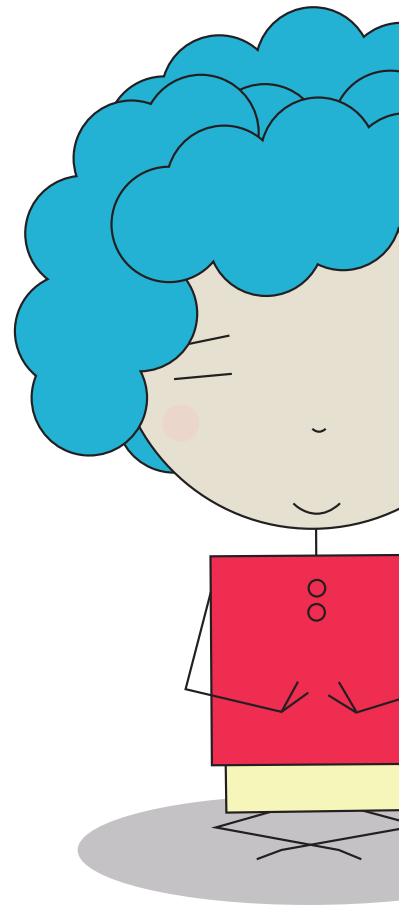
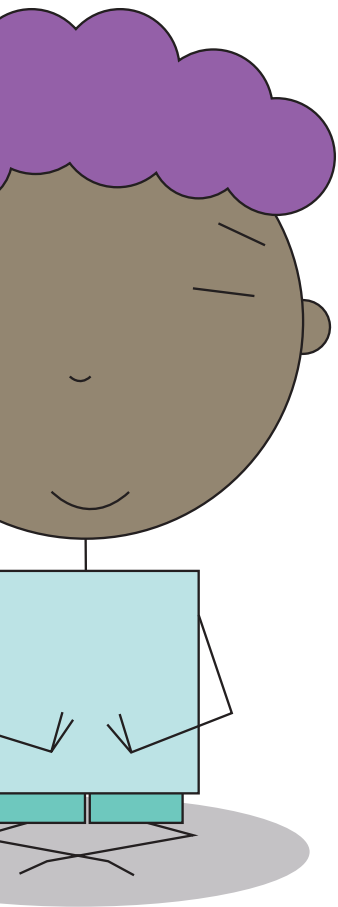




#FromFearToHope

A parent's guide to supporting
children's mental health
during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**BY: DR. TANYA COTLER,
MA, PHD, CPSYCH**



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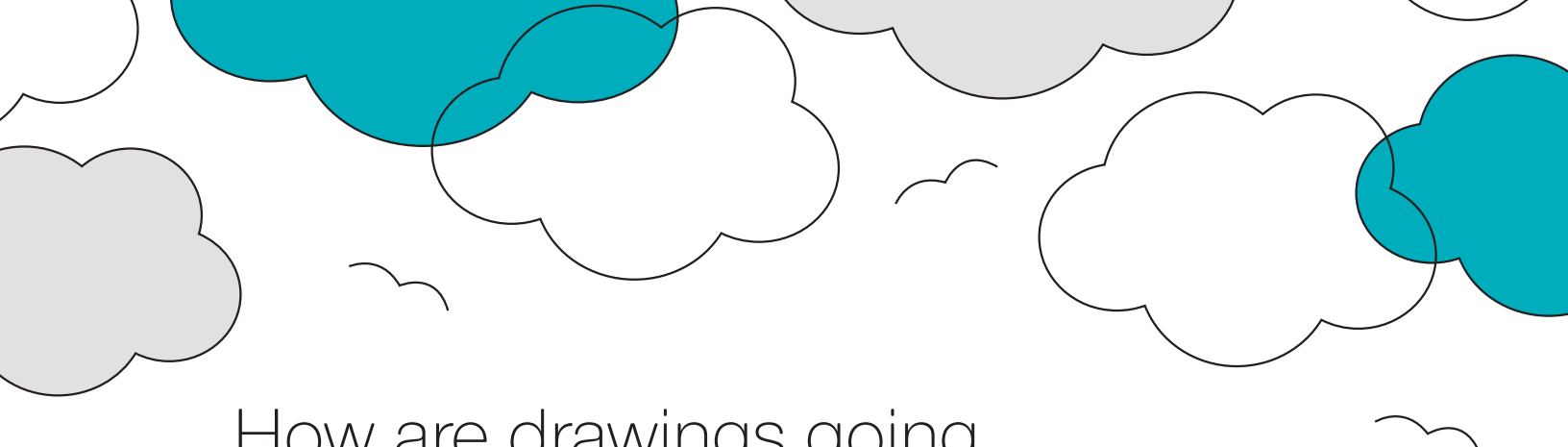
What's the goal of this workbook?

COVID-19 is scary for all of us. The constantly negative news, the isolation from our families and usual community networks, and the fears for the future have a very real impact on stress levels. This workbook is designed to help parents support their children's mental health during this time. We've also included some tips for parents, as we want everyone in the family to feel supported and empowered.

Why is it important to manage our children's stress levels?

We often think of stress as just an emotion or feeling, but stress has a very real impact on our mind and body. When the mind perceives a threat, a part of our brain called the hypothalamus sets off an alarm response in our body. The alarm response signals for a surge of two chemicals: cortisol and adrenaline.

As our body goes into fight-or-flight mode, other systems can become less effective. Unfortunately, that can include our immune system functions (so we become more susceptible to illnesses), our digestive process (so some of us lose or gain weight), and our executive functioning (so we feel less able to plan, focus and make good decisions). When our body thinks it's threatened for long periods of time, we can eventually feel like a car without gas and be at increased risk for ongoing physical and mental health issues.



How are drawings going to help my child?

The purpose of the drawings in this workbook is to give children a way to represent and organize their feelings and experience, and also connect to their parent through the medium of art. Think of art as a parallel to storytelling for children. The act of drawing helps children slow down and reconnect without words. Children often express themselves visually with imagination and aren't always able to talk about their emotions or feelings. It also helps parents slow down and ground themselves in the present moment with their child - away from the anxiety of thinking about the future (what's going to happen) or the past (triggering thoughts of previous times in our lives when we've felt helpless).

To help your child work through their feelings, try not to change or stop the feeling. The best way to do this is to repeat your child's feeling back to them. For example, "Yes, I can hear that you're worried" instead of saying "Don't worry." This prevents your child from feeling embarrassed about their feelings. To help younger kids, you could invite a toy into the conversation and have your child play out their feelings with their favourite stuffed animal if talking is too difficult for them.

Instructions:

We suggest sitting next to your child as they do each of their drawings. You can even join in and draw your own.

In Nguni Bantu, there's a lovely word about our shared humanity: Ubuntu. It means "I am because we are."



#FromFearToHope

You can help us create a community of hope, compassion and interconnectedness by sharing their (or your own) drawing of when they felt safe and brave on social media with **#FromFearToHope**

DRAWING #1

This is me.

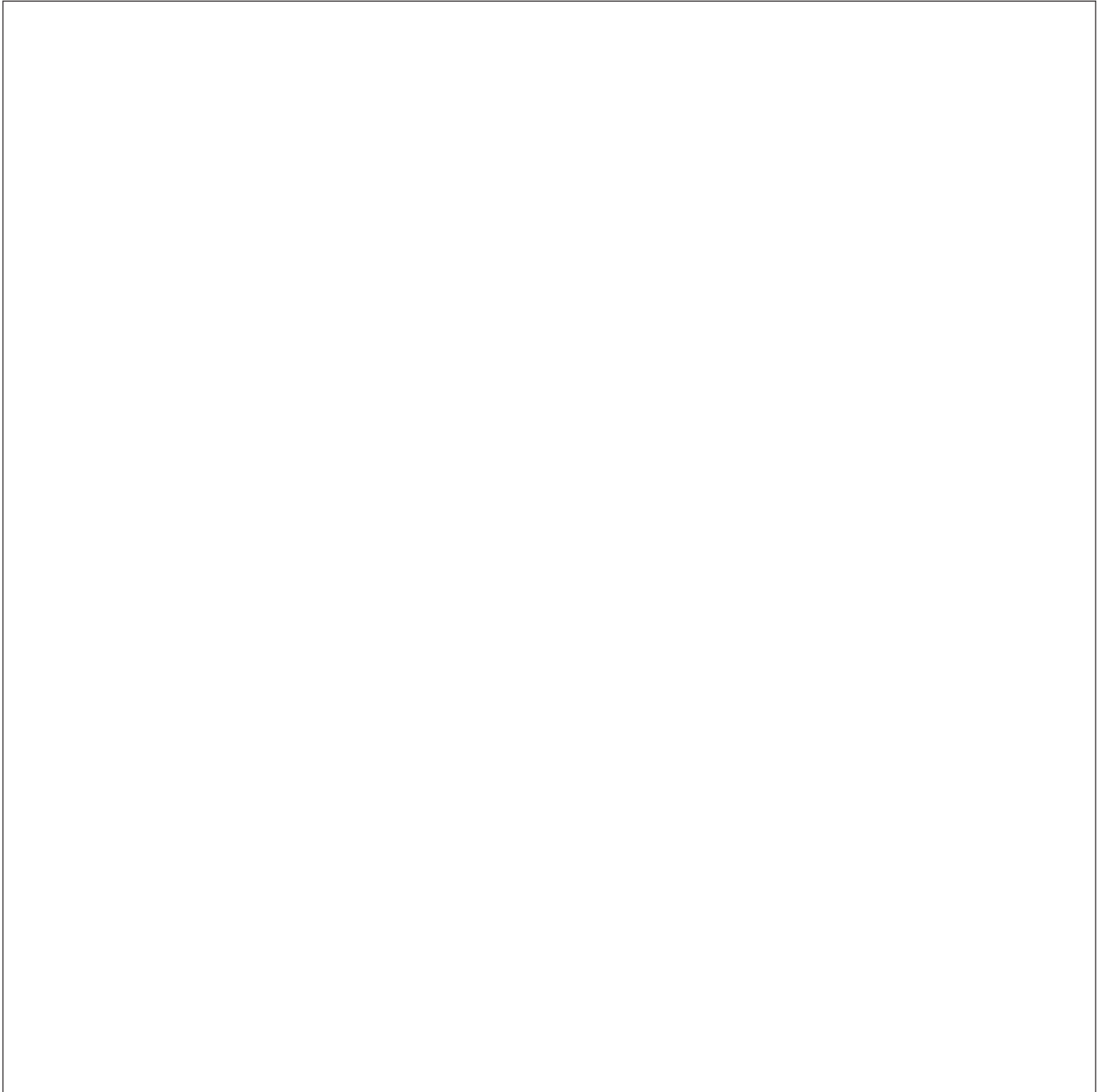
Note for parents: A self-portrait helps you peek inside your child's mind through their self-representation.



DRAWING #2

This is my family.

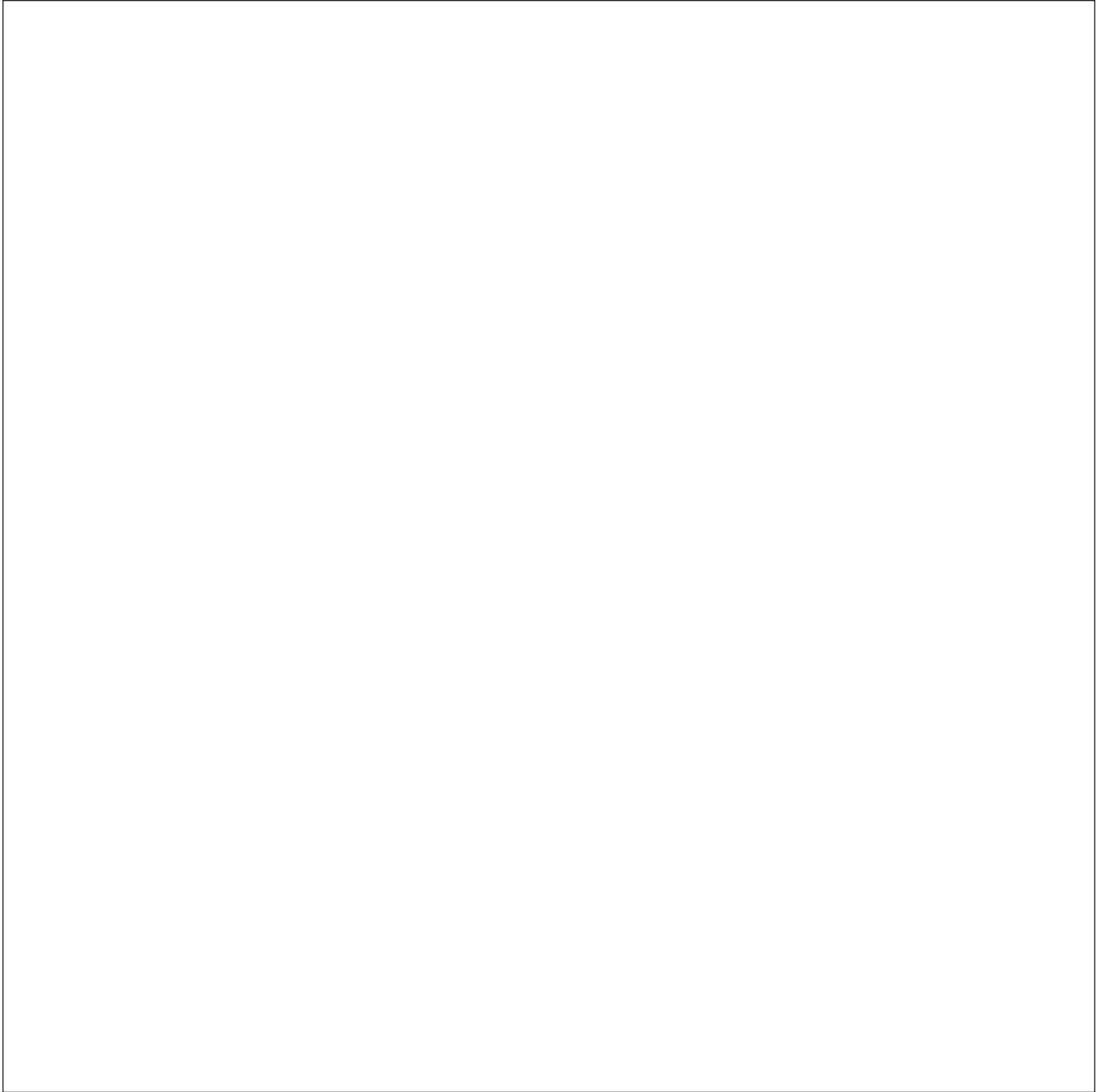
Note for parents: When a child draws their family, it helps them show people in their world that form their secure base and it reminds them of their support network. This drawing also helps open up communication between you and your child. After they've completed the drawing, we recommend asking them to tell you about their drawing.



DRAWING #3

This is me doing something that
I like/makes me feel good.

Note for parents: For this drawing, prompt your child to draw a hobby or something they like to do or makes them feel good. When a child draws themselves doing something they like, it helps to stimulate enjoyment, hope and active coping. In times of stress, they'll remember something that makes them happy.



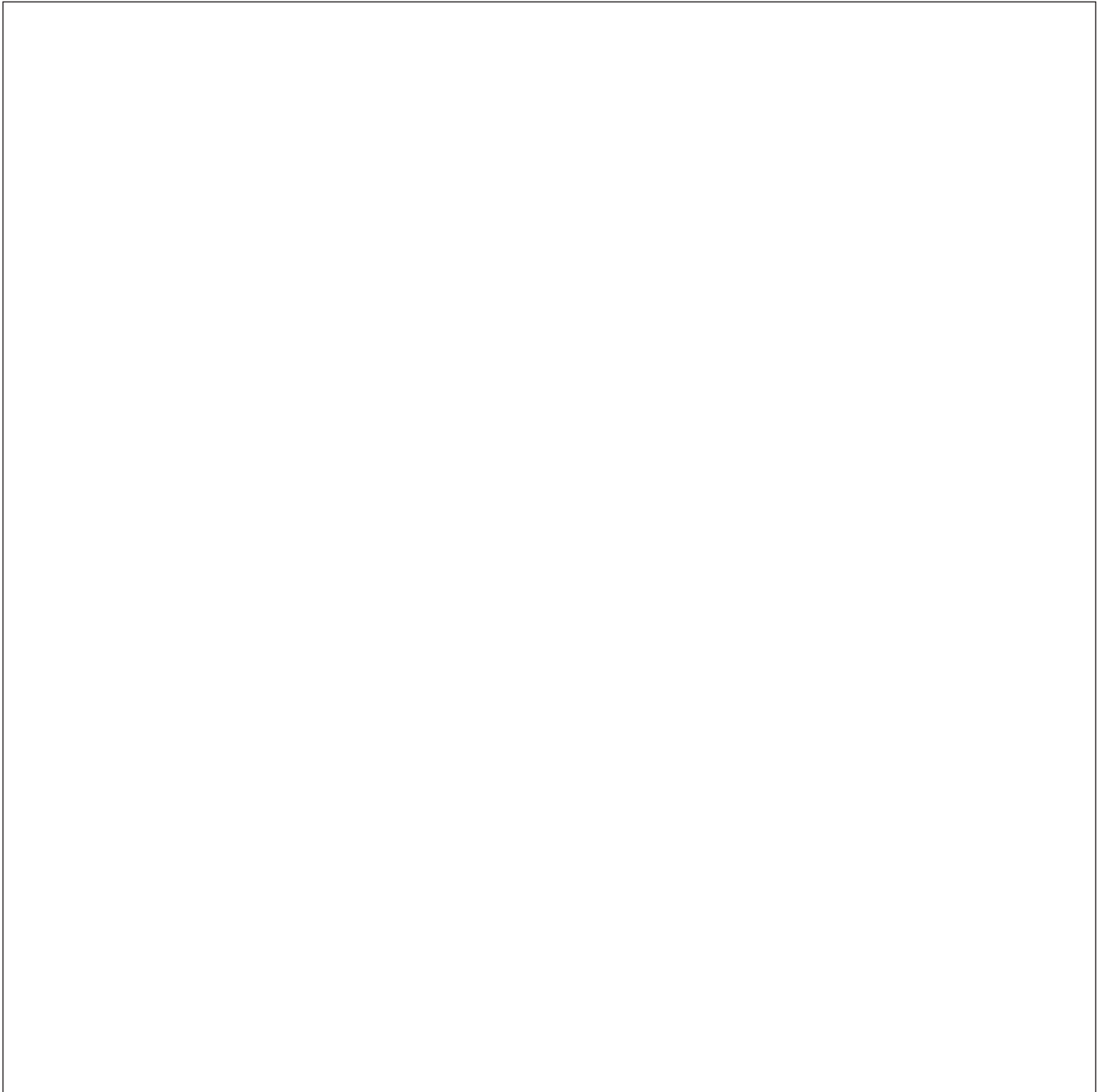
DRAWING #4

This is how I felt when I first
heard of COVID-19.

(COVID-19 is a virus. Think of it as a family member of the flu. It has travelled very quickly around the world.

The best way to protect ourselves is to wash our hands and stay close to home and away from others.)

Note for parents: This drawing helps your child represent their emotions, and organize their feelings and experience when words might not be as easy for them.



DRAWING #5

This is a picture of me when
I feel safe and brave.

Note for parents: When we are worried or stressed, it can help to imagine ourselves safe, calm, and brave. It may help to share with your child a time when you felt safe and brave. This not only helps your child with their drawing - it also reminds you of your own resilience.

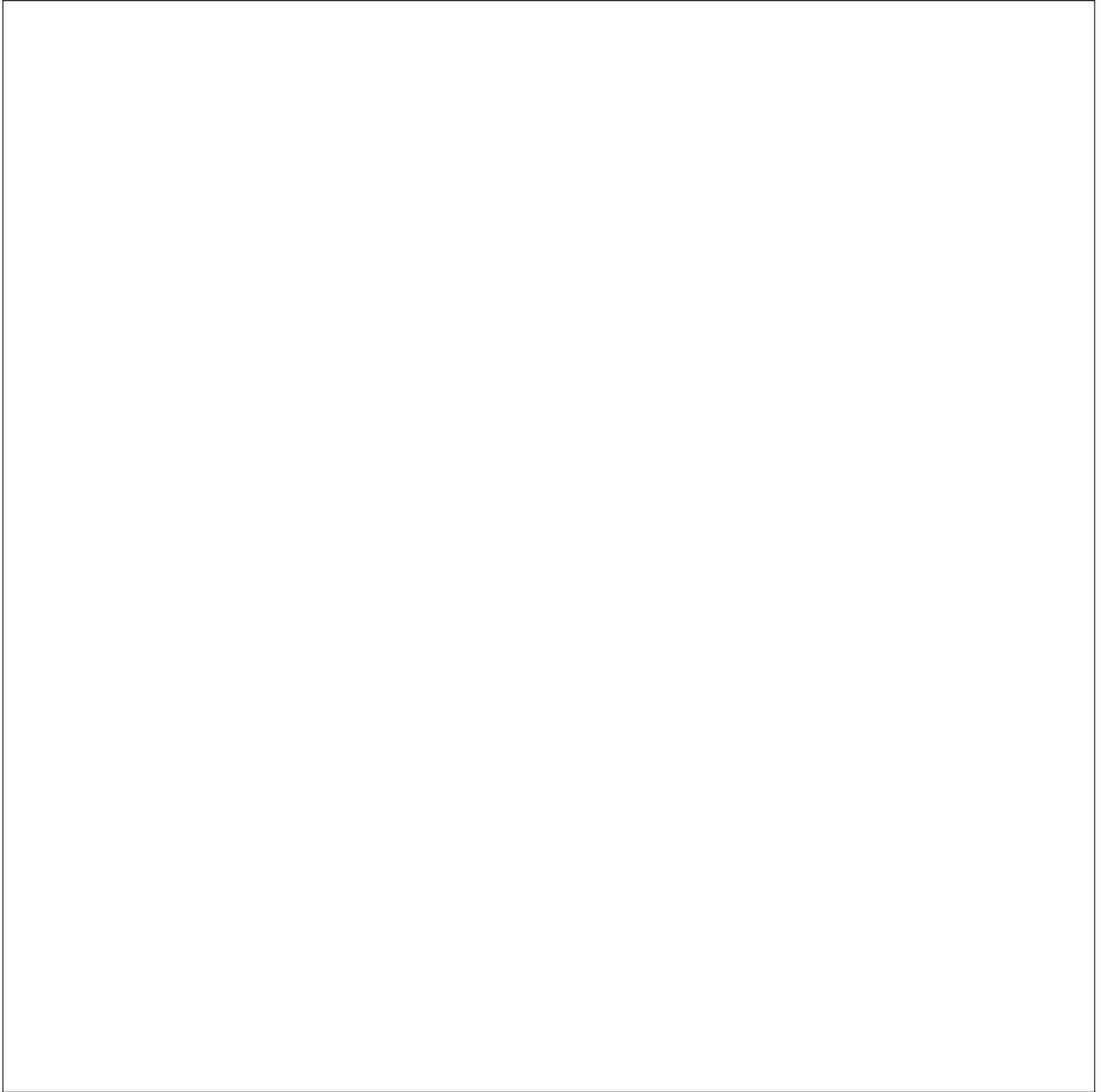
**Help us share a message of resilience and hope by sharing
this drawing on social media with #FromFearToHope**



DRAWING #6

This is me in 5 years or when
I'm grown up.

Note for parents: Imagining yourself in the future can help you move away from the scary thoughts to more positive, hopeful thoughts.





Now take a deep breath.

Sit with your child after they draw their feelings of worry, fear, or confusion and remind them that feelings are always changing. You can also help them manage their feelings with breathing. Deep breathing stimulates the vagus nerve, and activates our rest-and-digest (calming) system which moves us out of fight-or-flight mode. Take that stress!

Here's how you can help your child breathe their worries out:

1

First, help them notice the negative feeling spinning around in their body. Ask them what they feel in their body (maybe their tummy hurts or their chest is tight). Give examples to help younger children.

2

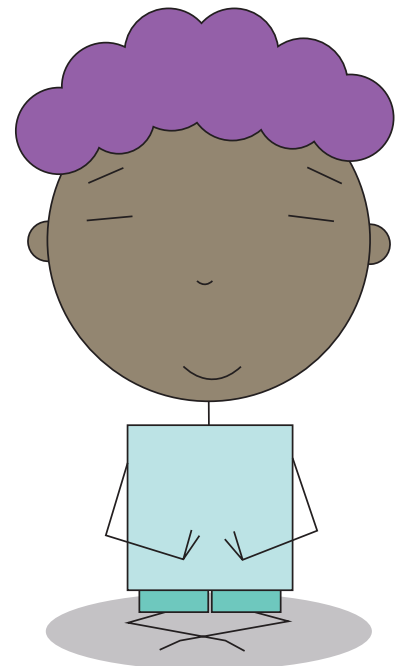
Tell them to put their hand (or a stuffed animal buddy) on their belly and try to take a deep breath to make their belly fill up like a balloon full of air, so it presses against their hand (or their stuffed animal).

3

Now tell them to breathe out and let their belly collapse like a balloon without air.

4

Get them to repeat it a few times and have them notice the difference in how their body feels calmer.





Take care of your mental health too with these tips for parents:

- **Limit your information intake and news coverage during times of stress.**

This is also critical to prevent toddlers and school-aged children from picking up on the negative events from the TV. Try containing your news intake to a given hour each day. And always get your information from reliable sources.

- **Practice your own breath work to help you feel grounded in your present moment.**

If you're feeling anxious, remind yourself that everything is constantly changing. Nothing lasts forever. This too shall pass.

- **Maintain your connections and make sure to connect to loved ones even during a time of social distancing through alternative ways of communication** (call, text, have a video call, etc). Connect with nature by going outside to feel the wind on your face and the ground beneath your feet.

It's okay to reach out for help.

If anxiety seems to feel unmanageable or too big for you or your child and starts to cause constant worry, difficulty finding pleasure in anything and difficulty doing most things, fear of separations, night wakings or difficulty falling asleep, or changes in appetite, please reach out for support. There are so many wonderful resources offering support to children.

Here's a quick list:

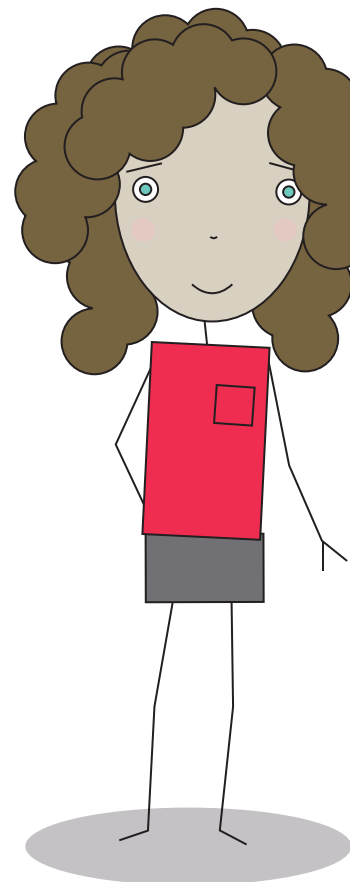
Dr. Tanya Cotler · Tanyacotlerphd.com

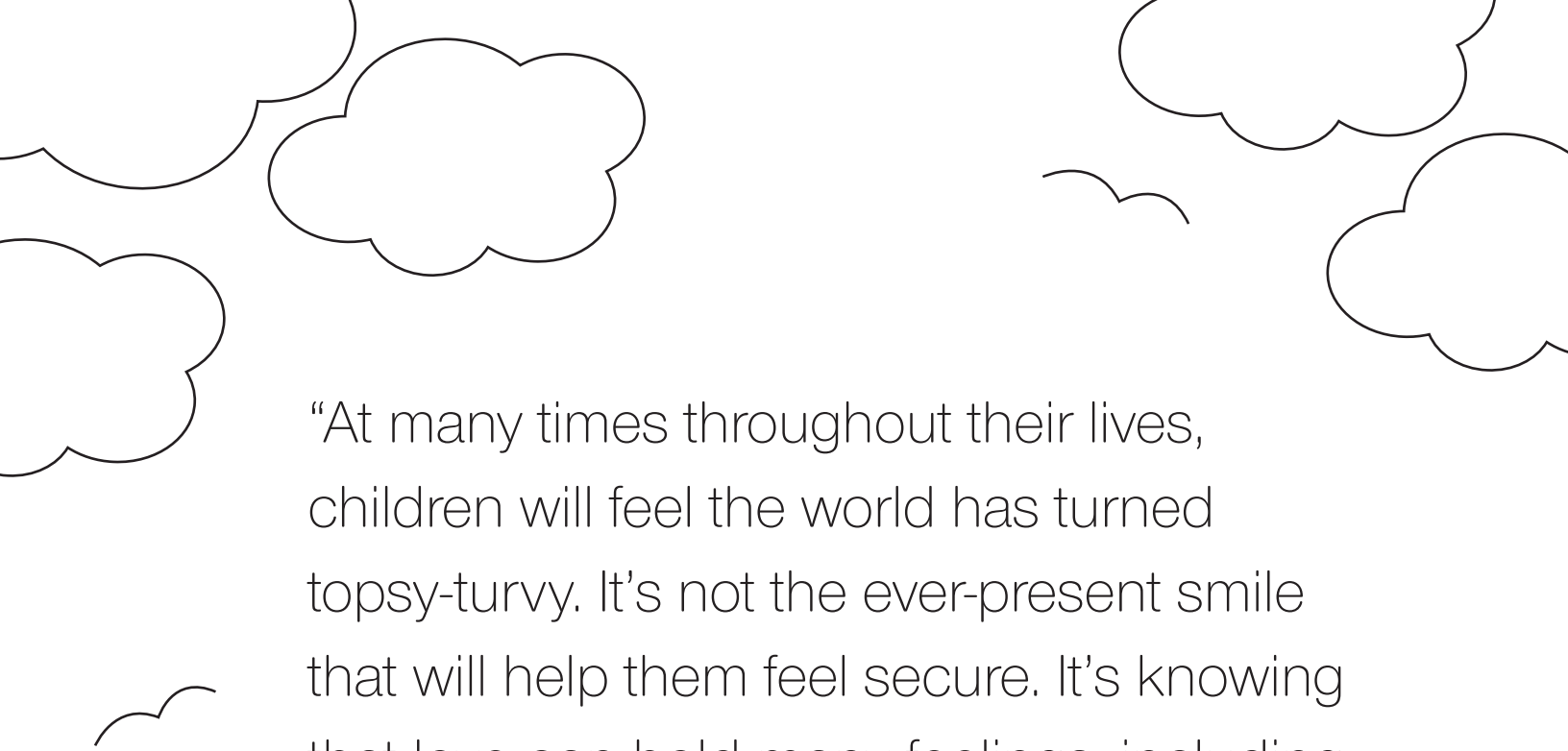
sickkidscmh.ca

childdevelop.ca

thewillowcentre.com

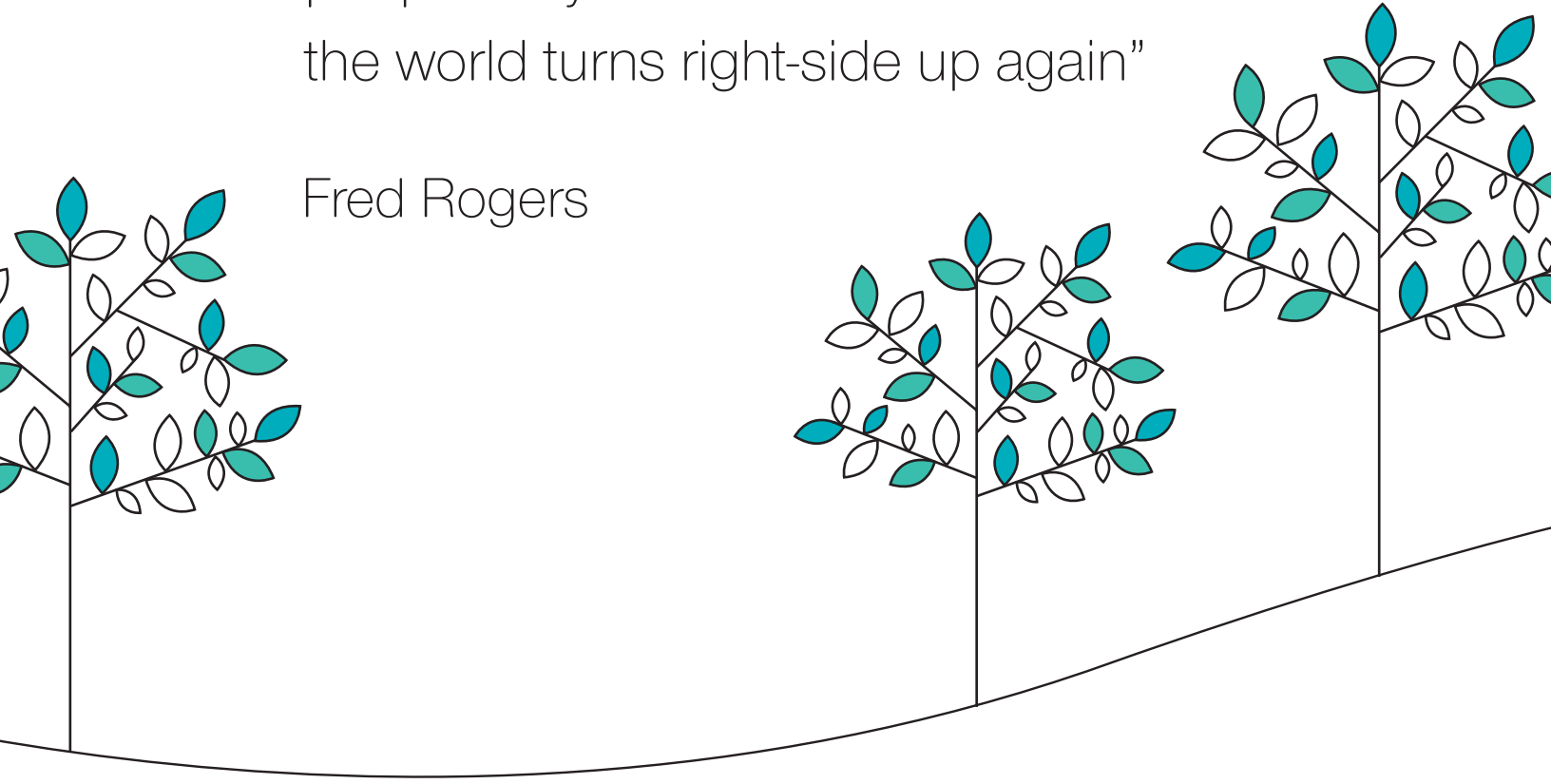
If you're in Ontario, you can find a private psychologist at psych.on.ca/Utilities/Find-a-psychologist.aspx





“At many times throughout their lives, children will feel the world has turned topsy-turvy. It’s not the ever-present smile that will help them feel secure. It’s knowing that love can hold many feelings, including sadness, and that they can count on the people they love to be with them until the world turns right-side up again”

Fred Rogers



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