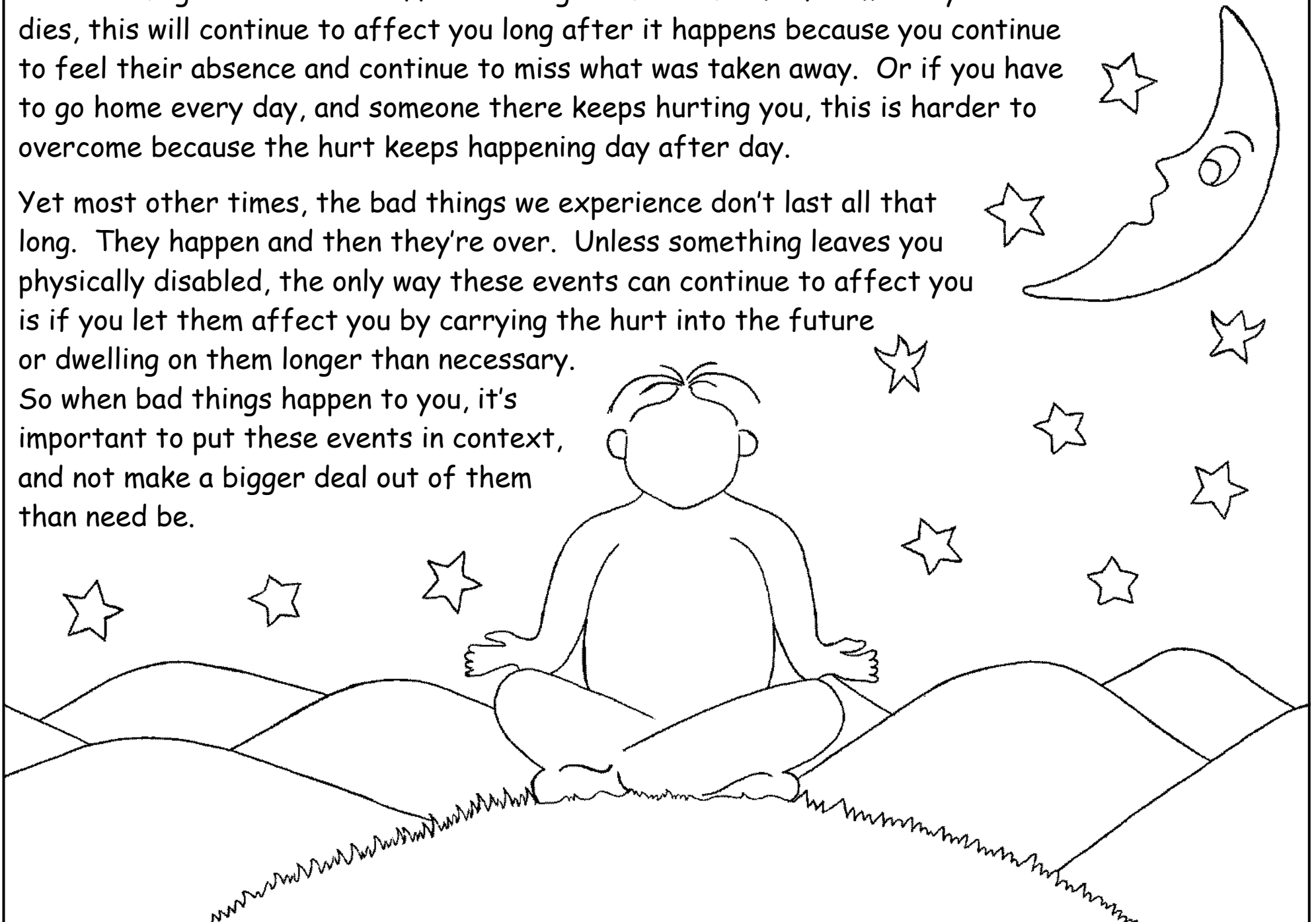
Most people have a tendency to exaggerate the bad. They dwell on it for longer than they have to and turn it into something more than it really is. Thus they end up staying bothered by things much longer than they should.



Certain things are bound to affect us longer than others. If someone you love dies, this will continue to affect you long after it happens because you continue to feel their absence and continue to miss what was taken away. Or if you have to go home every day, and someone there keeps hurting you, this is harder to overcome because the hurt keeps happening day after day.

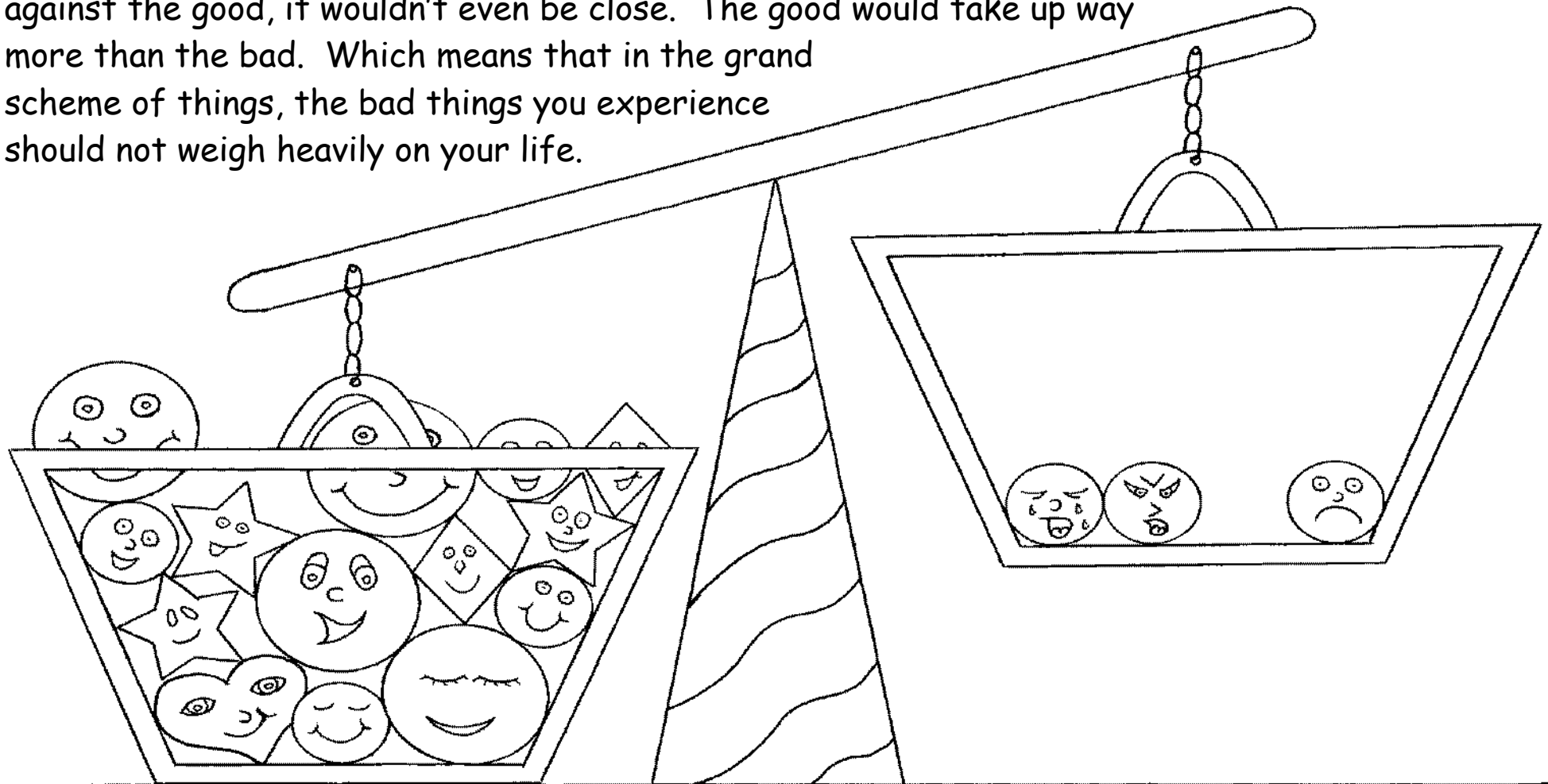
Yet most other times, the bad things we experience don't last all that long. They happen and then they're over. Unless something leaves you physically disabled, the only way these events can continue to affect you is if you let them affect you by carrying the hurt into the future or dwelling on them longer than necessary.

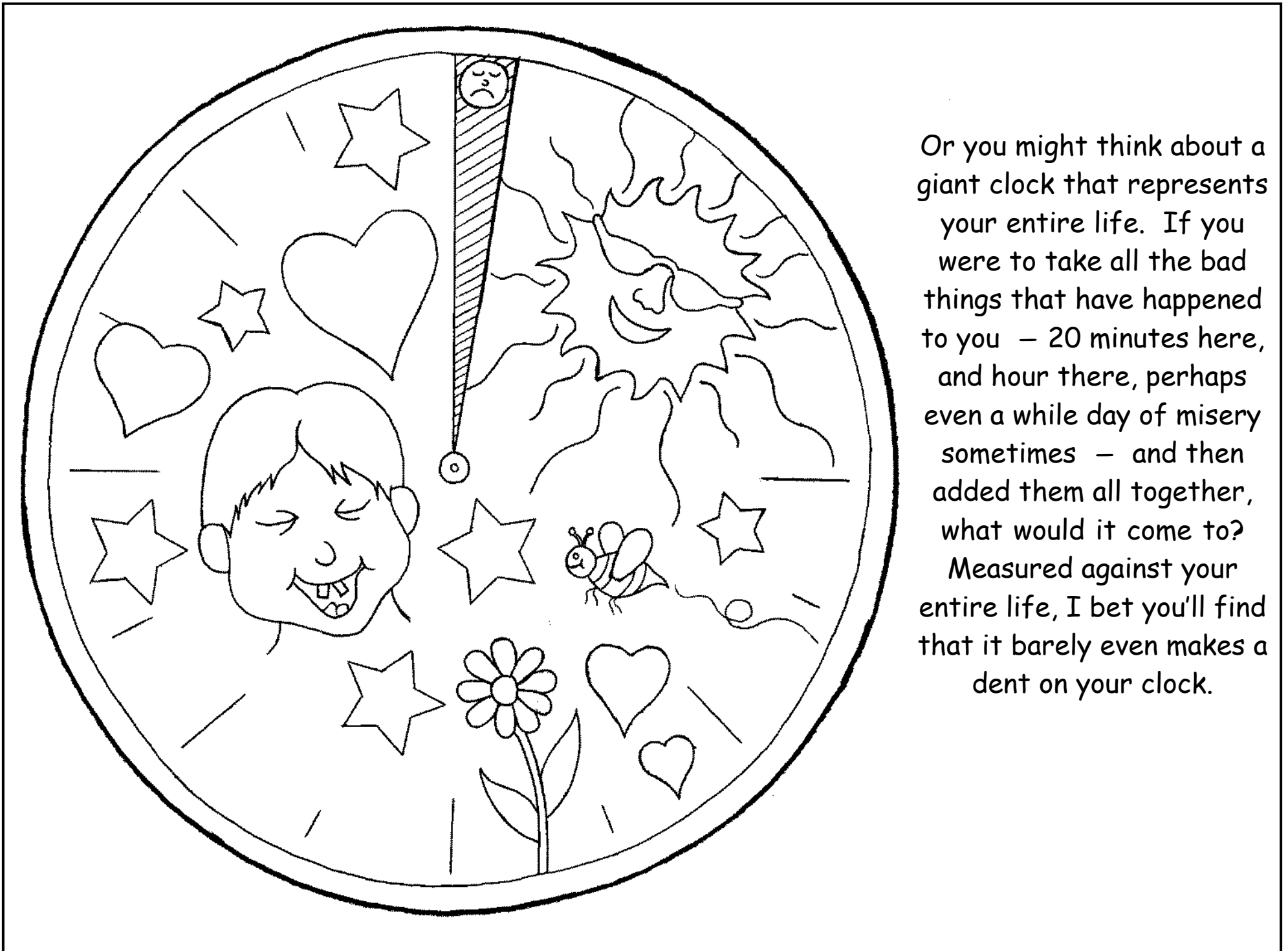
So when bad things happen to you, it's important to put these events in context, and not make a bigger deal out of them than need be.



Here's a trick that will help you put painful things in their proper place: Imagine that all your experiences are like weights on a scale. On one side are all the good experiences; the fun things you've done, the hours spent playing, the hugs and affection that have come your way and all the time you spend with those who love you.

On the other side of the scale are times when life hasn't treated you as well as you might have liked. Perhaps someone did or said something hurtful. I bet if you measured these bad times against the good, it wouldn't even be close. The good would take up way more than the bad. Which means that in the grand scheme of things, the bad things you experience should not weigh heavily on your life.



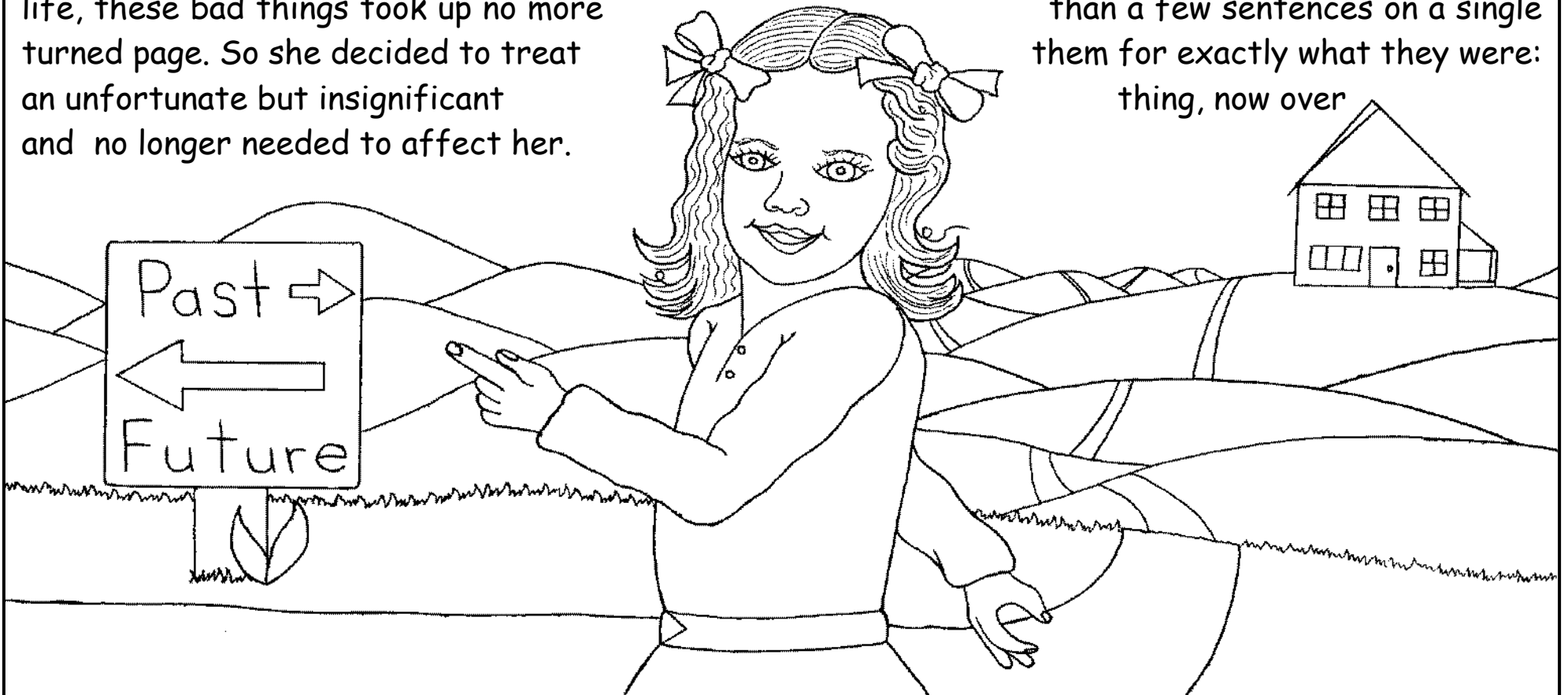


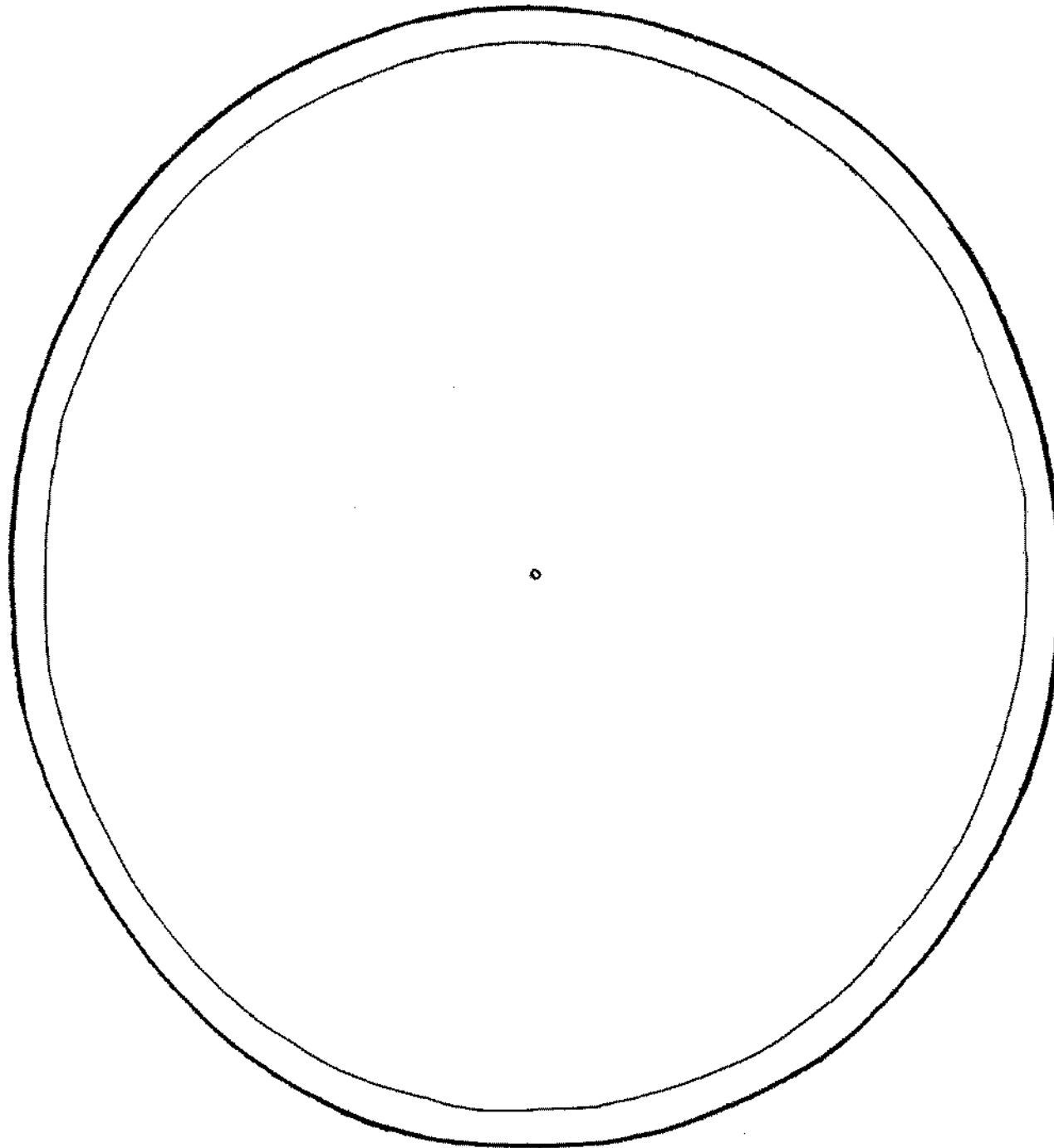
Or you might think about a giant clock that represents your entire life. If you were to take all the bad things that have happened to you – 20 minutes here, and hour there, perhaps even a while day of misery sometimes – and then added them all together, what would it come to? Measured against your entire life, I bet you'll find that it barely even makes a dent on your clock.

That's exactly what Rebecca did. she lives in a happy neighborhood with loving parents. But like everyone else, life sometimes sends challenges her way. Not that long ago, a neighbor did some things he shouldn't have done that made her uncomfortable. When people found out about it, they made a huge fuss over what happened. Seeing the way others acted, Rebecca started to think it was a big deal too.

Then she thought about these experiences on the clock of her life. She added up the 5 times this happened, and found it came to around 2 hours total. That wasn't even the better part of a day, and it was like the blink of an eye in terms of her whole life. This made her realize that in the grand scheme of things, these experiences weren't that significant after all. In the vast storybook of her life, these bad things took up no more than a few sentences on a single turned page. So she decided to treat an unfortunate but insignificant and no longer needed to affect her.

than a few sentences on a single
them for exactly what they were:
thing, now over



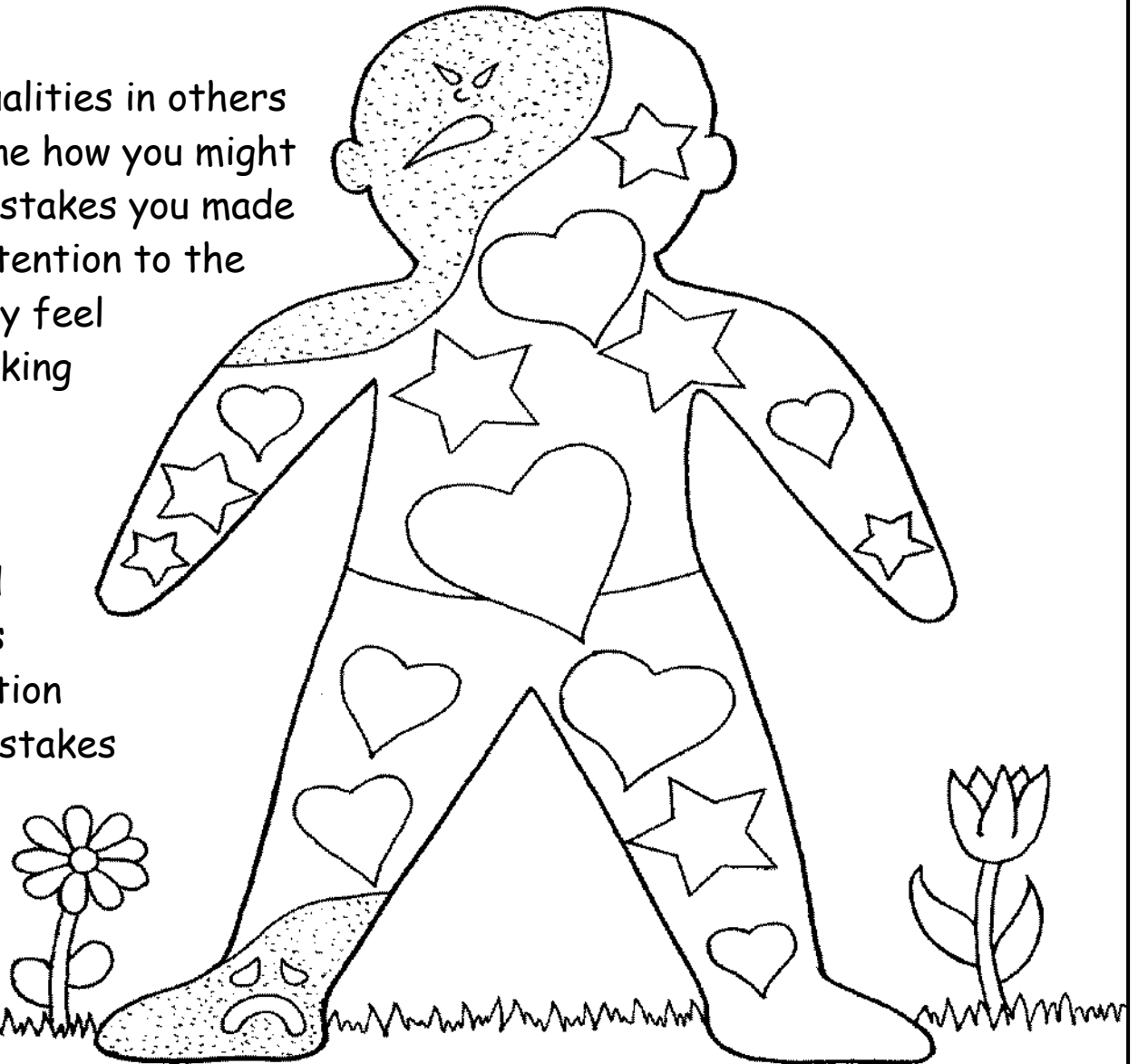


Pretend this is your own life clock. Draw a sliver in dark colors to represent all the bad things in your life. Then compare that to all the time you've spent being content, and draw some happy memories on the rest of your clock.

This same idea applies to people. Humans are complicated, imperfect creatures. No one is ever all good or all bad, but a mixture of both. All of us will make mistakes in the way we treat one another. This means that in every relationship we experience, there will be both joy and pain.

It's not fair to dwell on the bad qualities in others while discounting the good. Imagine how you might feel if everyone counted all the mistakes you made against you without ever paying attention to the good things you did. You'd probably feel that this was a lopsided way of looking at things.

Yet this is often what we do when others do hurtful things to us, and it's every bit as bad for US as it is for THEM. If you pay more attention to the bad in people and let the mistakes they make overshadow the good, you'll always feel things are a lot worse than they really are.

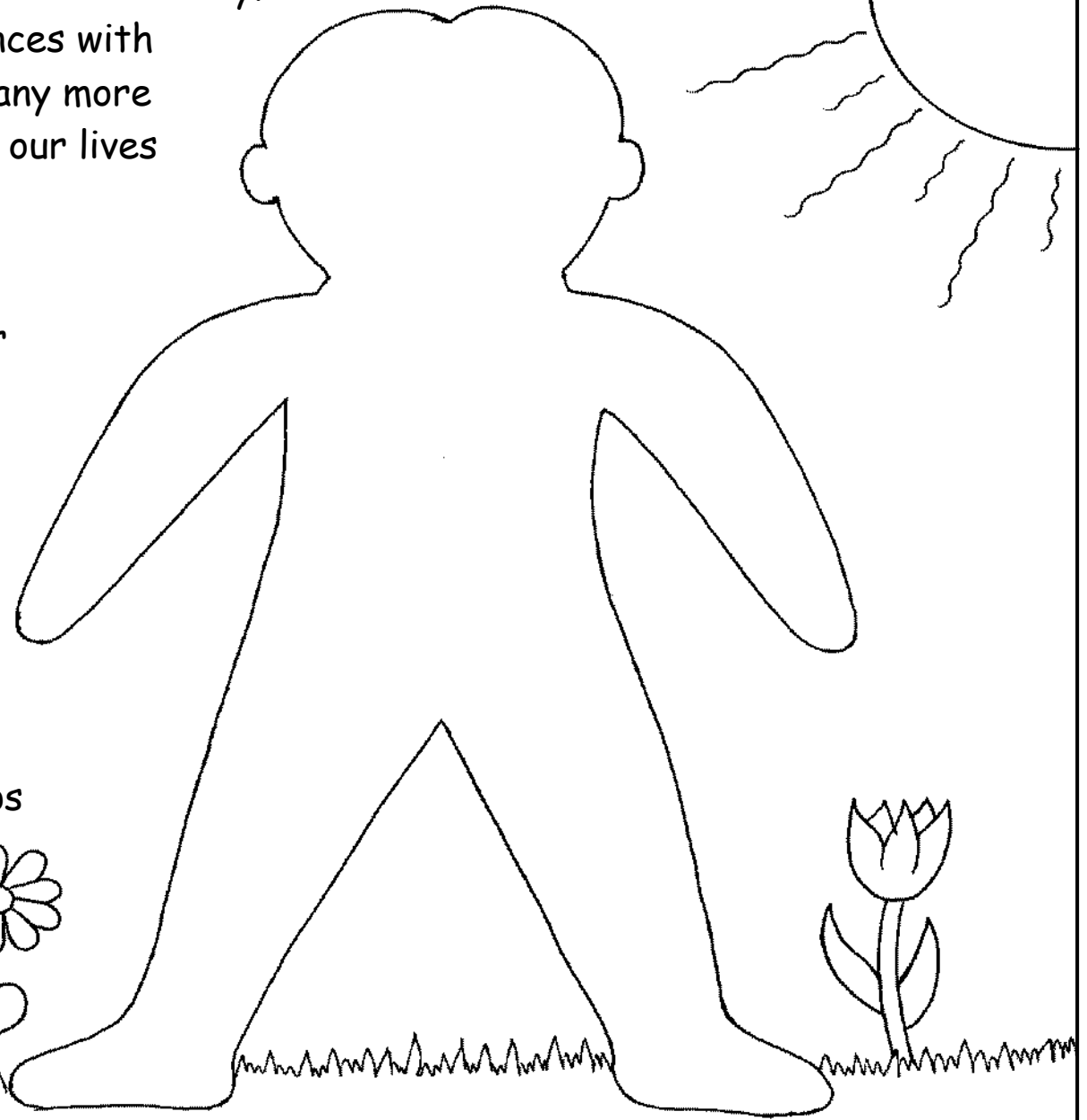


We can't and shouldn't allow other to treat us badly. But we also shouldn't let bad experiences with someone discount or erase the good, any more than we would let a few bad events in our lives ruin all the good ones.

If someone gives you more bad experiences than good experiences or makes you feel bad more than others do, then you probably need to reconsider your relationship with them. You may need to spend less time together or even go your own separate ways. But that *still* doesn't mean you need to dwell on the bad.

Think of someone in your life, perhaps someone who recently did something hurtful. Color them in according to their mixture of good traits and bad traits.

Then on a separate piece of paper, list the different good experiences you've had together, along with the not so good ones and how you would change them.

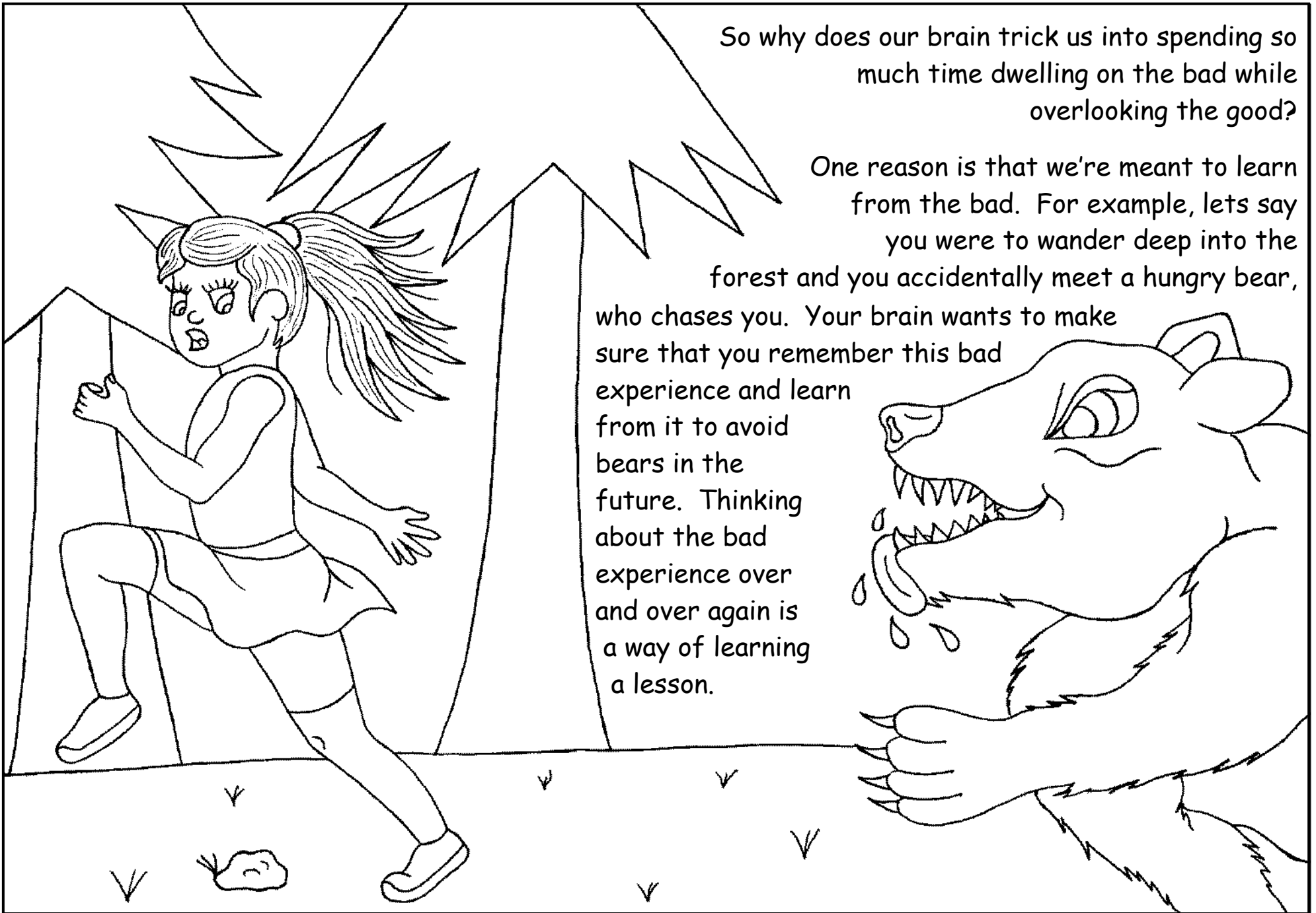


Another problem is that we tend to dwell too much on the people who frustrate us while thinking less about the ones who fulfill us. For example, John has a mother who loves him, grandparents who adore him, teachers at school who think he's a great kid, and a few close friends he can talk to and spend time with.

Unfortunately, John's father doesn't treat him very well. He always seems angry and can say and do all sorts of things that make John feel bad. When John thinks about how his father treats him he gets upset. Because he thinks about it a lot, he's upset a lot.

John is paying too much attention to the one person who makes him feel worthless while overlooking all the people who love and adore him. His mind is treating one bad relationship as if it has more power than 3 or 4 good ones. How silly is that? His brain is tricking him into paying more attention to the bad than the good!





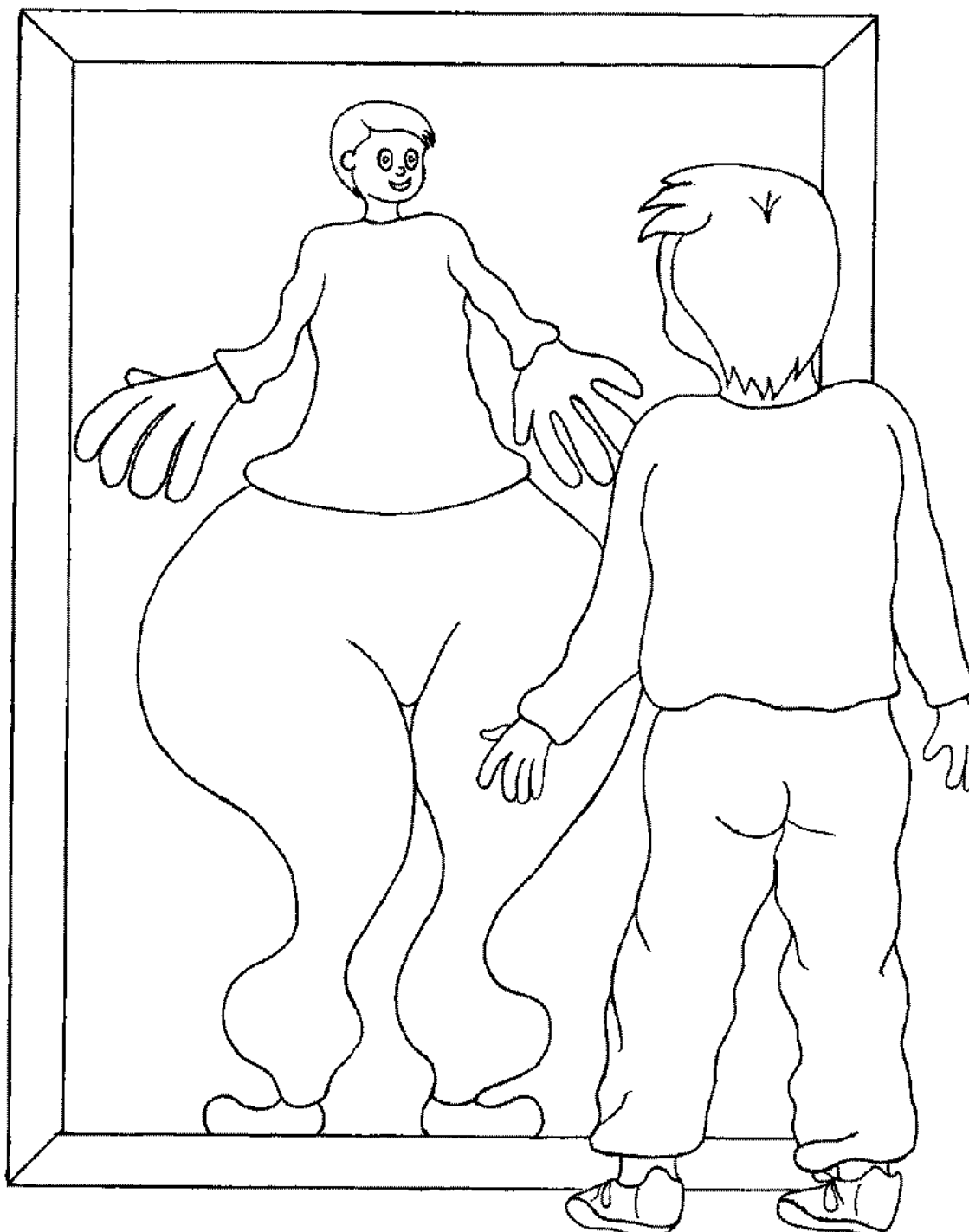
So why does our brain trick us into spending so much time dwelling on the bad while overlooking the good?

One reason is that we're meant to learn from the bad. For example, let's say you were to wander deep into the forest and you accidentally meet a hungry bear, who chases you. Your brain wants to make sure that you remember this bad experience and learn from it to avoid bears in the future. Thinking about the bad experience over and over again is a way of learning a lesson.

If you were the girl in this picture, what is something you might learn from this experience?

The problem is that while our brain is great about dwelling on the bad and getting us to pay attention to it, it isn't so good about keeping things in perspective. By making bad things seem especially big in our mind, it's almost as if we're looking at life through a fun house mirror. Bad things are distorted to seem bigger and and more important than they really are, while the good things and everyday calm that make up a much larger portion of our life seem to shrink into the background.

Because we're presenting ourselves with a fake, distorted picture, we end up feeling much worse for much longer than we have to.



So the next time you feel sad about something in the past, decide if there's a lesson to be learned. If so, say to yourself: "Well that was one heck of a learning experience!" But then be sure to put the pain in perspective. Remind yourself about how miniscule this bad thing was in the grand scheme of things. Think about how bad events are just one passing moment among many, many experiences that will come your way.

It's all about living in the present moment. Whenever we spend too much time thinking about what went wrong in the past, we're wasting away our time in the present! Leave painful baggage from the past where it belongs: **IN THE PAST!** Don't bring it with you into the future or dwell on it longer than you have to.

Try not to be like the fun house mirror that takes bad situations and makes them larger than life. Keep painful things in their proper perspective!

