

THE SELF-ESTEEM GARDEN

A 10-LESSON PROGRAM FOR DEVELOPING
SELF-ESTEEM IN YOUNG CHILDREN

WRITTEN BY
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Illustrated by Terry Sirrell

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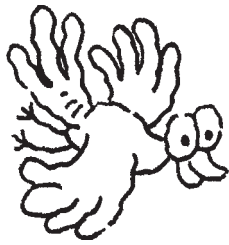
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THE SELF-ESTEEM GARDEN



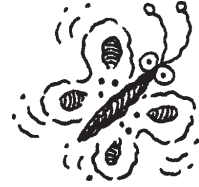
INTRODUCTION

This program has been developed for use by counselors and therapists who work with children in the development of self-esteem. It is intended to be one of several tools used in the therapy process. It is not intended to replace psychotherapy with the child or the child's family, but is designed to be used in conjunction with such interaction. *The Self-Esteem Garden* can be the focus of the treatment or, in situations involving divorce, substance abuse, or some other type of chaos in the home, used as an evaluation and discussion-prompting tool. The many "drop-off" points in the program allow facilitators to use their own creativity and skills to investigate potential problem situations or issues identified or alluded to by the child. Although created for general use with any child, the program can easily be tailored to address an individual child's specific needs.

The program is based on the 12 premises that influence the development of positive self-esteem in children (summarized in *The Foundations of Self-Esteem* section). From birth, we all progress along a continuum from dependence to autonomy. Ideally, we separate and individuate as we move toward autonomy. Children between the ages of 6 and 12 are usually at an interesting point on this continuum. During this age span, children begin the process of separating from parents in a more active manner. However, children are still dependent on others during these developmental years. This program is written specifically for this time in life, a time when a balance must be sought between recognizing how significantly others affect one's self-esteem, and how much responsibility one bears for the development of one's own sense of well-being and self-worth.

CHAPTER 1

COUNSELOR PREPARATION: THE FOUNDATIONS OF SELF-ESTEEM



OVERVIEW

Definition of Self-Esteem:

Numerous researchers and authors have proposed many definitions of *self-esteem*. The definitions that have proven most helpful tend to emphasize the importance of knowledge, rather than feelings. Accurate self-knowledge, which leads to lasting, healthy self-esteem, includes:

- the knowledge that we have the capacity to make good choices and deal with various life situations in healthy ways
- the knowledge that we are worthwhile—that our needs and wants are as valid as the needs and wants of others.

PRE-PRESENTATION INFORMATION

Premises and Tools:

The 12 premises of healthy self-esteem provide the underlying structure of *The Self-Esteem Garden* analogy. Each lesson presents one or more of these premises to the child through a corresponding analogy element. These analogy elements are highlighted in ***bold italics*** throughout the book.

In addition to the 12 premises, four ***garden tools*** that further strengthen the analogy are introduced in Chapter 4. The 12 premises and four tools are listed below in the order in which they will be presented to the children through their personal activity book. In addition, each premise is discussed in further detail in the chapter in which it is being presented.

The Foundational Premises:

These three premises are the bedrock on which healthy self-esteem must be built. Children must grasp these concepts before they will be able to apply the ones that follow.

Premise 1: Children must be aware of the existence of their own self-esteem.

Premise 2: Children must believe in their inherent worth in order to “grow” their self-esteem.

Premise 3: Children must be encouraged by positive, supportive people in order to develop strong self-esteem.

The Four Garden Tools:

One of the unique attributes of *The Self-Esteem Garden* is its emphasis on empowering children as agents in developing their own senses of worth and capability. This requires children to acquire several skills they can use to develop and nurture their self-esteem. These skills are taught through the analogy element of *garden tools*. The four specific tools taught correspond to skills the children can develop. The four *garden tools* are:

- *Doing tools* = behavioral skills
- *Thinking tools* = cognitive skills
- *Talking tools* = verbal skills (including self-talk)
- *Feeling tools* = emotional skills

The Internal Premises:

These three premises help children understand the unique characteristics they possess within themselves that contribute to their self-esteem. The internal premises call for children to engage in guided self-reflection in order to understand where their self-esteem comes from and how wide-ranging its roots are (or can be).

Premise 4: All children have certain positive qualities, attributes, and skills that contribute to their self-esteem.

Premise 5: Children have certain positive qualities, attributes, and skills that have not yet been developed but could eventually contribute to their self-esteem.

Premise 6: A healthy sense of self-worth is drawn from diverse sources of self-esteem.

The External Premises:

The next two premises focus on the impact external influences can have on children's self-esteem. They require children to participate in guided external reflection that will help them understand how people, events, and evaluative interactions with others can affect their self-esteem.

Premise 7: Children's self-esteem is affected by external events and by other people.

Premise 8: In order to exist and grow in a reality-based environment, children must be able to accept feedback from others and from themselves.

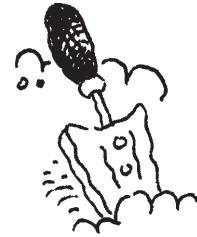
The Protection Premises:

The final four premises deal with the protective and nurturing aspects of self-esteem. Each premise teaches children things they can do to guard their self-esteem without becoming withdrawn or developing unrealistic or unreliable perceptions of their relationship to the individuals and events in their lives.

Premise 9: Children need realistic, positive ways to cope with feedback that is hurtful or destructive.

CHAPTER 4

GARDEN TOOLS



OVERVIEW

This chapter focuses on teaching children how to be agents in growing their own self-esteem. The lesson covers four types of *garden tools: doing, thinking, talking, and feeling*. Children can be taught to use these resources to tend their self-esteem in much the same way that gardeners use shovels, rakes, hoes, and wheelbarrows to take care of a garden. The chapter introduces children to the four tools, explains how each one can be used, and includes examples that illustrate how the tools can be used in the type of situations that many children face.

What children should gain from this chapter:

- knowledge that they are empowered with tools which allow them to deal effectively with challenging situations
- an understanding that these tools work best in *good soil* (although this does not mean that the tools are ineffective in other situations)
- an understanding of what each of the four tools is and how it can be used in resolving self-esteem problems.

PRE-PRESENTATION INFORMATION

There are no premises taught in this chapter. Instead, children are taught about four kinds of tools they can use in their self-esteem gardens.

Children need to believe that they have *agency* when dealing with their environment, that the choices they make can influence outcomes. Empowering children to resolve self-esteem problems gives them a sense of control over their relationships and overall emotional well-being. As children gain this sense of agency and control, they begin to see their successes as *outcomes* of their own choices, not as outcomes dictated by fate or the whims of other people. They can also learn to see their mistakes not as failures, but as learning opportunities that will enable them to make more effective choices in the future.⁵ They begin to see a direct correlation between good choices and satisfactory outcomes and between poor choices and unsatisfactory outcomes.

In addition to learning that they are capable of affecting outcomes, children need to have a realistic understanding of just how much control they have in a given situation. Teaching them that they have the ability to solve *every* problem they encounter is deleterious to self-esteem: No one, child or adult, has full control over everything that happens in his or her environment. Children must understand that even though they have tools to use, their agency may be limited by circumstances that are out of their control.

⁵ Editor Schor, Edward L. *Caring for Your School-Aged Child: Ages 5-12, Revised Edition*. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics, 1999, 126-127.

CHAPTER 6 SUNSHINE



OVERVIEW

This chapter introduces the child to the analogy element *sunshine*, which is equated with having a good day. Children are guided in exploring the seventh premise, that self-esteem is affected by external events and encounters with other people, by identifying interpersonal interactions and events that affect them in positive ways. This is particularly important for children who have been diagnosed with depression and for children of substance abusers. These children often have difficulty identifying positive experiences in their lives.

What children should gain from this chapter:

- recognition of how external events and other people can affect their self-esteem in positive ways
- a written record of some of the activities and people that make them feel good.

PRE-PRESENTATION INFORMATION

Premise #7: Children's self-esteem is affected by external events and by other people.

A variety of environmental and social stressors, some positive and some negative, can influence the development of children's self-esteem. Helping children become consciously aware of these influences enables them to gain reliable knowledge that makes their environment more predictable. It also helps them understand when they are responsible for what is happening within their environment and when some other person or event outside their control is responsible.

Children typically spend the first few years of their lives in relationships involving only their parents and immediate family members. As they grow older, their world naturally becomes larger and begins to include secondary relationships with peers in their neighborhood, children and teachers in a pre-school environment, and a broader range of children and teachers once they reach primary school. For some children, secondary relationships are also formed in the community in which they live, perhaps through organized sports, recreation, or education programs. Teachers, coaches, peer groups, and other non-family members gradually assume influential roles in children's lives.

Most children will begin to identify with these people, seeing them as role models and sources of nurturing and encouragement. The outcomes of these relationships can greatly affect their self-esteem. If outcomes are positive, children can experience security and a sense of belonging within their larger environment. Negative outcomes are more likely to cause children to feel confused, invisible, unworthy, and powerless. Therefore, it is important to identify positive and negative influences of external sources and help children find ways to benefit from (or cope with) them.

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY AND SUGGESTIONS

SUMMARY

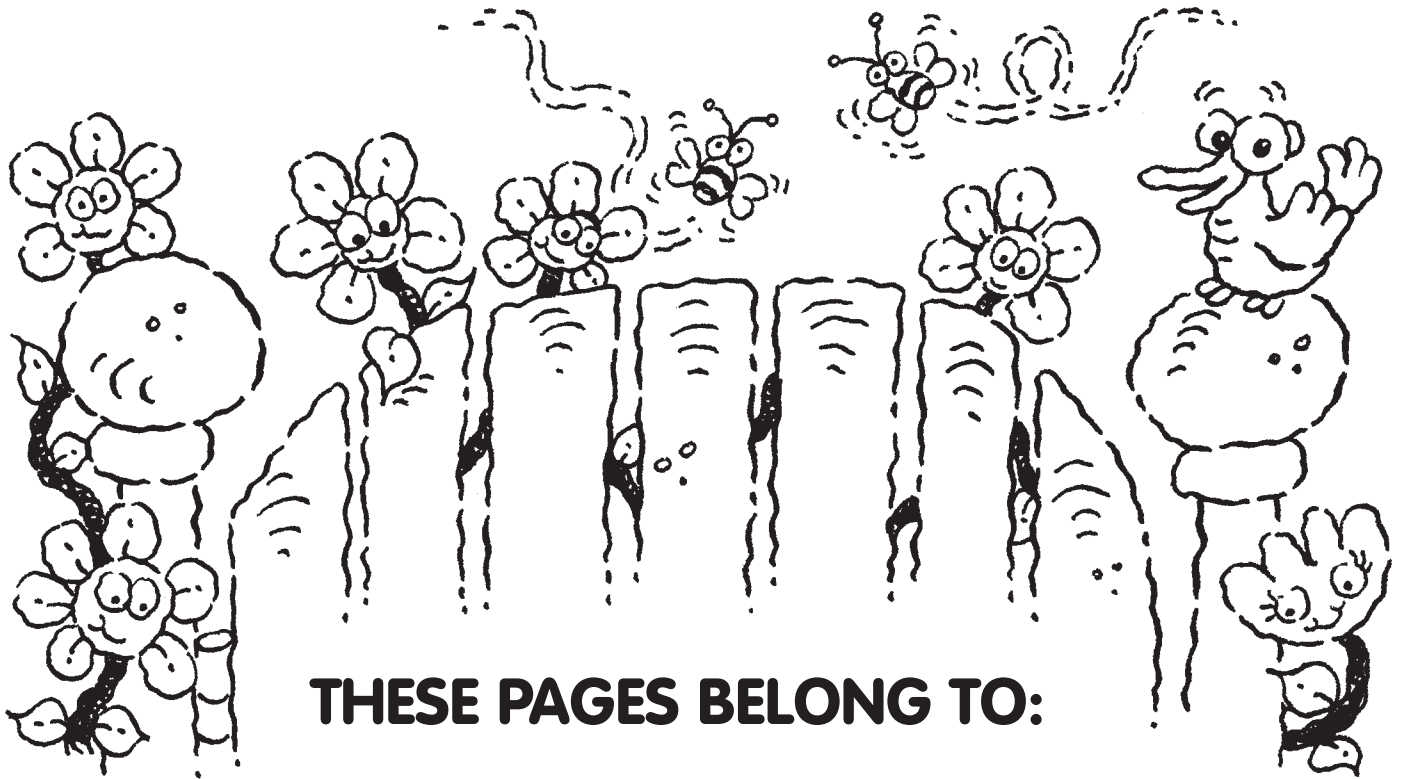
Throughout *The Self-Esteem Garden*, children have been enlisted as key players in the process of building self-esteem. They have been introduced to and given opportunities to incorporate 12 key premises that influence self-esteem. To review, these premises are:

- Premise #1: Children must be aware of the existence of their own self-esteem.
- Premise #2: Children must believe in their inherent worth in order to “grow” their self-esteem.
- Premise #3: Children must be encouraged by positive, supportive people in order to develop strong self-esteem.
- Premise #4: All children have certain positive qualities, attributes, and skills that contribute to their self-esteem.
- Premise #5: Children have certain positive qualities, attributes, and skills that have not yet been developed but could eventually contribute to their self-esteem.
- Premise #6: A healthy sense of self-worth is drawn from diverse sources of self-esteem.
- Premise #7: Children’s self-esteem is affected by external events and by other people.
- Premise #8: In order to exist and grow in a reality-based environment, children must be able to accept feedback from others and from themselves.
- Premise #9: Children need realistic, positive ways to cope with feedback that is hurtful or destructive.
- Premise #10: Children need ways to protect their self-esteem without becoming emotionally detached, aggressive, or withdrawn.
- Premise #11: Children need to understand how negative thinking affects their self-esteem and recognize the proactive, protective steps they can take to limit the impact of negative thoughts.
- Premise #12: Children must take responsibility for maintaining their own self-esteem with the help of trusted others.

In addition to learning these premises through the garden analogy used throughout the workbook, the

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THESE PAGES BELONG TO:





Have you ever seen a beautiful flower garden? _____

Where was the garden? _____

What did you like about it? _____

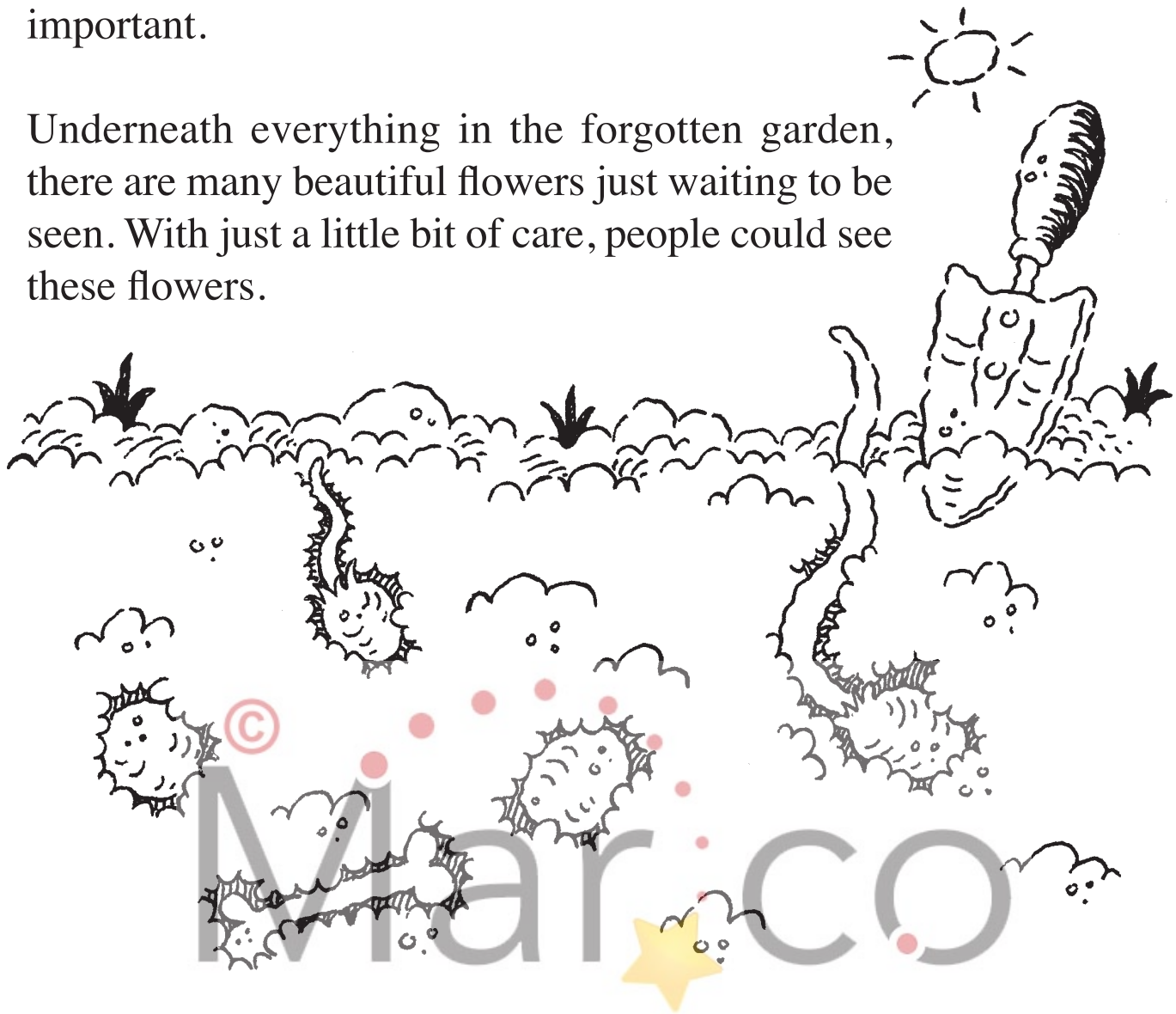
How many different kinds of flowers were in the garden?

Which flower did you like best? _____

How did you feel when you saw the garden? _____

If someone takes the time to plant a garden, then the garden is important.

Underneath everything in the forgotten garden, there are many beautiful flowers just waiting to be seen. With just a little bit of care, people could see these flowers.



That is why a garden that has not been cleaned up yet is as valuable as a garden that is already beautiful.



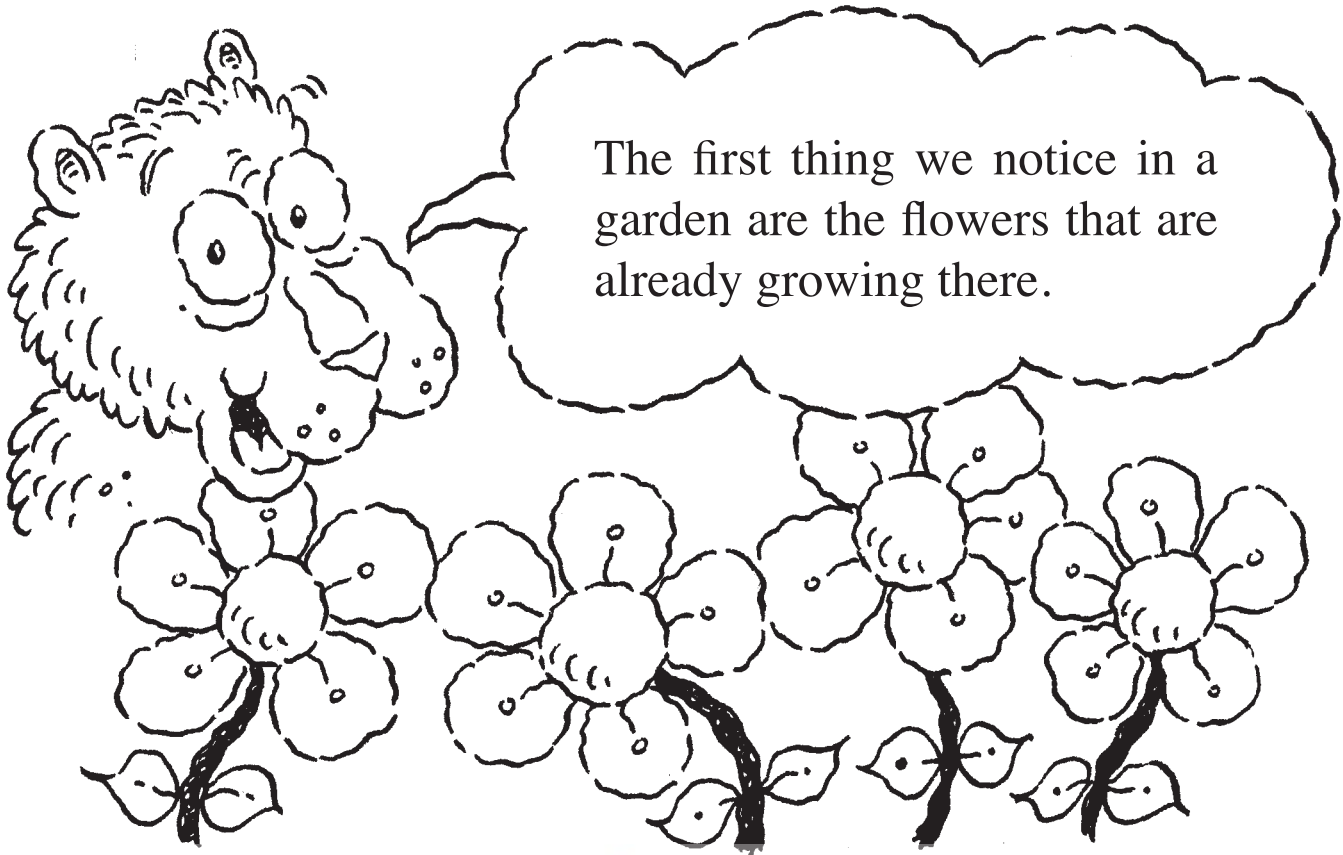
You are valuable, too!



Whether you like the way you are right now or think you still have some growing to do, you are important and special.

Draw a picture of yourself.





The *flowers* that are growing in your self-esteem garden are the things about yourself that you already like and can already see.

What are some good things that you like about yourself? _____

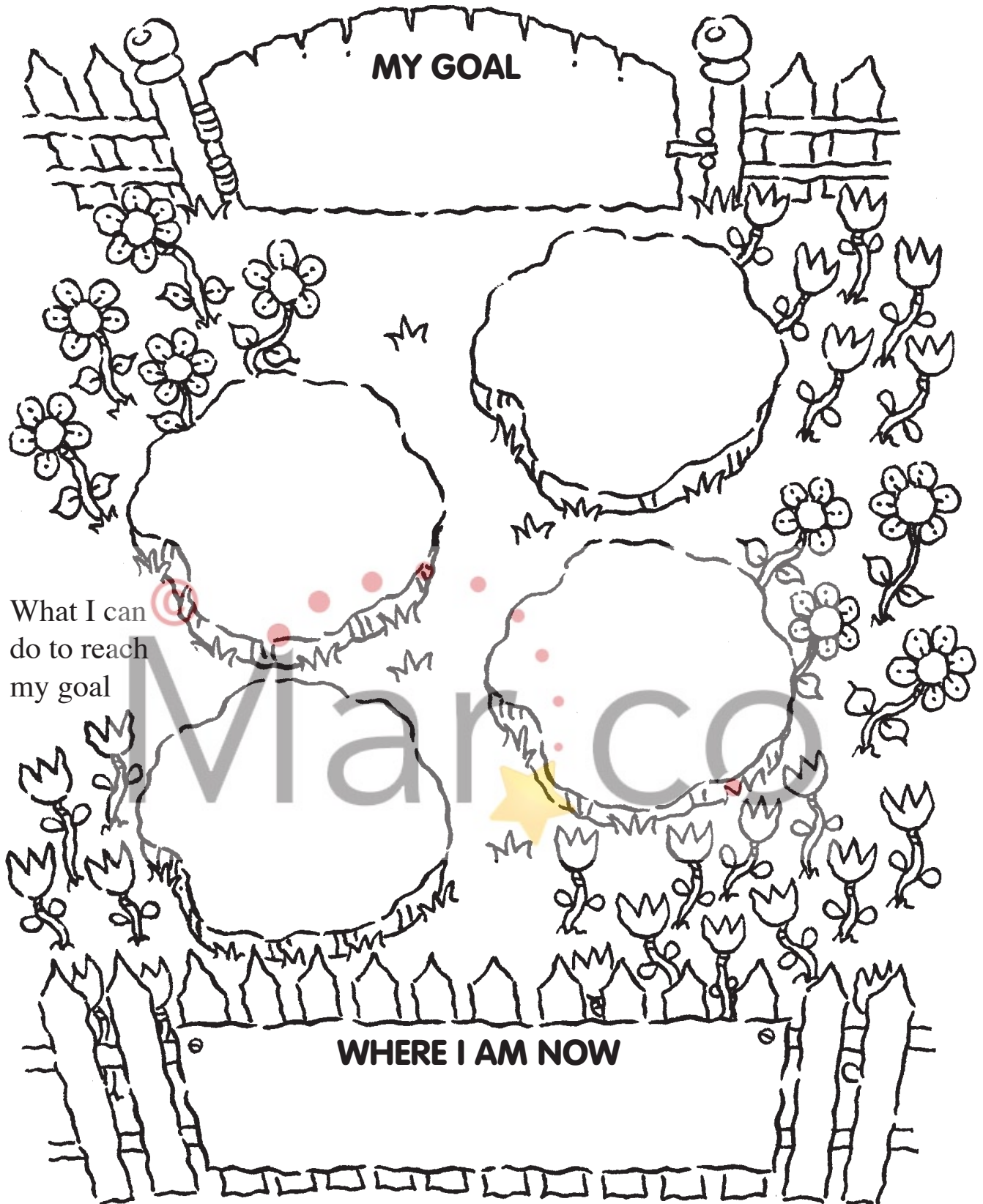
These are the *flowers* that you can plant in your self-esteem garden.

At the tip of each petal of the flower, write a role you play, such as being a son or daughter, grandchild, athlete, musician, friend, and so on.

On each petal, write one thing you do well in the role written at the tip of that petal.



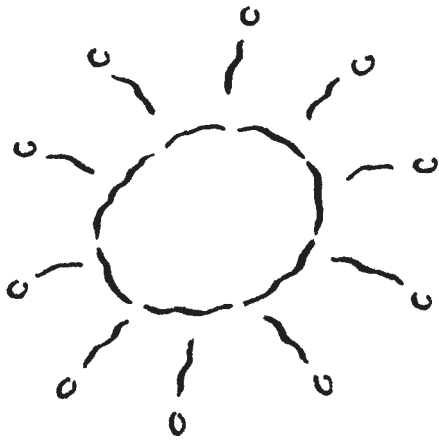
STEPPING STONES FOR MY GARDEN



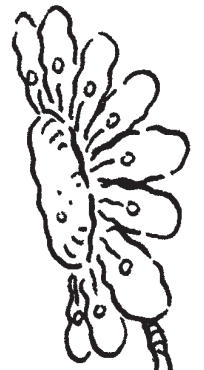
What I can do to reach my goal

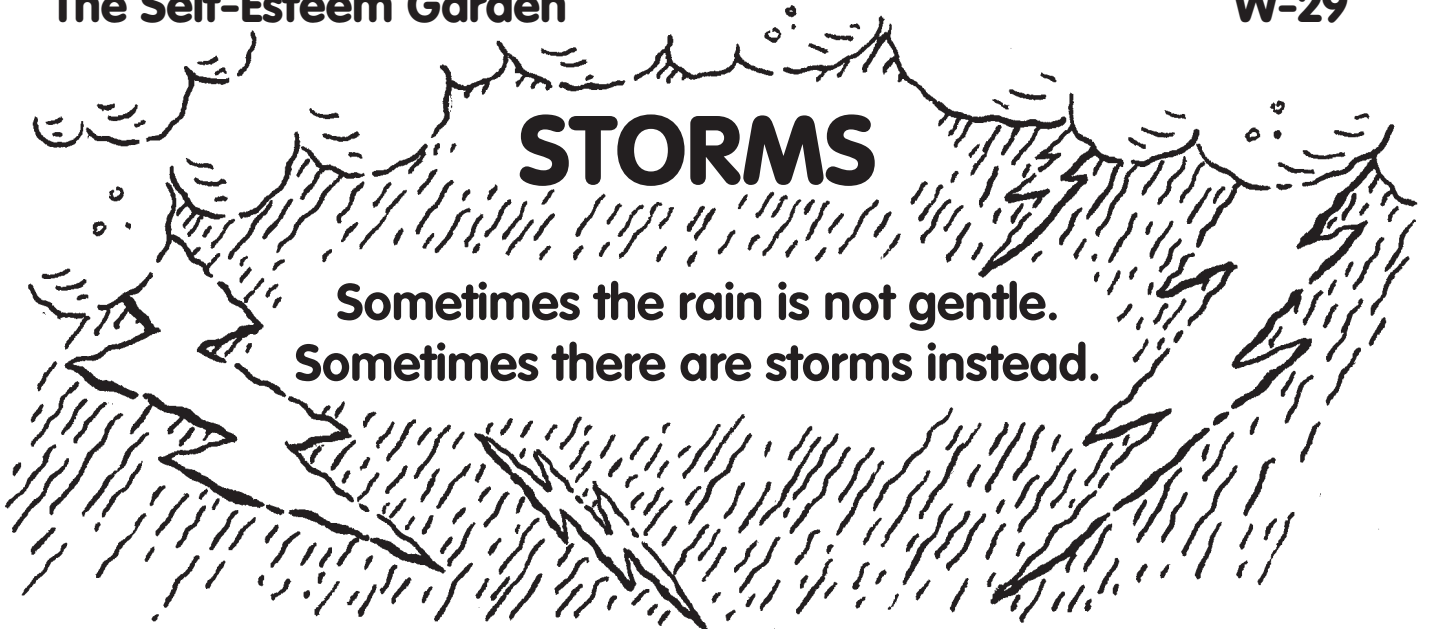
The Self-Esteem Garden

W-25



Draw a picture of you having that good day.





A *storm* is like a bad day. When the rain comes pouring down and the wind blows really hard, sometimes flowers get knocked down.

Sometimes when you have a bad day, you feel like you got knocked down, too.

Have you ever had a bad day? _____

What happened? _____

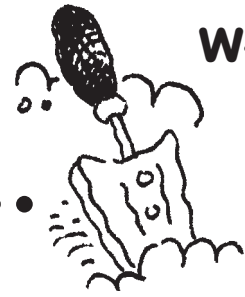
Before you can build your *fence*, you need to use your *feeling tools* to get the garden ready.

Think about how you feel when someone hurts your feelings. It is important to be honest about how you feel.

LIST THOSE FEELINGS HERE:

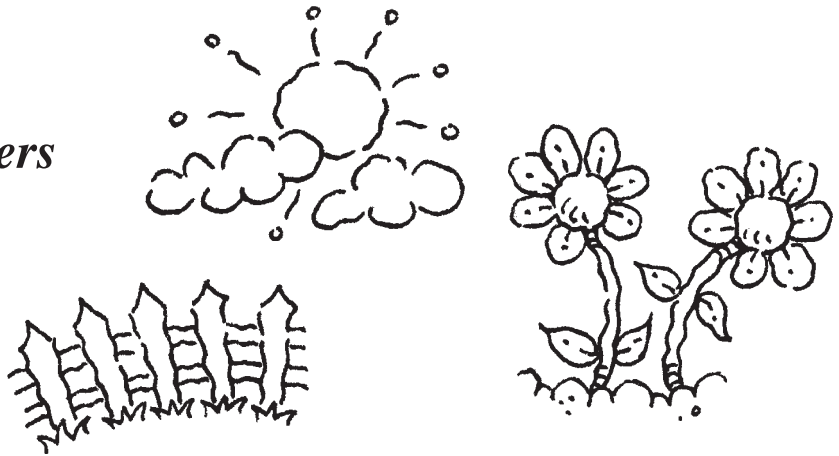


DON'T FORGET ...



Every garden needs help to grow beautiful. Gardens need:

- *Good Soil*
- *Garden Tools*
- *Seeds and Flowers*
- *Sunshine*
- *Rain*
- *Fences*
- *Gardeners*



Just as flowers grow in a garden, you can grow good self-esteem. You need:

- help from parents, relatives, teachers, and friends
- *doing, thinking, talking, and feeling tools*
- awareness of the good things about yourself
- happy, sunny days
- feedback (and coping skills for when the feedback you get is not gentle)
- *fences* to keep other people from trampling your Self-Esteem Garden
- things that you (and others) can do to help your self-esteem grow.

YOU ARE SPECIAL.

Take good care of your Self-Esteem Garden!

Self-Esteem Garden Evaluation TEACHER'S QUESTIONNAIRE

CHILD'S NAME: _____	GRADE: _____
TEACHER'S NAME: _____	
DATE COMPLETED: _____	

Since participating in this program, does this child:

- Accept tasks or challenges more readily? YES NO
- Accept risk-taking situations with encouragement? YES NO
- Show more perseverance in frustrating situations? YES NO
- Have more peer-group interaction? YES NO
- Make more realistic statements regarding behavior, potential, or abilities? YES NO
- Seem less concerned with others' opinions? YES NO
- Seem less affected by negative peer influence? YES NO
- Refrain from cheating or lying when losing a game or when doing poorly on a task? YES NO
- Display behavior more appropriate for his or her age? YES NO
- Avoid using controlling behavior to hide feelings of inadequacy or powerlessness? YES NO
- Prefer reality-based interactions to "fantasy-type" games? YES NO
- Accept more responsibility for poor performance? YES NO
- Accept praise more easily? YES NO
- Accept criticism more easily? YES NO
- Adapt more easily to new situations? YES NO

List other behaviors you feel reflect an improvement of low self-esteem.
