



Doing Distance

A psychological toolkit for
armed forces children

Worksheets





Introduction

Whether you are a military child's parent, or a supporting adult from their school or local community, this kit is for you. This toolkit has been compiled for our military families with the help from the team at [Bear Us In Mind](#).

They are a team with over 30 years' experience working directly with families around separation and loss and created these resources to help Ukrainian children who have been impacted by the war.

Here at the Naval Children's Charity, we have adapted these resources to help our military children and their supporting adults to navigate the highs and lows of service life. It is our aim that these tools will help with the processing of the challenges experienced by children and young people and to help them hold on to special memories.





Worksheet:

Balancing memories

About this activity

Some memories are fantastic and spark joy, others can be very difficult for a child to manage. Processing separation and, in some cases, grief is about balancing memories. Whilst talking about a range of memories is often hard, a child's memory muscle must be exercised and strengthened. This activity can help a child to understand that we can't ignore the difficult stuff, nor can we let it dominate, and it will guide you in supporting a child as they think and talk about different types of memories.



Outcomes

- ✓ To encourage a child to describe difficult memories and the different impact on their senses (what they saw, thought, heard, smelt, touched etc.)
- ✓ To encourage a child to edit and balance their memories
- ✓ To help improve concentration

What you will need

- ✓ One dark-coloured rock that is rough to the touch
- ✓ One light-coloured or smooth pebble
- ✓ Pieces of colourful glass or a polished gem stone(s), or just a pretty stone from the garden
- ✓ A small bag or box to keep the stones together; the stones need to be small enough to fit in a child's hand together

“

Since Mummy went away all my different memories are like actors coming into a stage. I can't stop them coming on. Some actors make me sad, others make me smile. With my stones I now have learned how to shine a spotlight on the memories I want to remember most.”



Worksheet:

Balancing memories

What to do

- 1 When you know you have plenty of time, sit with the child in a quiet place where they feel comfortable. Perhaps invite them to light a candle to signal this is some special work you are doing together.
- 2 Explain that you have an activity that may help them to think and talk about their different types of memories, whether that is memories of separation or when all the family is together. Allow the child to look at, touch, and hold the stones in their hands.
- 3 The first memory stone to use is the smooth and light-coloured pebble, representing ordinary, normal days when the whole family is together. Ask the child to hold it and encourage them to tell you what everyday life was like for them. This can often be the most important stone for a child, as they recall things they miss all the time, like being all together for family meals, or missing their school or friends that they no longer live close to. If the pebble is flat and pale enough, you could ask the child to draw a little picture on it of something that symbolises a normal day.
- 4 The second memory stone is the rough rock. Ask the child to clench this tightly. Notice how it is different from the smooth, warm pebble. Holding this rock, feeling its rough or sharp edges, say, 'I wonder if you can think of a memory that is difficult to handle, just like this rough rock?' The child may be able to tell you about a difficult memory they have, or they may prefer to draw it out on paper. Please remember, children can get very anxious about drawing, so reassure them it is okay to use stick people and simple outlines to express their memory.



If it's too hard to talk about on this occasion, you could say, 'I can sense this memory is very important but also very tough and difficult to share right now... do you think we could maybe come back to this rough rock next week?'





Worksheet:

Balancing memories

5 When you meet again remind them that you are aware there is a rough memory that you want to help them to share so it is not taking up so much space in their minds. To support them with this, you may want to show them the part of the 'Balancing Memories' video where we use a wastepaper bin to reflect what is happening in the brain.

6 The third type of stones are for exploring special memories, using coloured glass, gemstones or a shiny small stone. While they hold this stone, encourage the child to think about the very special memories they might want to share. Allow them to really connect with these stories and, if they start to cry, allow the tears to flow.

Your role is to see beyond the sadness and realise that you are giving the child a gift to engage with aspects of their life that were very special (and always will be) despite being 'happy/sad tears' at this moment in their lives. If they talk about them regularly then they will become more happy/sad but then happy again tears.

7 Finally, holding all three stones together in one hand can be a way of symbolising that these different memories can sit alongside each other in our minds, in a balanced way.



As a child uses the stones to think about their memories, there may be emotions. In your role as a supporter, it is important to remember that you have not made them cry, or made them feel guilt, shame or anger, but rather you have allowed them to safely explore a range of emotions.

The stones can also be used to regularly check in at the start of your session. For example, the smooth stone may represent something that is feeling okay now, the rough stone could be something that feels difficult or is worrying the child, and the special stone could be a way of sharing one nice thing.





Worksheet:

Friendship Rainbow

About this activity

Military children are often moving, having to make new relationships, and leaving friendships and family members behind. This activity helps to acknowledge this. Children often love doing this simple yet impactful activity. Even a child who is less artistic can easily create a jar that they feel proud to retain.

As they get lost in colouring the white salt you can talk about their friendships from around the country and even the world. A special bond will be established between you and the child as you understand more fully what friendship means to them.



Outcomes

- ✓ To hold on to friendships from places they have lived
- ✓ To allow others to understand what these relationships mean to the child
- ✓ To acknowledge the importance of new friendships

What you will need

- ✓ An empty jar with a lid
- ✓ Salt
- ✓ Coloured chalk or pastels
- ✓ 5 pieces of A4 paper



Worksheet:

Friendship Rainbow

What to do

- 1 Encourage your child to fill the jar right to the very top with salt. Using the Friendship Rainbow postcard in the toolkit pack, or simply on a piece of paper, write down the names of their friends and one thing they remember about them.

Ask them to choose a colour from their chalks or pastels for each friend and put some of that colour on the postcard or piece of paper near their name. Five friends is a good number for the jar, but you could do fewer.

- 2 Fold each piece of paper across the middle like a greetings card (this helps when the salt is poured back into the jar later on!). Spread out a piece of paper for each friend and divide the salt from the jar between them.

- 3 Have the child colour in each pile of salt using the chalk or pastel shade they have chosen for their friends. They must rub each chalk or pastel backwards and forwards into the salt; the harder they rub, the brighter the coloured salt will become. It can be easier if you turn the chalk onto its side rather than holding like you would to draw. As the child is colouring each pile of salt, you may be able to ask some questions about this particular friendship, finding out more about the things they liked to do together, or what they miss most about them.

- 4 Carefully pour the coloured salt – one piece of paper at a time – into your jar. Tap the jar gently on a hard surface to help the salt settle, but try not to shake the jar as it may mix up the colours.

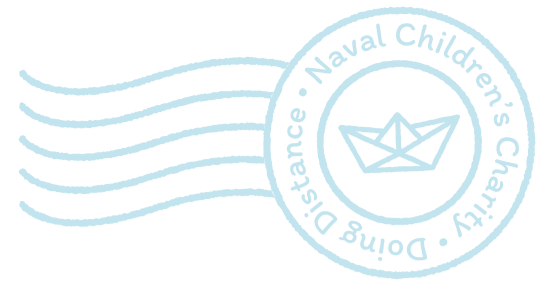
- 5 If there is some space left at the top of the jar, you can place a piece of cotton wool on top, before putting the lid on the jar tightly. This helps to ensure that the different colours of salt don't mix together.

- 6 Keep the jar with the postcard or piece of paper, which shows their friends' names and their memory of them, in a special place. Your child may like to show someone else their jar now, and tell them about their friendships. They may even like to take it into school to show their new friends.



In time, they may like to do a second jar to represent their new friendships in their new school or area, a wonderful opportunity to celebrate those new relationships.





Worksheet:

We are Family

About this activity

These activities use soft toys to encourage children to open up about how they are feeling, as well as bringing them comfort and helping them to feel safe and secure. Soft toys can become trusted companions to children and help them to manage fear and separation anxiety, and to feel connected to people they care about.

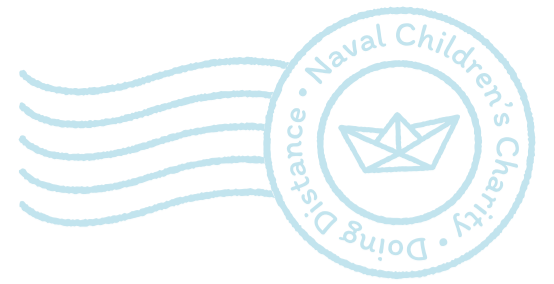


Outcomes

- ✓ To create a strong symbol for family unity
- ✓ To enable a child to manage separation anxiety and night-time fears
- ✓ To use sensory connections to soothe (e.g. scent, touch)

What you will need

- ✓ A soft toy per family member. You may already have toys or teddies, but if not, it can be a lovely experience to choose these together with the child. Children often like to choose animals that are reflective of their personality and how they want to be seen.



Worksheet:

We are Family

A symbol of unity

- 1 Encourage the family to give a name to their teddies/soft toys, one that represents their family.

'We decided to call Daddy's bear Big Courage and our ones are called Tiny Courage.'

'We called our bears Sailors, so we can all be sailors like Mummy'



- **Sailor Bear** (available from the Naval Children's Charity on request – 1 per family member)

- 2 Put the soft toys in a prime location in the home so that they are visible to everyone and they see the strength of the family unit – both those that live in this setting and those who live elsewhere.
- 3 On a piece of paper or a postcard, family members could write or draw a message to those who are not with them. This message or picture could be propped up on or close to the toy or teddy for a photo, which could then be sent home to them digitally, if technology allows. This will help build a sense of connection; the child can also be in these photos if they want.

Managing separation and anxiety worries

- 1 It may be that the child you are supporting is worried whenever they need to separate from family members, or about family members from whom they're already separated.

'Someone at school told me there's a war, what if mummy isn't safe on her ship?'

'I'm stressed about my exams, I wish I could speak to Dad about it'

'I've not heard from my step-mum in weeks because of no comms'. I just want to know that she is okay.'

'I wish I could play football with my brother since he has been on ship, I haven't been able to play'

'I get to see my Dad on the weekends but I hate it when he goes to work for the week.'

'Where's my Daddy gone? When is he coming back? It doesn't feel like home when he is not here!'

- 2 The soft toys can be given to each child as a way of keeping them connected to the family unit, reminding them that they are not alone.



Worksheet:

We are Family

- 3 With younger children, the bears can also be used as a puppet to chat to the other bears, encouraging an open dialogue about the child's concerns.

'Little Sailor was telling Big Sailor about something that really helped on the days when he was most scared...'

- 4 The child can keep their small toy or teddy close to them, clipping it on their rucksack, or taking it to bed. Or if an adult must leave them for a short or longer time frame, the small one can go with the adult to keep them safe. Allow the child to be in control and come up with what they think is best. If a soft toy from the family does need to leave, encourage the adult to take a photo of them with the toy and send it back to the child so they can manage their separation anxiety.



Bedtime worries

- 1 Encourage the child to speak to their soft toy at bedtime, sharing whatever is on their mind by saying it quietly out loud into the ear of a cuddly toy, before cuddling it or tucking it in next to them. This is a gentle way of finding out what is worrying them and can help aid restful sleep when separation has potentially made bedtimes trickier. For a teenager, you could use a more direct 'face your fears' approach. For example, you may like to ask them what one worry they would most like to describe and think through, so that it does not interfere with their sleep.
- 2 These are just a few ideas that we hope can help with separation and maintaining a sense of connection. Even teenagers, who may consider themselves too grown-up for soft toys, can value these soothing associations, although your approach may need to differ.
- 3 The bears could also be used as a way for the service person to speak about their deployments by taking the bear with them. Sometimes it is easier to speak about what you're doing in a fun way through the bear, especially when you can't share lots of information or have communication with home. By keeping a diary/log that is centred around the bear, children may feel like they are listening to a story about your journey when you come home but through the bear. "Here's Sailor Bear on a run ashore in Gibraltar with the monkeys!" This could also help submariner families who have very little to no communication with home.

If the child doesn't want to engage in these teddy bear activities or doesn't make an attachment, that is okay; it is important that you follow the child's lead in the moment. You can always suggest it again another day. Above all, try not to take it personally if one day they dismissively throw it across the room.





Worksheet: Growing Around Separation

About this activity

Faced with change and loss, a child may feel overwhelmed and suffocated by their emotions, particularly if the loss involves grief. This worksheet describes two activities you can use to support a child to grow around their emotions around separation, loss and grief, not by ignoring it, but by looking at how they can begin rebuilding their lives.



• Available from the Naval Children's Charity on request



Outcomes

- ✓ To engage the child in the outdoors and show the importance of movement when managing separation and loss
- ✓ To show the benefits of a growth mindset when managing grief
- ✓ To create a greater sense of control and mastery of skills the child values



Worksheet:

We are Family

Growing flowers or vegetables

The first activity is practical and will happen slowly. So often it is while you are doing things like planting, pruning and watering that the all-important side conversations happen more naturally as the child suddenly feels able to say what's on their mind.

Helping a child to plant seeds, nurture the seedlings and watch them grow is a therapeutic way to appreciate growth and how things evolve in time. You can use our Forget-Me-Not seeds which can be requested through our website or any available seasonal seeds.

If, for any reason, the plants you decide to grow do not succeed, then you could use the activity to talk about the disappointment. You could reflect on how it's important to bounce back when things don't work out as planned. This may be a nice opportunity to think about what you learnt about growing seeds and how you might try again.



What you will need

- ✓ Forget-Me-Not seeds (or any other seasonal flower seeds you can source)

What to do

- 1 With the child (and other family members if they would like to be involved), plant some seeds in small pots or seedling trays, caring for them as suggested on the packet. Eventually you'll need to move them into a garden bed or window box as they begin to grow.
- 2 The child may want to measure the plants, plot their growth, take photos of them or draw them, and share these with others. They may feel pride in having grown something themselves, so remember to celebrate with the child and to have fun with this activity! If digital connections allow, then take photos of the child with their produce or flowers to send to their family member who is serving away from home. Or make a scrapbook to capture all the lovely memories you are making with this child so they have it to look back on when they're ready to make sense of this important time in their lives.

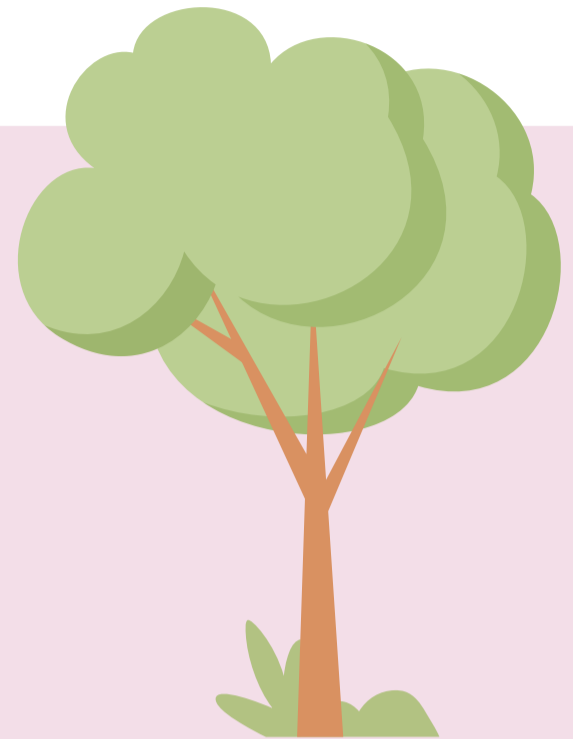


Worksheet:

We are Family

My family tree and me

This activity can be a powerful, visual way for a child to build a stronger sense of self and to think about where they have come from, who they are today, and their hopes and dreams for the future.



What you will need

- ✓ Plain A4 paper, or a printout of MY FAMILY TREE AND ME worksheet, available on our website

What to do

- 1 Begin by showing the child the worksheet and explaining the purpose of the activity – to show how they are still growing despite losses and separation they've experienced. Just as their bodies are growing, so too is their strength and resilience. Their anxiety also grows but they are finding ways to keep it from growing too large.
- 2 Start with the roots. It can be helpful for children to talk about their roots and their family history, so they have a sense of where they have come from. For example, their parents, grandparents, siblings and other important people who have shaped their life.

'My Gran used to look after me when my Mum and Dad had to be away working, she made the best roast dinner.'

'I look after my younger brother when he feels sad, people say it's nice how close we are, he's my best friend.'

- 3 Next is the trunk. Encourage the child to identify their strengths – this can be a new process for a child so they may need some support or curiosity from you to get them started. For example, what has helped them to build resilience? What qualities of the people in their roots may be helping them? What nice things do other people say about them?
- 4 Move on to the branches. They represent the child's hopes and dreams for their own future, such as 'What I want to be when I grow up'.

'When I grow up, I want to be a vet, I'm doing my GCSEs at the moment and I'm working hard to get my grades.'



Worksheet:

We are Family

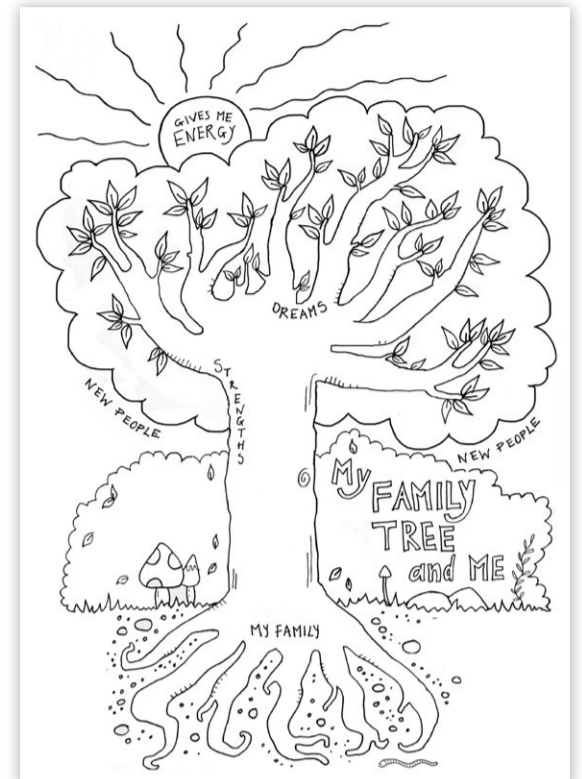
- 5 The leaves of the tree are any new people that have come into their life, people who they respect and trust like new friends or teachers.

'My teacher is a military child too, she is very kind and knows when I am struggling with my mum being away'

'The pastor at the church is very kind – he says prayers with us to keep Dad safe.'

'My friend isn't from the same background as me, but he has been so kind, and has helped me catch up on some of the school work I didn't do in my old school.'

'My swimming coach helps keep me focused and this helps me not to worry so much.'



- 6 Finally, they can add the Sun; this is where they capture the things they love to do, things that give them energy, for example talking with a friend or playing football.

This is an activity that can be revisited at another time, to see if the child would make any changes when they meet new people, or start a new hobby.

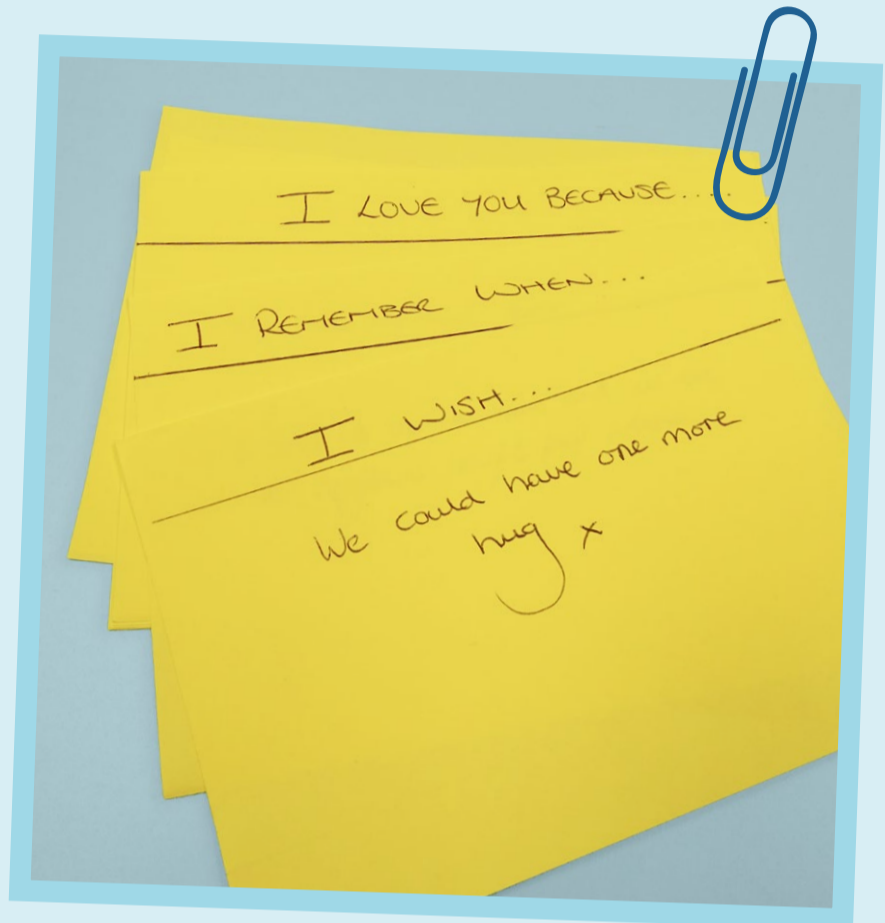
Worksheet:

Little Box of BIG Thoughts

About this activity

Sometimes it's hard to tell people who are important to you how you feel about them. When someone is upset, stressed or overwhelmed by deployments and separation, knowing where to start can be even trickier.

The Little Box of Big Thoughts is designed to help older children or adults have a conversation with someone close by who is important to them, or perhaps to process thoughts and feelings around separation. To aid natural healing in this event, it can be used to show a young person that just because someone is away, their connection to that person remains.



This tool will help by starting every sentence for them. It is simply a collection of sentence starters, which a person can finish on paper or say out loud to you, helping them to voice their feelings and memories as well as processing complex, commonly bottled-up emotions, such as anger, fear and guilt.

Sometimes when life holds such uncertainty, the answers to these simple sentences will feel incredibly important and grounding.

The Little Box of Big Thoughts is one of the most useful tools to help understand the 'unsaid's'; however, it can provoke strong and complicated feelings that you may not expect. Before suggesting it to a child, young person or parent, watch the film on our website and (if possible) sit down quietly and try to do the activity yourself. Do this activity about someone in your own family, imagining that you are separated from that person... you will quickly see how these small incomplete sentences connect you emotionally and why the exercise should not be rushed.

Outcomes

- ✓ To expand the stories we tell ourselves about other people in our family
- ✓ To strengthen the connection between an older child and a parent
- ✓ To promote the continuing bonds that reassure a child separated from family through separation or bereavement

What you will need

- ✓ You can find templates of the Little Box of Big Thoughts on the NCC website that you can copy or print. Try to find a little box to keep all the messages safely together, or if the person wants to give it to someone as a present, it can make a very special gift at a time of great vulnerability.



Worksheet:

Little Box of Big Thoughts

What to do

- 1 The first step is to support the child or adult to carefully choose who they may want to have a conversation with.
- 2 It may be a person they feel close to, but it can also help with difficult relationships. Perhaps a child may put one parent on a pedestal as a 'hero' parent if they are away with the military, but may naturally show anger and frustration to those close by. A more balanced view can be created by completing the sentences. For example...

'I want to do this for my mum as I think she is struggling without Dad and although we argue sometimes, I think she is doing a great job'.

- 3 The incomplete sentences are carefully constructed to allow a person to have a different and wider conversation with someone than they usually manage, so this activity can be surprisingly emotional. Many people will struggle to do it alone, and you may want to do it verbally together rather than writing it down, with you leading with the sentence prompt and the other person completing it aloud.



- I hope that you...
- Always know that...
- I feel so proud when...
- I laugh when...
- I wish...
- I remember when...
- I regret...
- It was your choice to...
- Thank you for...
- You shine when...
- When times get tough...
- I love you because...
- If we're not together, what I miss about you is...
- You are special because...
- I hope that I can be more...
- I will try to be less...
- Sometimes I feel we are similar because...
- Something that really matters in family life...
- A favourite memory I will always have is...
- Being separated will not break...



Worksheet:

This Is Me

About this activity

This activity is to help the child to build their sense of self, to acknowledge differences between their past and present and to help them see where being a military child fits into their identity.



Outcomes

- ✓ To encourage a child to explore what makes them unique – their identity
- ✓ To hold on to a sense of PAST and PRESENT
- ✓ To help them to share their personality and culture in a new setting



Worksheet:

This Is Me

My Earth Identity

On the Naval Children's Charity website or in your pack you will find a beautiful illustration of Earth. Military children are often aware of how big the world feels when separated from a loved one. However, for this exercise we also encourage the child to think about aspects of their inner world.

There are 4 different questions which will help a child strengthen their confidence to talk about their identity. Answers can be written on the inner circles of the illustration.

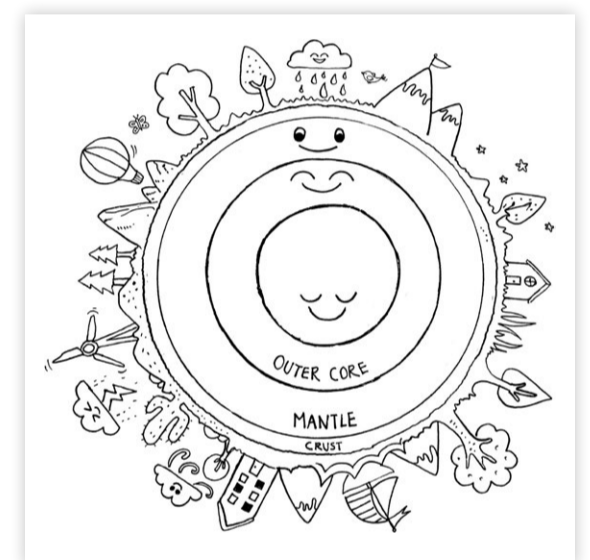


What to do

1 Inner core

Explain that no one human being is the same as another. Encourage the child to think of a couple of things that make them unique – what is special about them?

It is important to note here that children with lower self-esteem will find this quite hard to do. You may want to help with phrases like, 'Would you mind if I make a suggestion? I've noticed that you enjoy drawing?' or, 'Maybe we can ask Mum/Dad how they would answer this?'



2 Outer core

Here the child can make a note of what helps them feel stronger. For example, talking to a friend, writing a message to Dad, or listening to their favourite music.

3 Mantle

The mantle will share how the child likes their personality to be perceived by others. Here they can note down details of how they project themselves, for example, what clothes do they most like to wear, what sports kits do they like, and what items in their bedrooms do they most treasure?

4 Crust

Ask the child to write down the people they most value – they can be people they know in real life, or famous people they admire. The questions will be, for example, 'If you had the chance to create a team that could do something amazing, who would you pick to join you?'

When all the answers are written down, the child might like to colour the rest of the page in.



Worksheet:

This Is Me

Life before, life now

What to do

- 1** Take two pieces of paper. On the first, encourage the child to use words or drawings to capture life as it was BEFORE the deployment, separation or house/school move.
- 2** Ask about the kinds of things that happened on an average day as well as at the weekend and on holidays. On the second sheet, ask the child to consider life NOW, whilst they are separated from their loved one.
- 3** Ask the child if there is anything in their new home life that is surprising or different to what they expected. Is anything better? What has disappointed them? As the child explains the difference between life then and life now, try to ask what they mean by certain words – active listening is important to ensure you understand what the child is sharing with you.

This may give you some insights into things they liked or disliked, or even the things that were hard before a loved one went away, or situations that feels difficult now. All of this will help you support them with their new way of living and in preparing for the future.

LIFE BEFORE...

- Playing football in the park
- Being all together
- Moving house...

LIFE AFTER...

- Closer to Dad
- New room is smaller
- New neighbours...



Worksheet:

This Is Me

Photo book – this is me when... this is me with...

When life is ever-changing, it can help to create something that feels permanent and tangible, especially for those times when children feel most lost or lonely.

We therefore suggest helping the child to create a photo book, something physical to hold and to share memories of happier times.

What to do

The child may or may not have their own phone with photos on already, so one suggestion is to try and source photos from, for example, a family member's phone, and encourage the child to describe the photo in their own words, writing this down next to the photograph.

The photo book may be a personal and comforting bedtime story that they can go through each night, anchoring them to their sense of self.

If it is possible, you could help them to locate photos that show them as a baby, a toddler and a child, to give a sense of time passing and personal growth.



Children may also decide to include photos of adults who are important to them, such as their family, a friend at their new school or a teacher who is looking out for them.

Some examples of captions might include:

- **THIS IS ME...** making pancakes with Grandma – people say we are alike as we both love to dance
- **THIS IS ME...** with my football team when we won the league
- **THIS IS ME...** at my Dad's homecoming from his last deployment





Worksheet:

This Is Me

Identity

Meaningful music

If the child loves music, try to find some songs that really centre ideas of personal strength and identity, like 'This is Me' from The Greatest Showman. Also be sure to ask them which songs they love and why, and listen to them together.

Some older children may even like to compose some music or write a song or poem about how they feel about military life.

A-Z of Me and the Military

Together you could create an A to Z of 26 wonderful things that are special to the military child experience, from people, places and foods, to football teams, songs and books. This lovely list will help the child talk about home at school and to show their friends and family their personal experiences with being a military child.

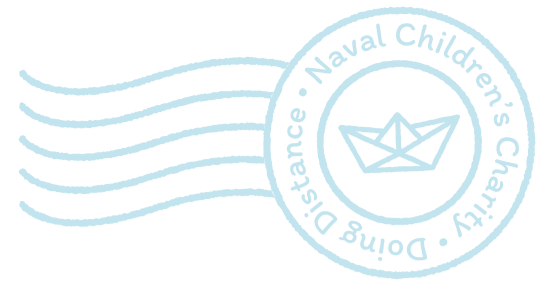
A-Z of Me and the Military

A... Airplane - watching them with my family

B... Bases - Naval Bases

C... Captain - Daddy's Boss

D... Deployment - when Daddy goes away



Contact details

Before starting an activity with a child please read the worksheet and watch the corresponding training film on www.navalchildrenscharity.org.uk.

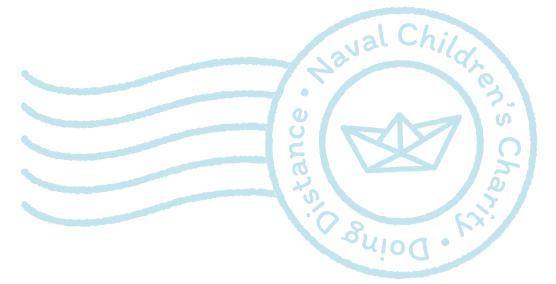


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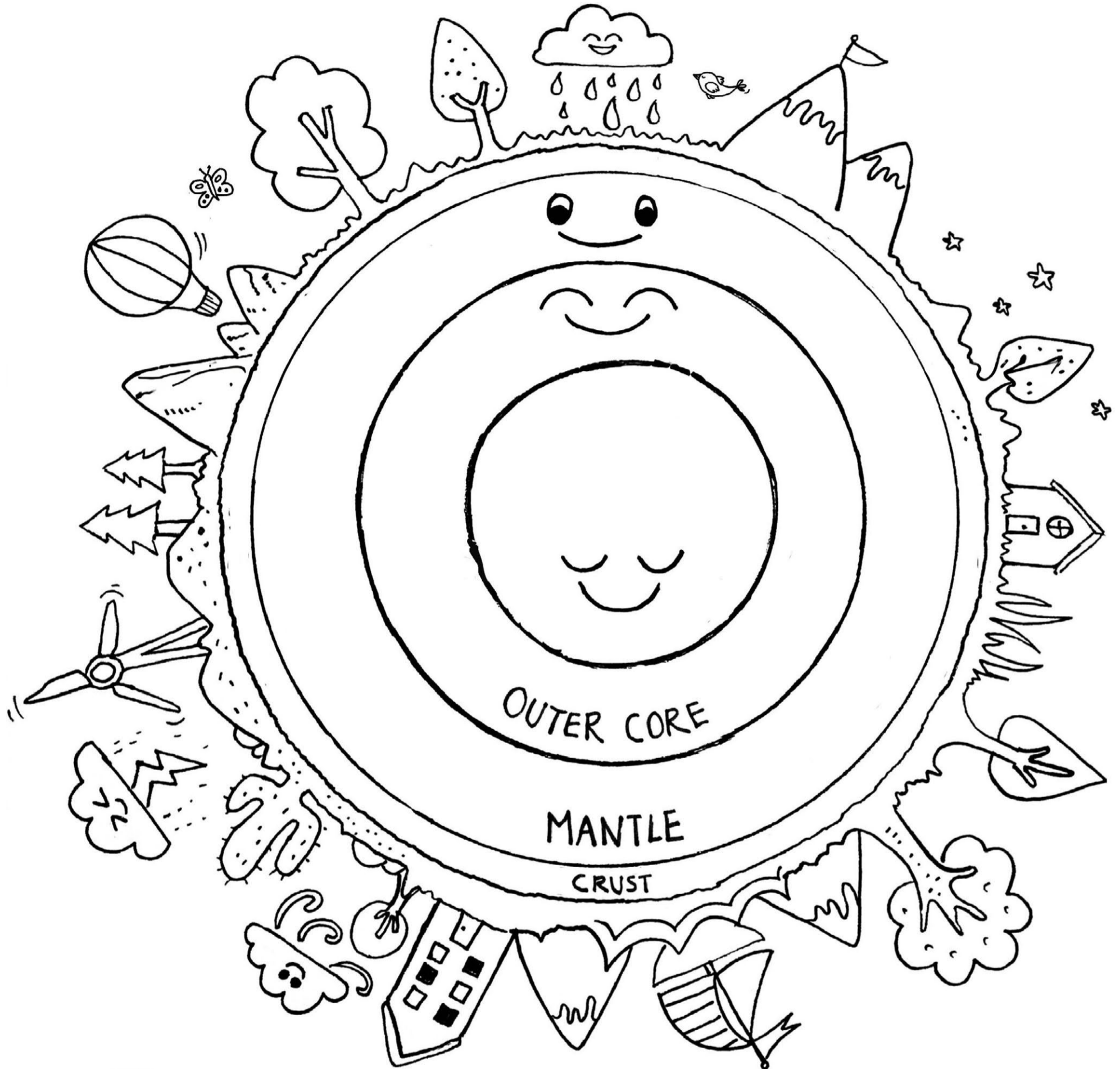
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Worksheet:

Supplemental materials



Laura Hambleton

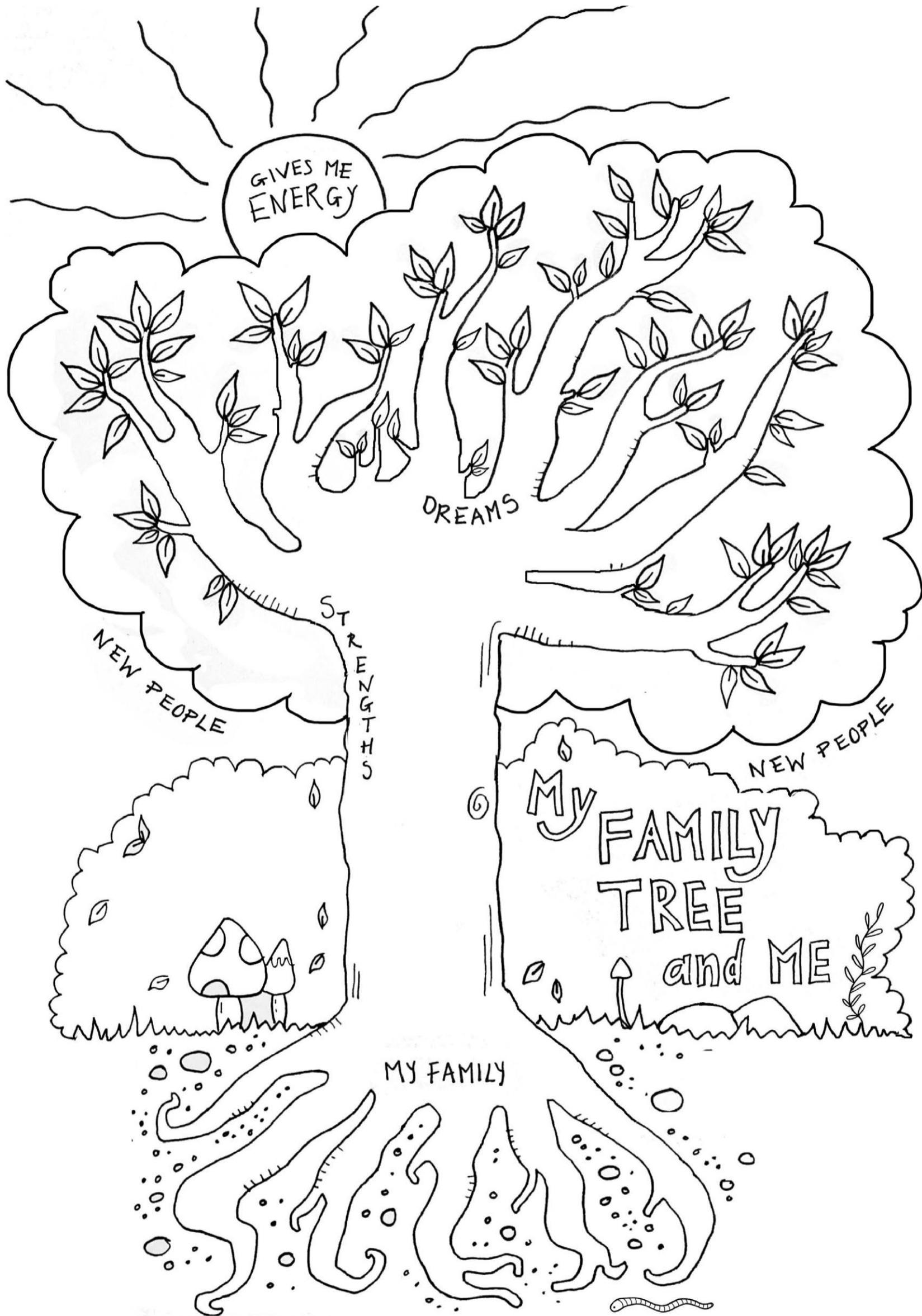
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Worksheet:

Supplemental materials



Laura Hambleton

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