A TOOLKIT FROM MEMBERS OF THE NAGC

National Alliance for Grieving Children

NAGC HERO TOOLKIT

In Support of Super Heroic Grieving Children & Teens

New York Life Foundation

Thank you to the following organizations and individuals who participated in the NAGC 's Building Resources Workgroup Work Group in order to create this toolkit:

Ashlee Cabral, LMFT joined St. Joseph Health Hospice Services – Northern California in 2014 and serves as the Grief Services Coordinator. She holds a Masters of Arts in Counseling from Sonoma State University and currently resides in Santa Rosa, California.

Alyssa Christensen serves as the Grief Support Director for Mourning Hope Grief Center in Lincoln, NE. She holds her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Sarah Eadon, MSSA joined the Bridges team in 2017 and serves as the Program Manager for Grief Support Services. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from The Ohio State University and Master of Science in Social Administration from the Case Western Reserve University. Sarah resides in Charleston, SC.

Heather Gianatassio, MS, CCLS, GCCA-C is a Certified Child Life Specialist, Certified Grief Counselor, and Certified Child and Adolescent Grief Counselor. She received her Bachelor of Arts from Wheelock College and her Master of Science from the University of Southern Mississippi. She currently resides in Massachusetts with her family.

Melissa Lunardini, M.A., MBA, is the Children's Bereavement Manager for The Elizabeth Hospice in San Diego, CA. She received a Master's in Psychology emphasis in Marriage Family Therapy from Chapman University and a Masters of Business Administration from California State San Bernardino.

Jordan Park, LMFT-Candidate, attended Oklahoma State University where she received a bachelor's degree in Human Development and Family Sciences as well as a master's in Human Development and Family Sciences. Jordan is the Assistant Program Director at Calm Waters Center for Children and Families in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Thank you to the following organizations and individuals who contributed ideas and/or activities for this toolkit:

Brigid Frasquillo, Tunidito Children and Family Services Tucson, AZ
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Nichole Rhodes, Annie's Hope – The Center for Grieving Kids, St. Lois, MO
Teresa Mendez-Quigley, Uplift Center for Grieving Children, Philadelphia, PA

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INTRODUCTION

A hero is someone with integrity and honor, who demonstrates courage, bravery, and nobility. Did you know there is a hero inside of us all, waiting for an opportunity to step into action?

After a death, we depend on everyday superheroes, the cape-less crusaders who have powers of listening and empathy, who can have courageous conversations, boldly express support, and who are kind to someone in grief.

This Superhero Toolkit, developed for children, teens and their support network, provides activities and conversations designed to empower each of us to become everyday superheroes.

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What is a Hero?

What is a hero? Does heroism demand extraordinary circumstances, or can heroism take place in our everyday lives?

Can anyone be a hero? Everyday? What do you think?

WHEN I WAS VERY YOUNG,
MOST OF MY CHILDHOOD HEROES WORE CAPES,
FLEW THROUGH THE AIR, OR PICKED UP BUILDINGS WITH ONE ARM.
THEY WERE SPECTACULAR AND GOT A LOT OF ATTENTION.
BUT AS I GREW, MY HEROES CHANGED,
SO THAT NOW I CAN HONESTLY SAY THAT

ANYONE WHO DOES
ANYTHING TO HELP A CHILD
IS A HERO TO ME.

- FRED ROGERS

I think a hero is an
ORDINARY
INDIVIDUAL
WHO FINDS **STRENGTH** TO
PERSEVERE AND **ENDURE**
IN SPITE OF OVERWHELMING OBSTACLES.

– Christopher Reeve

Don't Forget
YOU ARE THE
HERO
OF **YOUR** OWN STORY

– Greg Boyle

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How to be a Hero: To Your Grieving Child or Teen: For Parents/ Caregivers

1 Listen to Your Child
It is important for your child to have a safe space to talk about their loved one and their feelings about the death. Act as a sounding board and validate your child's feelings. This can help them to create their unique story. This story can even be used as a way for your child to support a friend in the future.

2 Allow Emotional Expression
Allow your child to have a safe space to express their emotions. Your child may experience a wide range of emotions: anger, sadness, pain, shame, guilt, or other powerful emotions. Often, children are not able to verbalize what they are feeling. Avoid minimizing these emotions, telling them how they should feel, or trying to put a positive spin on things.

3 Encourage Coping Skills
You can support your child by helping them find healthy ways to cope with the overwhelming emotions of grief. Try out different activities as a family: deep breathing, yoga, taking breaks, going for walks, gratitude jars, artistic expression, etc. Help your child identify the different activities that work well for them and develop a plan for when these feelings arise.

4 Practice Self-Care
Just like the oxygen mask theory, you must take care of yourself first before you can support your child. Implement healthy coping skills, develop a self-care plan, surround yourself with a support system and express your emotions--this way you can serve as a role model for your child.

5 Understand Grief Comes in Waves
Both you and your child will have easier and harder days, and it is important to give yourself and your child grace to grieve. Be open about it if you are having a difficult day and encourage them to do the same, as this can help prevent misunderstanding.

6 Establish/Maintain Family Traditions
As a family, foster ways that you can remember your loved one. These rituals can keep their connection to the loved one strong, as some worry that they will forget their loved one. Acknowledge that some past traditions may have to look differently. Decide together what to keep and when to try something new. Try different activities: make a scrapbook, visit your loved one's grave, plant something in his/her honor, or share stories about the loved one's life.

7 Ask for Help
It can be difficult to ask for help. Stay connected with your support system and encourage your child to identify friends and adults that they can go to when they need support. Look for resources in your area that can help your child to build their social support with others who understand what they're going through.

8 Make New Memories
Remind your child that it's okay to be happy and make new memories. Plan family dates: go for walks, visit new places, go to the movies, make new traditions, etc.

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How to be a Hero: To a Grieving Child or Teen: For Professionals

1 Reach Out
Touching base with the child gives them validation that they are important to you and that their loss is being acknowledged.

2 Share Information
Review with the family what information is to be shared and let the child practice answering difficult questions. This will increase the comfort level of the child to return to school and activities.

3 Listen Empathetically
Empathetic listening is key to supporting kids after a death. Try not to interrupt, interpret, or evaluate. Simply being present while the child shares is helpful. Let them lead the conversation.

4 Be Consistent
Children need routine and normalcy to feel in control, supported and comforted. Keep limits consistent and clear to provide a safe and secure environment for everyone.

5 Be There
Support each child in the way in which they grieve, there is no right or wrong way. Reassure them that all their feelings and thoughts are valid.

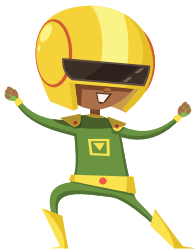
6 Validate Questions
If you are unsure how to answer a child's question, be honest. Tell the child you do not know the answer and that you will get back to them. Make sure to follow-up. Know that some questions should be answered by the family. The child may need help practicing how to ask these questions.

7 Recognize Uniqueness
Trying to connect with the child by sharing a similar loss can often minimize that child's loss. No two people grieve the same or were a part of the same relationship. Keep the focus on the child. Provide support and allow the child to share about the death and their grief.

8 Create a Plan
Often, fears of becoming emotional in front of peers may result in increased anxiety which can lead to missing class or activities. Creating a safety plan for difficult days in advance will help the child feel safe to interact with peers. A safety plan may include creating a signal to adults, identifying where to go for support or quiet space and returning to the classroom or activity.

9 Care For Self
Remember that you may also be impacted by this loss. A death will have impact whether you knew the person who died, have your own recent or past losses or are feeling deeply for the child. Be compassionate with yourself, seek support from others, and remember to give yourself extra self-care to recharge.

10 Seek Resources
Children's grief is very different from adult grief. There are many resources for professionals through National Alliance of Grieving Children, New York Life Foundation, Coalition to Support Grieving Students, and many more in your local community.



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How to be a Hero: To Your Grieving Friend

Maybe you're reading this page because one of your friends just had a loved one die and you are wondering how to help. First and most important, please find a trusted adult to support you and your friend during this difficult time. Also know, the thing your friend might want most is just to have you to play with. Here are some other ways to support them.

- TALK TO A TRUSTED ADULT ABOUT HOW TO BEST SUPPORT YOUR FRIEND.
- BAKE YOUR FRIEND COOKIES
- WRITE YOUR FRIEND A NOTE TO LET THEM KNOW YOU ARE THINKING ABOUT THEM.
- HAVE YOUR FAMILY HELP YOU BRING YOUR FRIEND AND HIS/HER FAMILY GROCERIES OR A MEAL.
- AS A FAMILY WRITE DOWN GOOD MEMORIES THAT YOU HAVE ABOUT THE PERSON THAT DIED AND SHARE IT WITH YOUR FRIEND.
- INVITE YOUR FRIEND TO HANG OUT.

Taking Care of Yourself

Being with our friends who are sad can make us sad. If this happens, be sure to do something that helps you feel better. You can ride your bike, read a book or go on a walk. Also talk to a trusted adult about what you are feeling and let them support you.

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How to be a Hero to Yourself: For Children

When someone special to you dies, it takes a super amount of strength to do all the things you normally do. Here are some powers you have that you can use to be a hero to yourself!

Super Movement

Move your body. Play, run, jump, wiggle, dance, hit a balloon or yell into a pillow.

Superpower Recharge

Recharge your strength by getting lots of sleep, good food and water.

Super Breathing

Take some deep breaths. Try blowing some bubbles, smell the flowers, or just notice how fast you are breathing and try to slow it down. Breathe out a little longer than you breathe in.

Super Slow Down

Try moving with super slow speed for a bit, sit in a quiet space or listen to soft music.

Super Self-Talk

Talk kindly to yourself like you would talk to a friend. Examples: "You can do this." "You're doing the best you can." "You will figure this out."

Super Strength

Do something you're good at, whatever that may be, and celebrate the little things. Examples: Making it to school on time, remembering homework, helping a friend, scoring a goal at soccer.

Super Connection

Choose an object or make something to remind you of your special person. It could be as simple as a stone you find. Keep it with you to feel connected whenever you need it.

Super Support

Look for people you can talk to when you are feeling down. Examples: friend, family member, teacher, coach or counselor.

Super Creative

Express yourself through art, writing, drawing, dancing or listening to/playing music.

Super Emotions

Remember that it's OK to feel sad or angry. You do not need to be strong all the time. Crying is OK, especially when you are talking or thinking about your special person.

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How to be a Hero to Yourself: For Teens

When someone important to you dies, it takes an incredible amount of strength to do all the things you normally do. Here are some simple things to try to be your own hero.

Move your body

Dance, run, play sports, clean, stretch or punch a pillow. A little movement goes a long way.

Recharge your batteries

Try to get plenty of sleep, eat healthy, energizing foods and drink plenty of water.

Remember to breathe

Take some deep breaths. Start by noticing your breath and try to slow it down. Breathe out a little longer than you breathe in.

Slow down

When it feels like everything is moving too fast, take a minute to move slowly, sit in a quiet space or listen to soft music.

Use supportive self-talk

Talk kindly to yourself like you would talk to a friend. Try saying: "you can do this", "you're doing the best you can in this moment", or "you will figure this out".

Identify your strengths

Do something you're good at, whatever that may be, and celebrate small wins. It could be as simple as making it to school on time, remembering homework, helping a friend or scoring a goal at soccer.

Stay connected

Choose an object or make something to remind you of your special person. It may be something of theirs or a special stone you find. Keep it with you to feel connected whenever you need it.

Identify supportive allies

Look for the people in your life you trust who you can talk to and will show up to listen. You may need different people for different needs (someone to talk deeply to, make you laugh, and/or be a cheerleader).

Use creative outlets

Express yourself through art, journaling, drawing, dancing, or listening to/playing music. Remember this is just for you, so don't worry about how it looks or sounds.

Know that being emotional is ok

Sometimes you just need to cry. Don't be afraid to release emotions and let it all out. Find safe ways to do this. Examples: cry with a family member/friend or squeeze a stress ball.

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ACTIVITIES

SUPERHERO STRENGTH BUILDER:

Like a superhero, we all have special strengths inside of us, "powers" that we can call upon when we are grieving or feeling down. This "strength ball" will be a reminder of all of the strengths inside you and those that connect you to your special person.

SUPERHERO CAPE:

It is normal to feel worried or more scared after someone special dies. You can be as confident facing these as a superhero is when facing their enemy! Be your own superhero by creating something to help fight off those worries and fears.

SUPERHERO SELF-ESTEEM SHIELD:

This activity is designed to help a child identify their strengths, unique characteristics, and create a reminder about what makes them special and strong. This reminder can help them build a strong sense of empowerment during times of struggle.

MY LIFE WITH A SUPERPOWER:

This activity encourages a person to consider their superpowers in dealing with their grief.

THE MASK:

The purpose of this activity is to provide children with a safe space to express their true emotions, while also helping them identify their underlying emotions and times when they may be hiding them.

MINDFULNESS HERO:

In times of distress, sadness and/or anger, the participants can use this mindfulness activity to come back to the present moment.

BUILDING YOUR SUPERPOWERS:

Heroes come in all shapes, sizes and colors. This activity enables grieving children and youth to identify their own strengths and abilities that lie within.

See additional pages for full activity instructions.

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SUPERHERO STRENGTH BUILDER

Like a superhero, we all have special strengths inside of us,"powers" that we can call upon when we are grieving or feeling down. This "strength builder" will be a reminder of all of the strengths inside you and those that connect you to your special person.

CONVERSATION

What makes you feel strong?
Name some people who give you strength. Who are they (i.e. mother, father, friend)?
What are your special skills?
What makes you feel proud?
What were your special persons' strengths?

INSTRUCTIONS:

Make and design your own "Superhero Strength Builder":

1. Choose a balloon color that will represent your power.

2. Have a helper hold the balloon open while you put in small pieces of play dough.

3. Each piece of play dough can be a different color to represent different strengths.

4. Once all play dough is added, tie the balloon.

5. Optional: For extra strength, use two balloons.

6. When feeling worried or anxious, squeeze the strength ball and remember all of the strength you have inside!

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Balloons (multiple color options)

Play dough (multiple color options)

GOAL

To identify personal strengths and what helps boost strength during difficult times. Strength builders can be used as a "fidget object" to relieve anxiety as well.

TIME NEEDED

Approx. 15 mins

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SUPERHERO CAPE

It is normal to feel worried or more scared after someone special dies. You can be as confident facing these feelings as a superhero is when facing their enemy! Be your own superhero by creating something to help fight off those worries and fears.

CONVERSATION

Do you ever get scared or worry about bad things happening?

What are some of your worries and fears?
(i.e. common worries might include questions such as: "Am I going to die?", "Is someone else I love going to leave me?")

What about superheroes? What do you think they worry about?

What do you think they might do to help feel better when they are scared or worried?

INSTRUCTIONS:

Make and design your own capes. Decorate your design with words, phrases or pictures of things (or people) who might help you feel better when you feel scared or worried.

Some things to think about:

What things can you do to help you feel better?
(*i.e. talk, cry, write, listen to music, run, play, look though pictures, sit outside, etc.)*

What can you say to yourself to feel better?
(ie. *I am loved; I am brave; I can do this.)*

What can you think about to feel better?
(ie. *I am loved ; I am supported; I have hope that things will get better)*

Who you can go to for support?

SUPPLIES NEEDED

"My Superhero Cape" Worksheet

Crayons, Markers, and/or Paint

GOALS

- To help express negative thoughts, feelings, and/or worries.
- Learn ways to create a sense of security when negative thoughts, feelings, and/or worries arise.

TIME NEEDED

Approx. 1 hour

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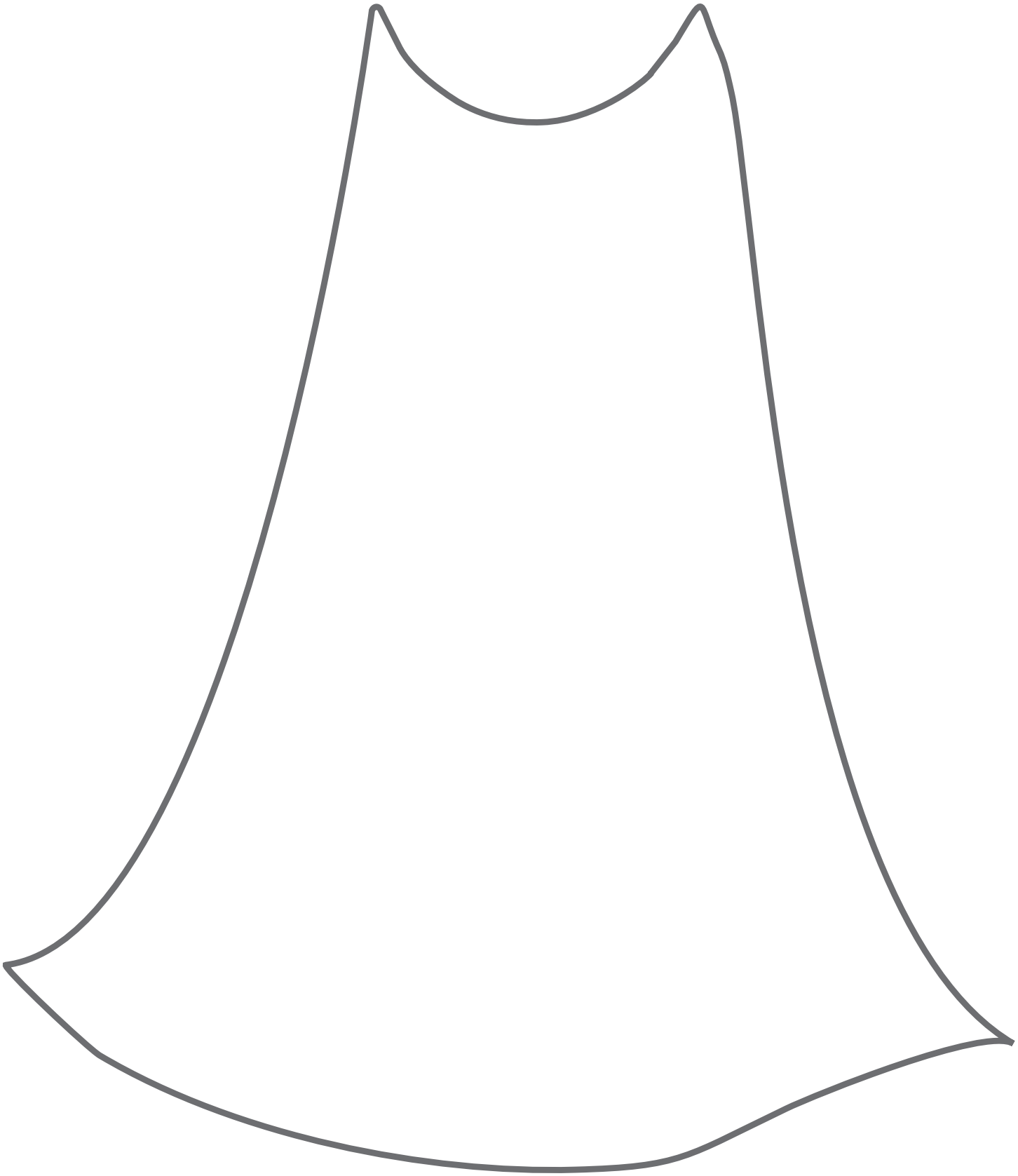
My Superhero Cape



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SUPERHERO SELF-ESTEEM SHIELD

After the death of a loved one, a child can feel isolated and different from their peers, which can distort perceptions of themselves. This can affect a child's self-esteem and their emotional well-being.

Self-esteem provides an inner strength which, once firmly established, can help build a child's resilience in life. A strong self-esteem can provide a child with a sense of empowerment and resilience.

This activity is designed to help a child identify their strengths, unique characteristics, and create a reminder about what makes them special and strong. This reminder can help them build a strong sense of empowerment during times of struggle.

CONVERSATION

Self-esteem is a way of thinking or feeling about yourself.
Self-esteem can help us feel brave when we're scared and believe in ourselves even when we make mistakes.

This can help us recognize our good qualities that can build confidence in ourselves.

Self-esteem can help us believe in ourselves, can help us keep going when times are tough and help us work through difficult emotions.

What are some words that you would use to describe yourself?

What are some ways that you would encourage a friend who is feeling sad or upset?

What are some ways that you would encourage yourself?

INSTRUCTIONS:

Complete and decorate your own "Superhero Self-Esteem Shield". Include the positive qualities you have and are proud of about yourself.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

"My Superhero Self-Esteem Shield" Worksheet

Crayons, Markers, and/or Paint

GOAL

Strengthen a child's self-esteem

TIME NEEDED

Approx. 20 mins

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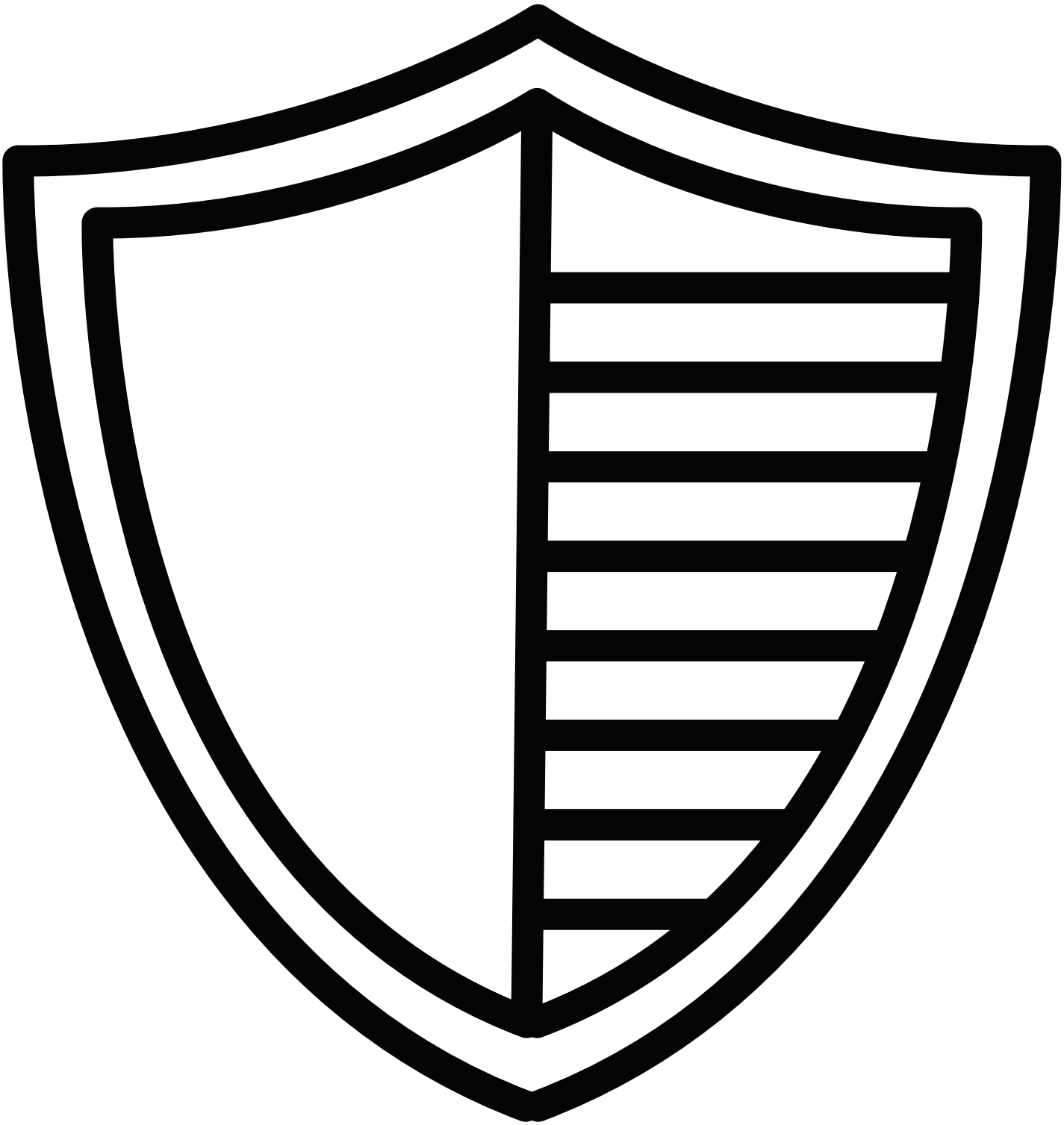
My SUPERHERO Self-Esteem Shield



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MY LIFE WITH A SUPERPOWER

This activity encourages a person to consider their superpowers in dealing with their grief.

INSTRUCTIONS:

You will be drawing a superpower card; you have the chance to either turn back time to before the death happened, during the dying process, or you can use the power in your current grief.

1. Draw a superpower card.

2. Discuss the superpower. When would you want to use that superpower?

CONVERSATION

Which was your favorite of the superpowers?

What are the *coulda, shoulda, woulda* thoughts that you may have when thinking about the death?

What are ways you let those thoughts out or cope with those thoughts?

SUPPLIES NEEDED

"My Life With A Superpower" Cards

GOAL

To discuss what you wish you could have done or could do if you had a superhuman ability.

TIME NEEDED

Variable; 15-30 mins

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My Life with a Superpower

TELEPORTATION: Ability to disappear and then reappear at a different place	**TIME MANIPULATION:** Ability to accelerate, slow, stop, rewind, or loop time of others	**SUPER STRENGTH:** Ability to possess strength beyond that of a normal person	**ELEMENTAL POWERS:** Ability to control and manipulate the weather
HEALING ABILITY: Ability to restore organisms to their optimal health	**INVINCIBILITY:** Ability to be too powerful to be defeated	**INVISIBILITY:** The ability to be unseen	**ENHANCED SENSES:** The ability to hear things outside the normal human range
SHAPE-SHIFTING: The ability to change one's appearance	**MIND CONTROL:** Ability to control the minds of others	**FAST FLEXES:** Ability to have enhanced reaction speed	**MIND READING:** Ability to read/sense the thoughts of others
FLIGHT: Ability to use energy to be able to fly	**SUPER INTELLIGENCE:** The ability to have extremely enhanced intelligence	**OPEN PORTALS:** Ability to create a portal to transport between two location of different times	**INTANGIBILITY:** Ability to move through objects and ignore physical effects in your way
SUPER SPEED: Ability that allows you to move faster than humanly possible	**TELEKINESIS:** Ability to move, manipulate, influence objects with your mind	**IMMORTALITY:** Ability to live forever	**SUPERIOR ADAPTATION:** Ability to adapt to anything and quickly evolve to survive any environment

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THE MASK

After the death of a loved one, children react in many different ways. While some children may freely express their emotions, others may suppress their feelings or emotions. They may outwardly show different emotions than what is truly being felt.

Similar to adults, children will put on a "brave" or "happy" face to hide their true feelings in order to not upset the other people in their life (i.e. guardians, friends).

CONVERSATION

Often times, superheroes wear masks to protect their identities. We sometimes do this as well by hiding behind a smile or saying that we're just "OK" because we might be protecting the people around us. Other times, we may show anger when there are other emotions underneath that show how we are actually feeling.

It is important to recognize these underlying emotions, so we can use our coping skills or reach out to our go-to people to help us through these times.

Can you think about a situation where you might hide "behind a mask" (which means hide how you are truly feeling)?

How does hiding these emotions make you feel? How does it feel emotionally? How does it feel physically?

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. On the front side of your mask (or on the first mask on the worksheet), decorate your mask to show how you present yourself to the outside world.

2. On the back side of your mask (or on the second mask on the worksheet), show how you feel on the inside.

Why do people sometimes hide how we are really feeling?

If certain emotions that we experience are difficult, what are some activities that we can use to relax and cope with these emotions?

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Paper Mask or "My Mask" Worksheet

Coloring supplies

GOAL

To provide children with a safe space to express their true emotions, while also helping them identify their underlying emotions and times when they may be hiding them.

TIME NEEDED

Variable; 15-20 mins

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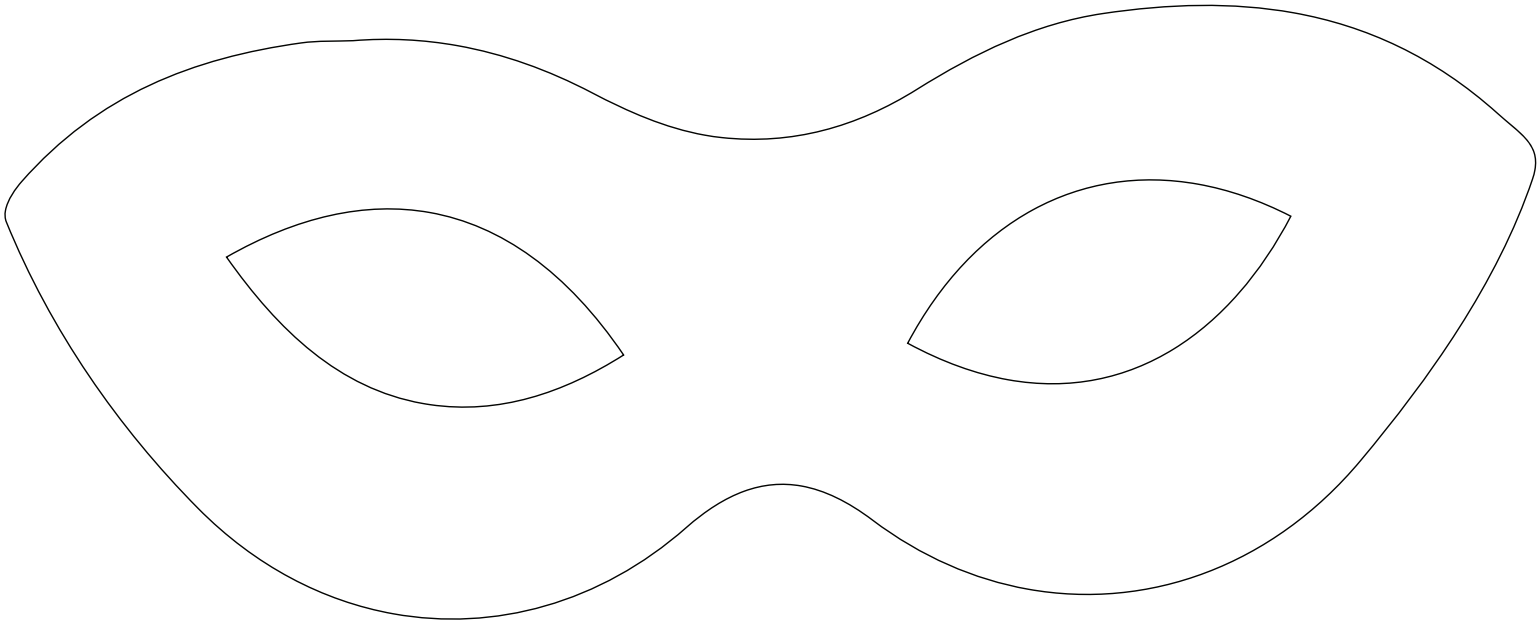
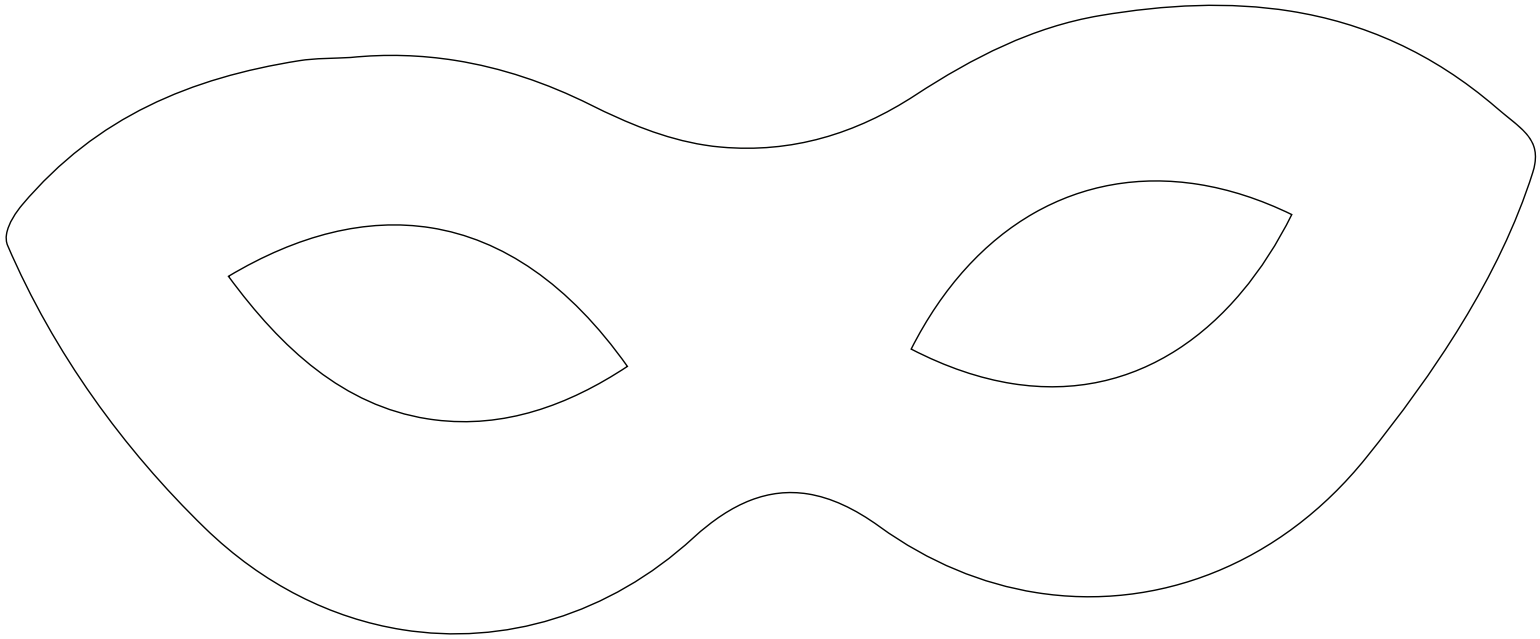
My Mask

Print on card stock and cut out. Or use page as a worksheet: 1. Decorate the first mask to reflect what you show the Outside world.
2. Decorate the second mask to show how you feel on the Inside.





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MINDFULNESS HERO

In times of distress, sadness and/or anger, a child/teen can use this mindfulness activity to come back to the present moment.

You will help your child create some positive affirmations and a visual scene using the prompts below.

CONVERSATION

What is a hero?
What does a hero look like?
Who is or has been a hero in your life?
What about your hero made them a hero?
What about you makes you a hero?* (This will turn into our mantra during the mindfulness activity: Examples: "I am kind." "I am brave." "I care about people." "I help people.")

INSTRUCTIONS:

Today, we are going to learn a coping skill that you can use to help calm yourself down in times of distress. In this activity, you are going to picture yourself in detail as a superhero. You are going to slowly hear a series of questions and visualize yourself wearing an entire superhero outfit , starting with the bottom of their feet. Remind them that you are going to go very slow.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

My Mindful Hero" Worksheet

Coloring supplies

GOAL

To create a visual scene and positive affirmation a child could use to "mentally walk through" to help ground/calm themselves when they are upset.

TIME NEEDED

5-10 mins for mindfulness/ visualization portion

20-30 mins for coloring sheet

- What do our hero shoes look like? What color are they? Are they a boot, a sneaker, or a sandal?
- What are we wearing on our legs? Pants, tights, leggings? What colors are they?
- Do we have a skirt or dress on? What color and shape are they?
- What type of shirt are we wearing? Does it have a symbol or no symbol?
- Do we have a cape or no cape?
- Do we have a helmet? What does the helmet look like?
- What about our minds and hearts makes us a hero? (*Insert mantra that was created above.)*

After the visualization, have the child color in their handout and write out their mantra in order for them to have a visual reminder of the description. Encourage the child to practice visualizing this scene from time to time when they are feeling calm in order to prepare themselves to use this when they are upset.

During a time of stress, anger, and or sadness, coach the child through the Mindfulness Hero. Have them say their answers (to the question "What about you makes you a hero?") out loud, which will become their mantra. Repeat the mantra 2-3 times.

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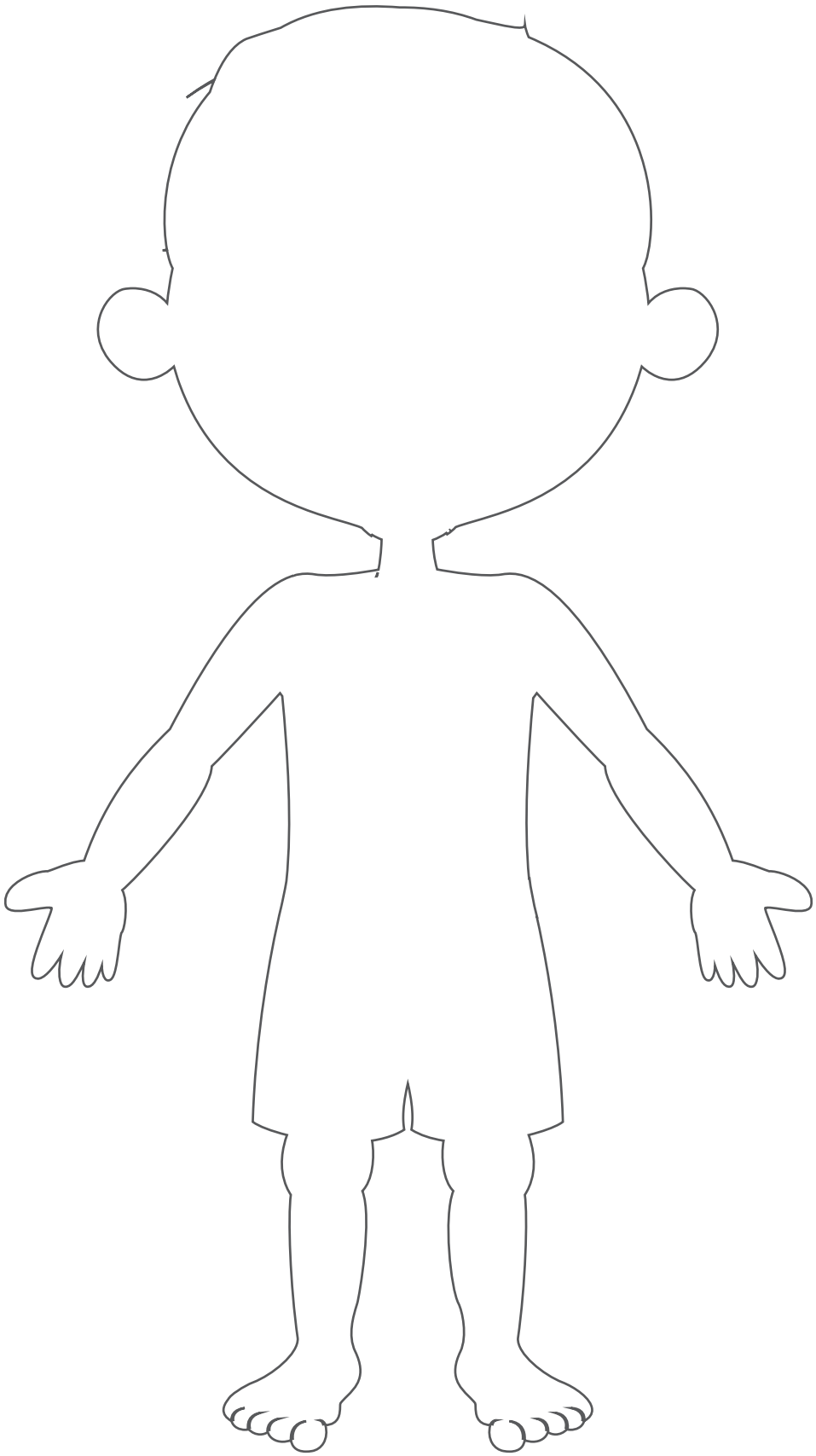
My Mindful Hero



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BUILDING YOUR SUPERPOWERS

Heroes come in all shapes, sizes and colors. This activity enables grieving children and youth to identify their own strengths and abilities that lie within.

CONVERSATION

This activity requires some level of self-reflection. Encourage your child to think about the following questions:

What are your current favorite superhero and what qualities do you like the most?

Is there anyone in real life that has super hero qualities? If so, who and what qualities do they have?

What is a quality that you are good at?

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Paper Mask or "Building My Superpowers" Worksheet

Coloring supplies

Color Guide

GOAL

To identify strengths the child has and would like to have

TIME NEEDED

30-45 mins

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Color in your superhero with different colors to represent the different qualities you have.

2. Label the colors as you go.

3. Include qualities you would like to have or increase.

4. You can use the color guide for ideas or make up your own.

5. Share your superhero with a trusted adult. Talk with them about which qualities you would like to increase. Brainstorm with them on ways you could do this. Write down your ideas and start strengthening your superpowers!

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Building My Superpowers

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"Building My Superpowers" Color Guide

LOVE, STRENGTH, ASSERTIVENESS, PASSION, BOLDNESS, ENERGY, POWER, EXCITEMENT, LEADERSHIP, CONFIDENCE, COURAGE

TRUST, PEACE, LOYALTY, STRENGTH, DEPENDABILITY, DETERMINATION, AWARENESS, PURPOSE, OPENNESS, AMBITION, BELIEF, GRACE, PURITY, HONOR, UNDERSTANDING

HAPPINESS, ENERGY, CREATIVITY, CHEERFULNESS, HOPE, FRIENDSHIP, OPTIMISM, JOY, WARMTH, CLARITY, ENLIGHTENMENT, ADVENTURE, SATISFACTION

QUALITY, HEALING, GROWTH, HARMONY, HEALTH, LUCK, PEACE, BALANCE, RESTORATION, SANCTUARY, POSITIVITY, CLARITY, GENEROSITY, SAFETY, STABILITY, GOOD JUDGEMENT, CHANGE

BRAVERY, CONFIDENCE, FRIENDLINESS, CHEERFULNESS, CREATIVITY, PLAYFULNESS, ENERGY, INSTINCT, WARMTH, OPTIMISM, FREEDOM, MOTIVATION

AMBITION, ROYALTY, LUXURY, FAITH/ SPIRITUALITY, DEPTH, CREATIVITY, ORIGINALITY, COMPASSION, DISTINCTION, RESPECT, FANTASY, WISDOM, VIRTUE, TRUTH

LOVE, CALMNESS, RESPECT, WARMTH, INTUITION, CARE, ASSERTIVENESS, SENSITIVITY, NURTURE, POSSIBILITIES, FUN, VISION, CREATIVITY

FRIENDSHIP, LONGEVITY, OUTDOORS, DEPENDABILITY, STABILITY, DEPTH, NATURE, COMFORT

GRIEF, SECURITY, CLASS, DRAMA, ELEGANCE, POWER, STRENGTH, FORMALITY, STYLE, SOPHISTICATION

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National Alliance for
Grieving Children

NAGC HERO TOOLKIT

In Support of Super Heroic Grieving Children & Teens

LEARN HOW TO BE A SUPER HERO TO GRIEVING CHILDREN!

JOIN US AS WE EXPLORE WAYS TO BE A HERO, CREATE NEW HEROES, FIND THE HERO WITHIN, AND CELEBRATE THE HEROES AMONG US.

The National Alliance for Grieving Children (NAGC) is a nonprofit organization that raises awareness about the needs of children and teens who are grieving a death and provides education and resources for anyone who supports them.

For more information, visit us at: ChildrenGrieve.org

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