



Family Holiday Packet

GRIEF RESOURCES FOR THE SEASON OF FAMILY



HENRY FORD HEALTH

SANDCASTLES FAMILIES

The activities and projects in this packet are designed to help you cope with the stresses of the holiday season. The pages can be used and modified for all family members, not just children. Young children may need help with reading or writing answers down. Feel free to make as many copies of each page as you wish. All family members could work on the same page individually and then talk together about what they made. These pages can open the door to conversations about topics that may otherwise be difficult to bring up.



There are many suggestions for “dealing with” the holidays included in this packet. Some might fit for you, and some may not. Choose those that feel right. Don’t feel pressured to do more than is comfortable. Something that other SandCastles families have found helpful and comforting is to look at this year’s holiday season as just that: this *year*. Not as a blueprint for how things will be for every holiday in the future. Do what you are able to do and know that you can change things when you are ready.

The staff at SandCastles is available to help you in any way we can. Please feel free to call us at 313-771-7005. It is our hope that your holiday season is a meaningful one and that something in this packet can contribute to it.

Henry Ford SandCastles Grief Support Program for Children and Families

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How to Help Ourselves Through the Holidays


By Donna Kalb


1. Family get togethers may be extremely difficult. Be honest with each other about your feelings. Sit down with your family and decide what you want to do for the holiday season. Don't set expectations too high for yourself or the day. If you wish things to be the same, you are going to be disappointed. Undertake only what each family member is able to handle comfortably
 2. There is no right or wrong way to handle the day. Some may wish to follow family traditions, while others may choose to change them. It may help to do things just a little differently. What you choose to do the first year, you don't have to do the next.
 3. Keep in mind the feelings of your children or family members. Try to make the holiday season as joyous as possible for them.
 4. Be careful of "shoulds" – it is better to do what is most helpful for you and your family. If a situation looks especially difficult over the holidays, try not to get involved.
 5. Set limitations. Realize that it isn't going to be easy. Do the things that are very special and/or important to you. Do the best that you can.
 6. Once you have made the decision on how you and your family will handle the holidays, let relatives and friends know.
 7. Baking and cleaning the house can get out of proportion. If these chores are enjoyable, go ahead, but not to the point that it is tiring. This year you could either buy baked goods or go without.
 8. Emotionally, physically and psychologically, it is draining. You need every bit of strength. Try to get enough rest.
 9. If you used to cut down your own tree, consider buying it already cut this year. Let your children, other family members, neighboring teens, friends, or people from your church help decorate the tree and house. If you choose not to have a tree, perhaps you could make a centerpiece from the lower branches of a tree, get a ceramic tree or a small table-top tree.
 10. One possibility for the first year may be to visit relatives, friends, or even go away on a vacation. Planning, packing, etc., keeps your mind somewhat off the holiday and you share the time in a different and hopefully less painful setting.
 11. How do you answer, "Happy Holidays"? You may say, "I'll try" or "Best wishes to you." You think of many answers you don't say.
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12. If you are accustomed to having dinner at your home, change and go to relatives; or change the time. Some find it helpful to be involved in the activity of preparing a large meal. Serving buffet style and/or eating in a different room may help.
13. Try attending holiday services at a different time and/or church.
14. Some people fear crying in public, especially at the church service. It is usually better to not push the tears down any time. You should be gentle with yourself and not expect so much of yourself. Worrying about crying is an additional burden. If you let go and cry, you probably will feel better. It should not ruin the day for the other family members, but will provide them with the same freedom.
15. Consider not sending or cutting back on your cards this year. It is not necessary to send cards, especially to those people you will see over the holidays.
16. Do something for someone else, such as volunteer work at a soup kitchen or visit the lonely and shut-ins. Ask someone who is alone to share the day with your family. Provide help for a needy family. Donate a gift or money in your loved one's name.
17. Share your concerns, feelings, apprehensions, etc. as the holiday approaches, with a relative or friend. Tell them that this is a difficult time for you. Accept their help. You will appreciate their love and support at this time.
18. Holidays often magnify feelings of loss of a loved one. It is important and natural to experience the sadness that comes. To block such feelings is unhealthy. Keep the positive memory of your loved one alive.
19. Often after the first year, the people in your life may expect you to be "over it." We are never "over it" but the experience of many bereaved is that eventually they enjoy the holidays again. Hold on to hope.
20. Don't forget: Anticipation of any holiday is usually much worse than the actual holiday.

5 4 3 2 1 Grounding Exercise











Instructions

5. Acknowledge FIVE things you see around you.
4. Acknowledge FOUR things you can touch around you.
3. Acknowledge THREE things you can hear around you.
2. Acknowledge TWO things you can smell around you.
1. Acknowledge ONE thing you can taste.

Tears and sadness do not have to ruin the entire holiday for you. Let yourself have the cry you need, and you will be surprised that you can go on again until the next time you need to release the tears. Let your tears and sadness come and go throughout the whole day if necessary.

Ask for what you want or need from others during the holidays. Everyone is busy and may be less likely to notice your needs, but may still want to help.

Let the memories of past holidays spent with your deceased loved one come. Talk about them. This is part of mourning and is usually intensified during the holidays.

Having fun during the holidays is not a betrayal of your loved one. You must give yourself permission to feel joy as well as sadness when you have the need.

Don't be forced into doing things you don't want to do, or don't feel up to solely to keep others happy. Don't overwhelm or overcommit yourself. Remember grieving takes up a lot of energy and you will have much to spare. Use it for what is really important to you.

Do something for someone else. Reaching out to others can bring you a sense of wellbeing. You can combine this with a memorial of your loved one. For example, donating something to charity in your loved one's name can be meaningful.

Pay attention to your physical emotional, and spiritual needs and do whatever helps you get through this time.

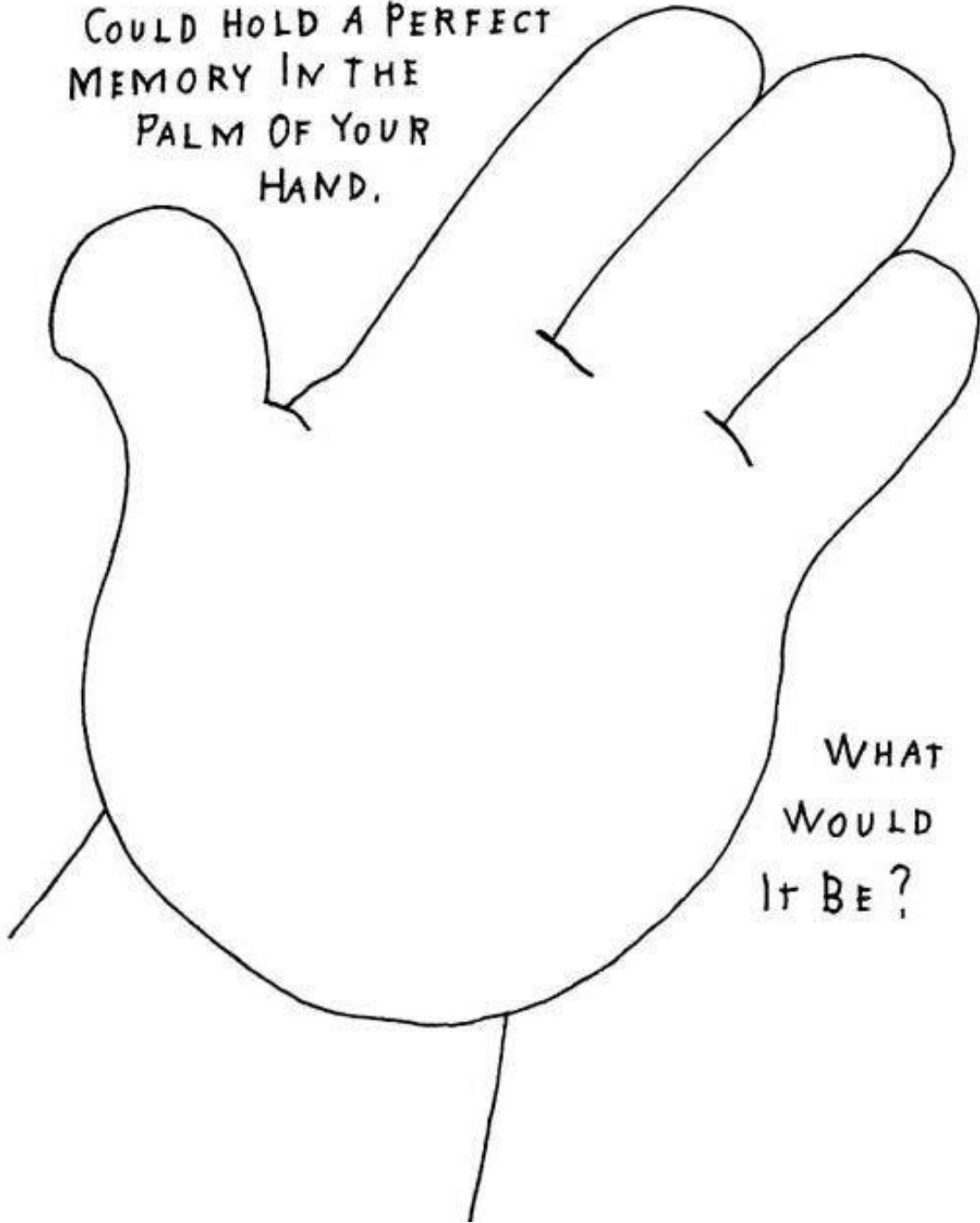
From How to Go on Living When Someone you Love Dies by Teresa Rando



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The Perfect Memory

IMAGINE THAT YOU
COULD HOLD A PERFECT
MEMORY IN THE
PALM OF YOUR
HAND.



WHAT
WOULD
IT BE?



Pet Loss During the Holidays

The holidays can be a difficult time if you are mourning the loss of a pet. For many of us, our pets are an important and treasured part of our lives. Not having them with us at the holidays and other times gives us the right to grieve for the loss of a pet. Grieving for a pet can be an isolating experience; our society isn't very good at supporting mourners, and that's especially true if you are mourning the loss of a pet. It can be helpful to seek out friends and family that have gone through a similar loss; they may be better able to understand your feelings and your need to talk about your pet.

The internet has many resources for someone going through the loss of a pet. The site www.pet-loss.net has lots of helpful information. The College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Illinois operates a helpline offering live telephone support for those who have experienced, or are about to experience the loss of a pet. They are available Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday evenings from 7-9pm central time. They can be reached (toll-free) at 877-394-2273. If you feel the need to memorialize your pet in a special way, there are many animal-related charitable organizations that can use support. A memorial made in your pet's name can be a fitting tribute.

My Personal Holiday Plan

I predict the most difficult parts of the holiday season for me will be:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

My support people (those who can hear my grief) are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

My grief triggers might be:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Words that would be helpful for me to hear would be:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

This year, I want to include the following traditions in my holiday:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Give What's Left of Me Away

Now that I'm gone,
Remember me with a smile and laughter.
And if you need to cry,
Cry with your brother or sister
Who walks in grief beside you.

And when you need me,
Put your arms around everyone
And give to them
What you need to give to me.

There are so many
Who need so much.
I want to leave you something,
Something much better
Than words or sounds.

Look for me
In the people
I've known and loved or helped
In some special way.
Let me live in your heart
As well as your mind.

You can love me most
By letting your love
Reach out to our loved ones.
By Embracing them
And living in their love.

Love does not die,
People do.
So, when all that's left of me is love,
Give me away as best you can.

Author Unknown

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SUGGESTIONS FOR COPING WITH HOLIDAYS

Holidays and anniversaries are times when people remember important and usually happy occasions, and at the same time look forward to the future. If there has been a death in the family, emotional wounds are left that can ache during these times of warmth and cheer. Feelings of isolation and loneliness can magnify.

With planning and forethought, it is possible to get through these times. We hope the following suggestions are as helpful to you as they have been for others.

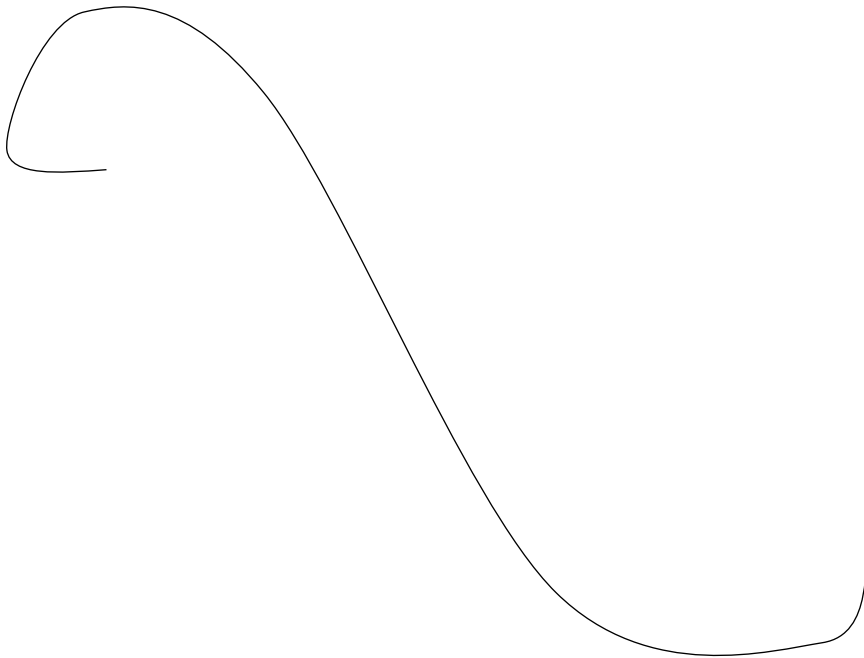
1. Realize that this is a new holiday, unlike the holidays of the past.
 2. Acknowledge the absence of your loved one. Have a dinner or toast in their honor. Visit the cemetery or memorial site. Don't be afraid to cry... or to smile!
 3. Engage in spiritual activities that are comfortable for you.
 4. Do things because you want to do them, not because your loved one "would have wanted it that way" Do what you are comfortable doing.
 5. Initiate activity yourself; do not wait for others. Plan your own holiday. Make phone calls to your friends or relatives. Calls to people in similar situations can be worthwhile. Follow through with these activities.
 6. Remember that one is a whole number. Time spent by yourself can also be rewarding.
 7. Be gentle with yourself, all wounds take time to heal. Realize that you will feel sad at times.
 8. Take time to identify and take care of your needs. Get adequate rest and exercise. Be aware of the increased availability of sugar, caffeine, and alcohol during the holiday season, and guard against overuse of these substances.
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What Could It Be?

Use this line as the beginning of a drawing about you, your family, how you feel, or anything you want! You can turn the paper in any direction. Challenge yourself by asking other people to add to the line to make it a group effort!





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Thoughts for the Holidays

By Joannetta Hendel, Indianapolis, Indiana

Plan Ahead

Bereaved individuals who experience the most difficulty with the holiday season are those who have given little thought to the challenges they will encounter. Consider ahead of time what may be expected of you, both socially and emotionally, as well as your own preferences.

Accept Your Limitations

Grief consumes most of your available energy no matter what the season. The holidays place additional demands on your time and emotions. Plan to lower your expectations to accommodate current needs.

Make Changes

Your circumstances have changed. Expect to make necessary alterations in holiday plans to accommodate those changes. Consider changing your surroundings, rituals and/or traditions to diminish stress. Serve notice on family and friends that this year things may be somewhat different.

Trim Down to Essentials

Limit social and family commitments to suit your available energy. Shop early or use catalogue sales. Re-evaluate priorities and forego unnecessary activities and obligations.

Ask for and Accept Help

Accept offers for assistance with holiday shopping, decorating, cleaning, cooking, etc. Chances are loved ones are looking for ways to lessen your burden at this time of year. Allow those who care about you to offer their support in concrete ways.

Inform Others of Your Needs

Give family and friends the tools they need to help you through the holidays. Be specific with them about your preferences and desires, and keep them up-to-date when those needs change.

Build in Flexibility

Learn to 'play it by ear.' There is no concrete formula for learning to deal with loss. You are the foremost authority on what is best for you, and your needs may legitimately change from day to day. Accept the fluctuations that occur when walking in unknown territory, and learn to take each moment as it comes.

Give Yourself Permission 'To Be'

Allow breathing space and expect fluctuations in mood and perspective. The bereaved work overtime. Not only is life more complicated, but all energy is siphoned into mental

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and emotional resolution. Grieving is nature's way of healing the mind and heart from the greatest injury of all. Allow yourself the privilege of limping till your wounds have healed and you can learn to run again.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FAMILY HOLIDAY PROJECTS

MEMORY BOOKS

Collect memories of past holidays by making drawings, writing stories or poems, or assembling photographs and souvenirs. These can be stapled or tied together in a simple book or other album to be shared and saved. Ask for contributions from immediate and extended family members of the person who died.

THANK YOU CARDS

If the idea of sending holiday cards is not appealing, consider sending thank you cards to family and friends instead. Having children make their own cards might be a fun project.

MEMORY CHAIN

Using strips of colored paper, write or draw about a memory of the person who died or a memory of past holidays. Shape each strip into a circle and staple or tape securely, joining all the links of the chain together. The chain can be added to at any time and by anyone in the family, or by visitors. Display your chain in a central family location or let individual family members create their own for their own special spot.

A PLACE AT THE TABLE

Create a plate and/or placemat to remember the person who died to be included in your holiday table setting. Use a strong paper plate and add drawings, words, stickers, paint, anything you want. A placemat can be fabric or paper which could be covered on both sides with clear contact paper. Another idea would be to make a special placemat for all family members. Consider serving a special food that was a favorite of the person who died in order to remember him or her at the meal.

HOMEMADE CLAY

Clay is an activity that has a long "fun life" for children on their own or in a group. A few cups and plates and some plastic silverware, a rolling pin and cookie cutters or some small figures, toy animals, or cars added to the clay table can increase the amount of time children stay interested and occupied. Here is a recipe that can be easily made with some adult help:

COOKED PLAYDOUGH

1 cup flour

1/2 cup salt

2 teaspoons cream of tartar

1 cup water

1 tablespoon oil

1 teaspoon food coloring

*combine flour, salt, and cream of tartar in a saucepan

*mix liquids and gradually stir them into the dry ingredients.

- *when the mixture is smooth, cook over medium heat, stirring constantly
- *remove from heat and knead until smooth
- *store in a sealed plastic bag in the refrigerator.

OUR LIVES ARE A GIFT TO OTHERS

Find a big, empty, undecorated gift box. Gather wrapping paper choices, ribbons and other decorative items. Instead of using wrapping paper, consider using white paper that can be decorated by family members themselves. Have the family work together to plan how the box should look. The box should be wrapped so the lid can be removed. Into this box, family members can place small pieces of paper on which they have written or drawn about how the person who died has been a gift to them. Remember that gifts can be how much the person loved them, hugs, teaching a skill or tradition, inspiring values or behavior, encouragement, etc. Younger children should be helped with this activity. At gift-opening time, this box can be opened and the memories and gifts of the person who died can be shared.

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What's in Your Heart?

Emotions (Assign each one a color)

Happy

Sad

Worried

Frustrated

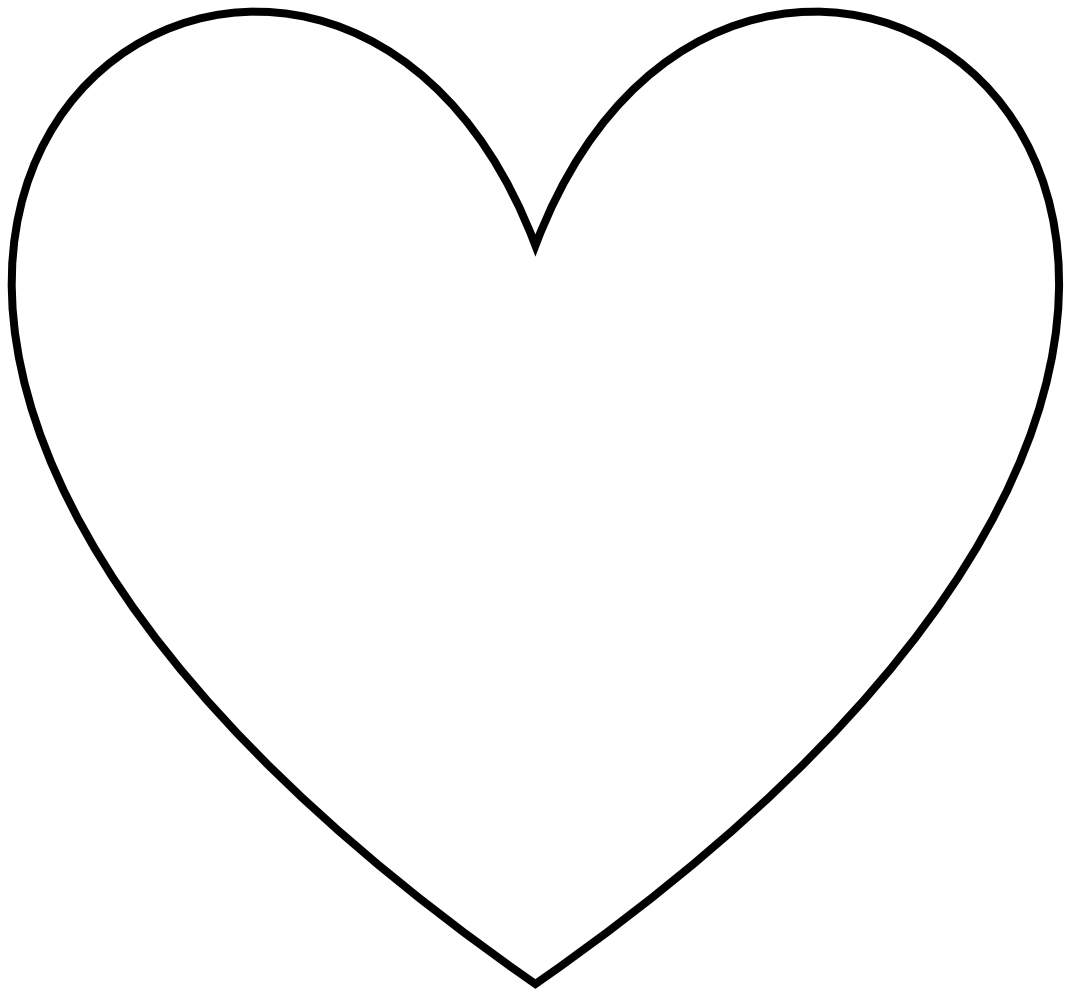
Tired

Scared

Angry

Excited

Lonely







Find-A-Feeling



WORD SEARCH PUZZLE

S	E	C	H	S	S	D	S	D	L	A	O	W	I	C
F	T	S	O	T	D	D	U	W	H	N	E	S	T	O
E	I	I	E	N	T	H	O	P	E	F	U	I	A	D
U	O	E	D	T	F	R	U	S	T	R	A	T	E	D
L	I	L	O	C	R	I	C	I	T	A	T	S	C	E
T	O	S	S	I	E	O	D	L	O	A	U	U	D	S
H	L	N	E	X	C	I	T	E	D	F	I	O	O	I
A	I	D	E	K	C	O	H	S	N	A	R	L	K	R
P	F	E	N	L	R	S	U	O	I	T	U	A	C	P
P	T	R	R	H	Y	D	C	F	P	D	F	E	U	R
Y	S	O	A	R	S	U	O	V	R	E	N	J	H	U
E	T	B	G	I	H	O	P	E	F	U	L	R	O	S
N	C	N	E	R	D	R	T	R	O	A	F	E	D	A
W	A	P	D	R	E	P	I	P	T	E	T	E	S	A
L	S	U	I	O	T	T	L	T	R	H	O	Y	G	S

SURPRISED
NERVOUS
AFRAID
CAUTIOUS
CONFUSED
ECSTATIC
EXCITED

ENRAGED
HAPPY
ANGRY
FRUSTRATED
BORED
JEALOUS
WORRIED

PROUD
PROUD
CONFIDENT
LONELY
SHOCKED
HOPELESS
SAD



I Feel... _____

I WISH... _____

I THINK... _____

I Need... _____

I HOPE... _____

I Want... _____
