

# Art For Healing

Self Directed Art Therapy

Chicago Torture Justice Center 2022



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While this zine is a resource for people who need healing from any type of violence and trauma, this zine was created specifically for incarcerated survivors of police violence

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# WHO ARE WE?

The Chicago Torture Justice Center (CTJC) is a community center for Chicago police torture survivors and anyone who has experienced police violence, directly or indirectly. CTJC was established as a result of a historic Reparations Ordinance passed by the Chicago City Council in May 2015 and serves survivors of police torture, their family members, and community members. CTJC is the first community center in the United States that provides specialized trauma services to those tortured by law enforcement officers within the country. We are a part of and support a movement to end all forms of police violence. Our support is rooted in what we call “politicized healing.” Politicized healing is the belief that our healing is political and our politics are healing. Politicized healing addresses the harm—felt by individuals and communities—caused by historic and evolving systems of oppression. It reminds us that surviving and healing as individuals is also healing to our communities and the world we would like to see flourish.

# WHAT IS ART THERAPY?

Art therapy is used to help individuals to verbalize their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. Especially while incarcerated you may not be able to express your thoughts and feelings verbally in a safe way. Art and writing can help you to still express it and get those emotions outside of your mind and body. It also can provide an alternative place to focus attention and new practices that can serve as support.

Art therapy is not about making an objectively good piece of art. Focus less on the result and more on the process. It is about the mental and emotional experience rather than the result. You can have a more healing experience drawing like a 6-year old than by creating a masterpiece, art therapy is about engaging in the process fully.

Each of these directives has different purposes. Some are calming practices, some require deeper engagement. Pay attention to yourself and what you need. If you are constantly feeling high levels of emotions, it may be more helpful for you to engage in calming practices rather than the ones that may trigger more emotions. These directives are not a substitute for having your own therapist or engaging in counseling, but rather a tool to help support you navigate your emotions.

All of these directives are created to be able to be completed with a pencil and paper, but if you have access to more materials, feel free to alter the assignment to work with the art supplies you have. This zine is created to be a set of guidelines to get you started on using art for healing, but you are the only one that knows what you need. Feel free to use this as a jumping-off point for your own creativity and create whatever feels best

# SAFE SPACE

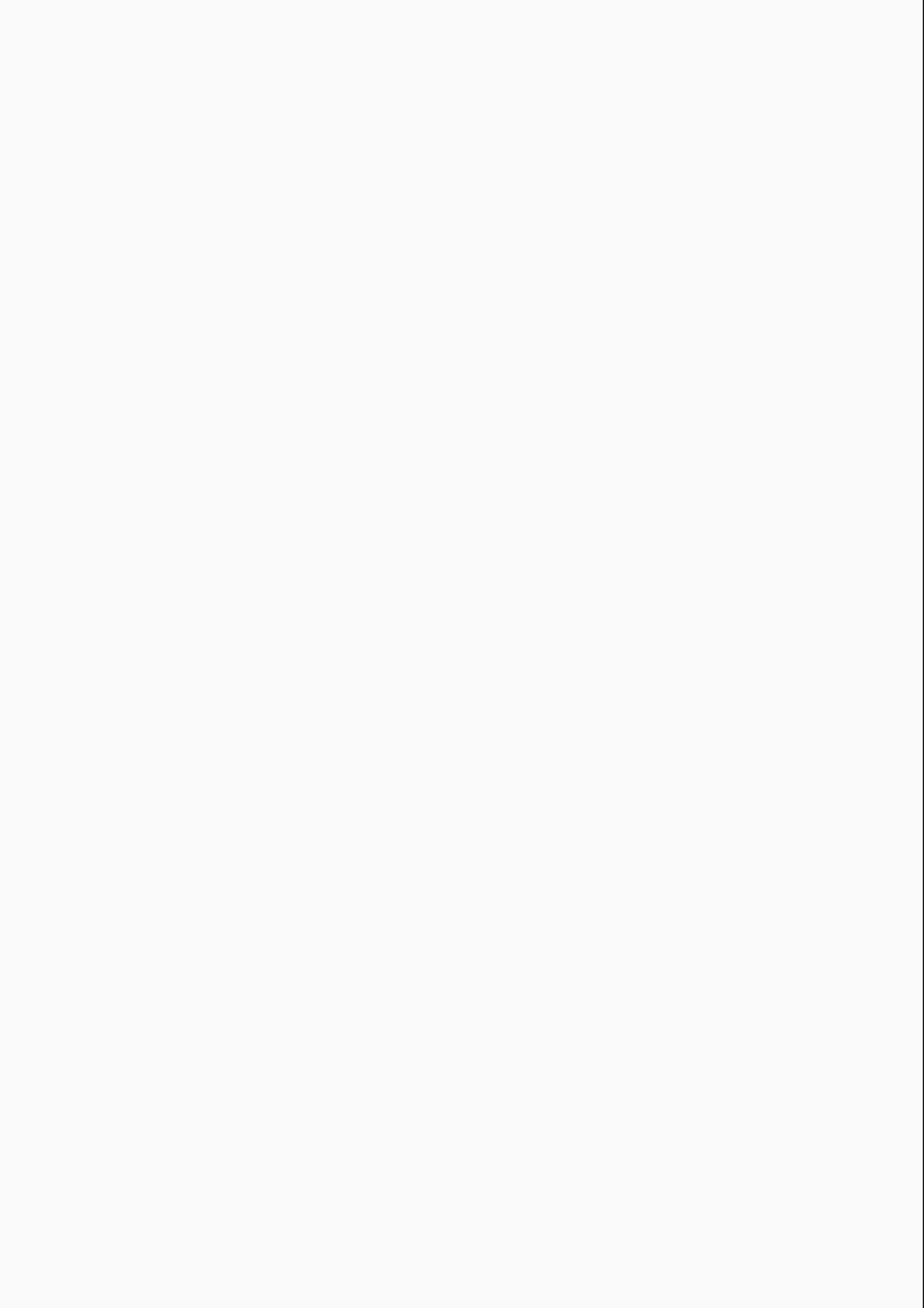
Having a place that feels safe and that you can retreat to when things get tough is important, but isn't always physically possible. A helpful alternative is creating a safe space in your mind that you can go to when fear, panic, or traumatic memories become overwhelming. Having a mental safe place can help you to cope with stress and increase your sense of safety.

As you begin, try and think about a location where you have felt safe at some time in your life or imagine a new place that would be safe for you. Think about what smells, sights, feelings, and sounds you would experience in your safe place. Think about if it would be inside or outside. You can work off of a space that you already have experienced or create an entirely new imaginative space.

When you are ready, begin to draw what your safe place would look like. Who would be there? What objects would be there (furniture, activities, comforts etc.) How do you enter and leave the room? Is there a way to secure it from unwanted people or things? Think about the details and what makes those specific details feel safe to you

After you are done creating your space on paper, practice visualizing the image in your mind's eye. Create a plan for how you would enter the space, would it be a room at the top of a set of stairs, would you have to climb up a hill? Practice entering and leaving your safe space in your imagination so that when your feelings or surroundings become overwhelming you have a place to retreat to.

Safe Space



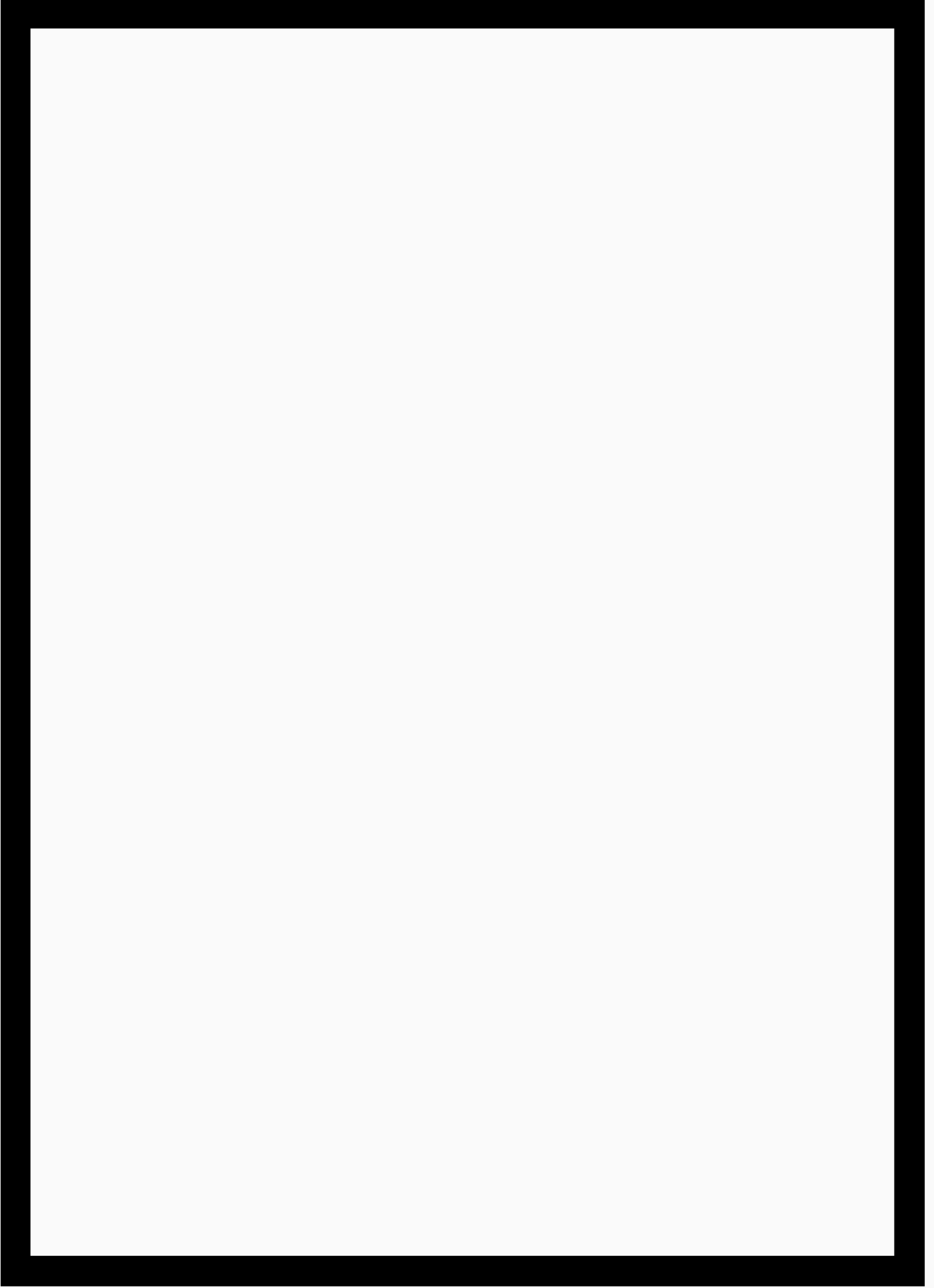
# DRAWING A BREATH

Breathing is a natural action that we do without thinking every day. However, when we are in distress we may begin to breathe rapidly or shallowly, which only serves to increase our anxiety. Conscious breathing that is slow and deep when we are feeling distressed can reduce our distress by releasing muscular and emotional tension. Focusing on breathing can also shift your attention away from flashbacks or unhelpful thinking and bring your focus back to the present reality.

When you are ready to begin, take a piece of paper, and while you are inhaling and exhaling pay attention to the rhythm, depth, and sounds of your breathing. Draw a line that has similar qualities to your breath. Think about if the lines should be long or short; curved or angular; quick or slow; light or heavy pressure; dashed or solid line. After doing this for a couple of minutes with your normal breathing, focus on changing your breathing to being slower and more controlled. You can try saying something silently to yourself like “breath in calm, exhale tension” if it helps you.

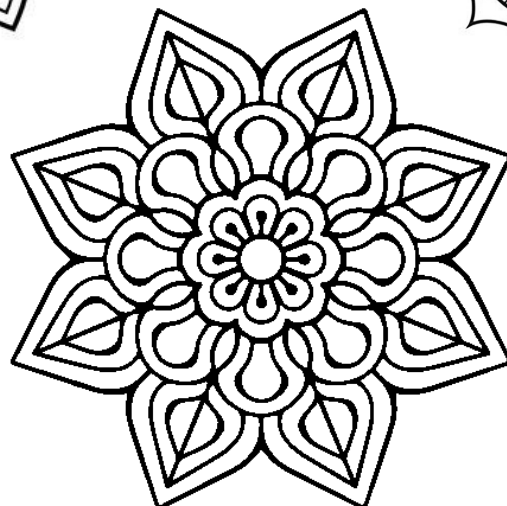
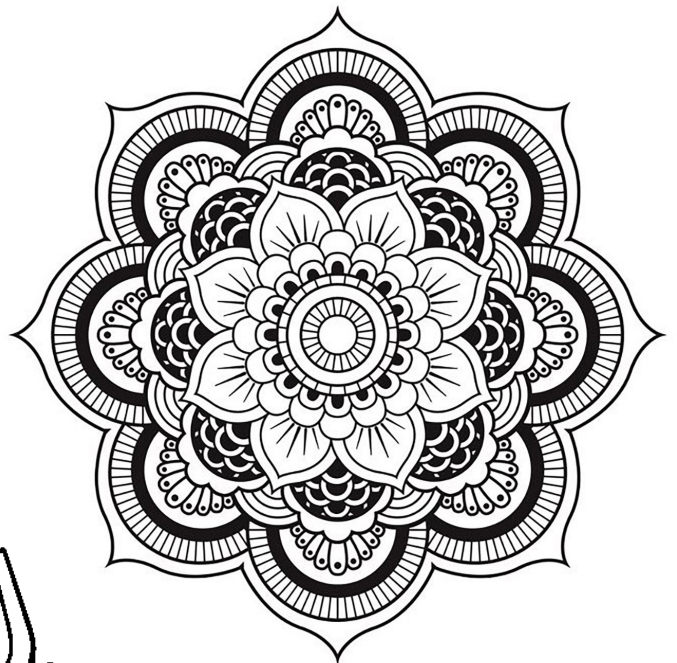
Draw your new pattern of breathing on the other side of the paper for a couple of minutes. Pay attention to the depth and length of your calming breaths. After you are done, compare the two drawings. Do you notice any differences? Do you notice any differences in your stress levels after changing your breathing pattern? This can be used just once as a reminder to work on controlling your breathing, or you can use this directive as a coping skill when you are experiencing anxiety or heightened stress levels and you can draw your breathing in order to help you calm down.

## Drawing aa Breath



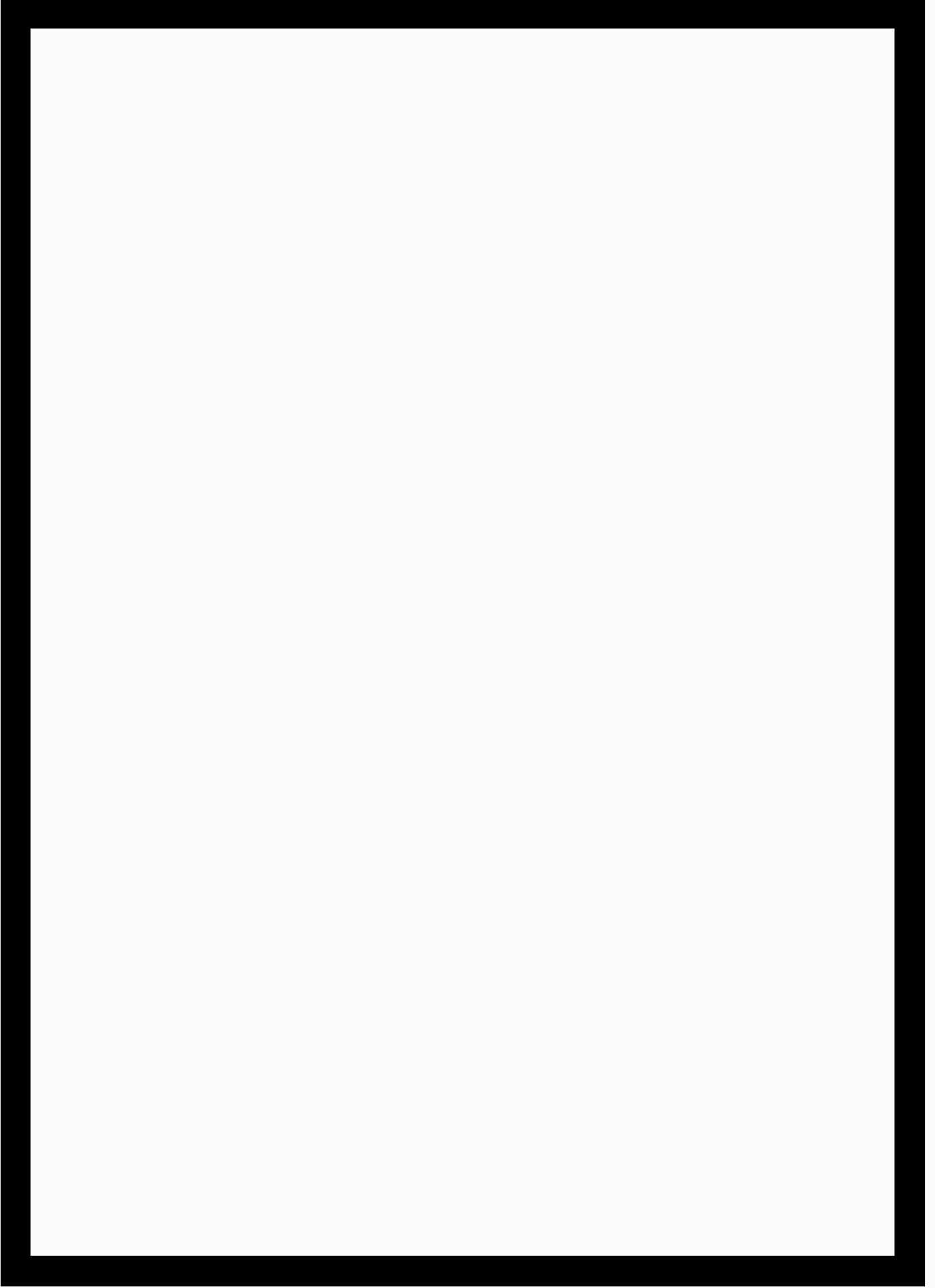
# MANDALAS

Mandala is a Sanskrit word that means circle and is a symbol that is a part of spiritual and religious practices in Hinduism and Buddhism. It is a set of designs in a circular pattern like pictured below. The circle is a representation of wholeness and unity and creating within a circular pattern helps to bring a sense of calmness. Drawing a mandala can be a practice in mindfulness meditation as well as a calming practice when anxiety or other emotions get overwhelming. The mandalas below are examples of what they can look like. Feel free to try to recreate one of these or design a new one. When creating a mandala, start with a circle in the middle of your paper and draw repeating geometric patterns around it layer by layer. It is common to make petal, leaf, or triangle shapes and fill in those shapes with more geometric patterns. Have fun with it and challenge yourself to try different designs as you go!





# Mandalas



# PROTECTIVE CONTAINER

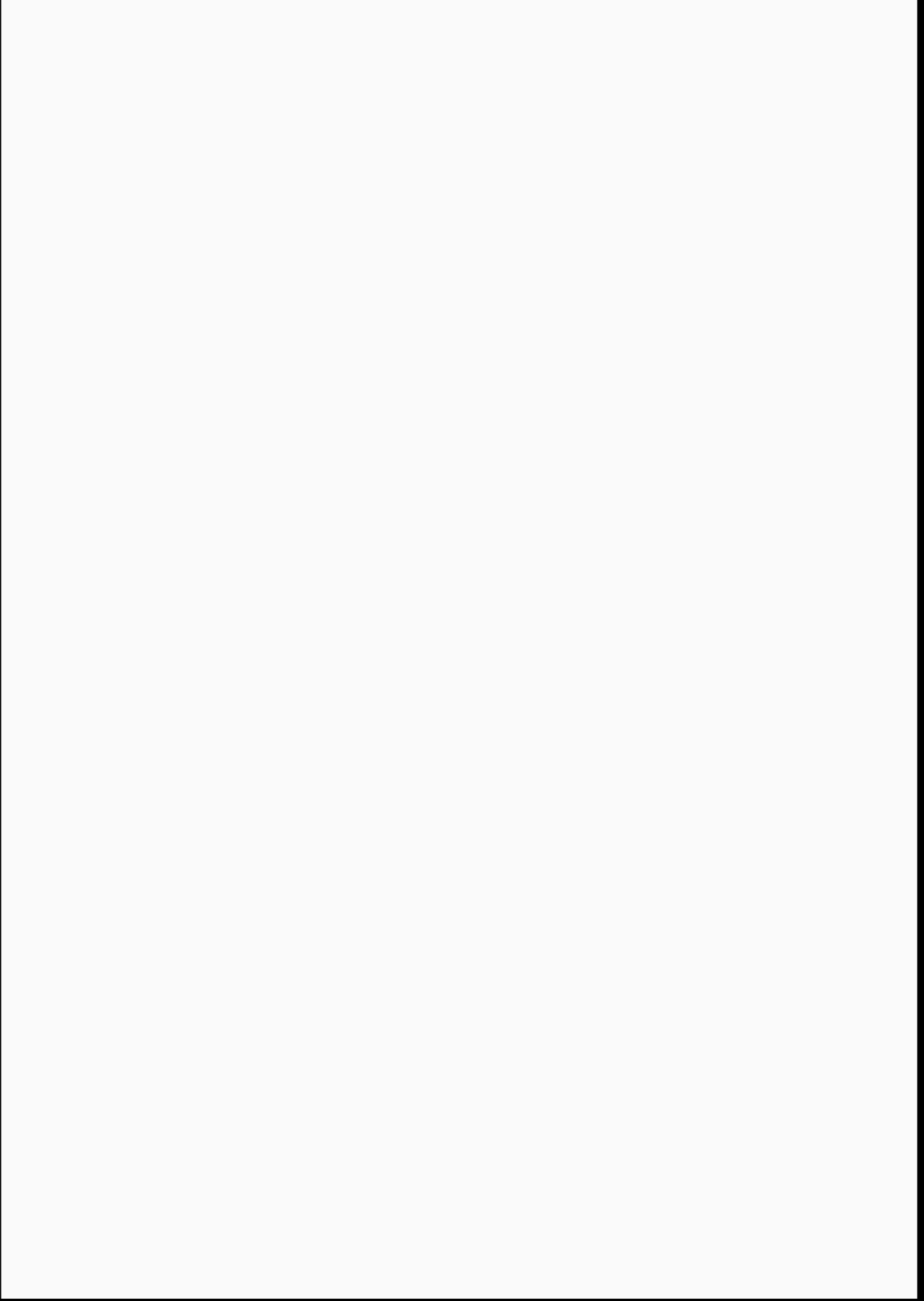
When negative feelings or thoughts become overwhelming or when we are unprepared to deal with them, it can lead to harmful behavior or destructive thoughts. One strategy for guarding against this is called containment, which is the ability to store overwhelming information, images, or feelings for exploration at a later date when they will no longer cause you high levels of distress or trigger harmful behaviors. This art directive is to help you create an image of the container to temporarily store the intrusive thoughts and feelings.

This container is only meant to temporarily store these emotions because at some point they have to be confronted in order to experience healing. If we try to continually stuff our pain and hurt down it will come up in unexpected ways and during unexpected times. The goal isn't to hide the emotions or to never explore them, but it is to store them until we have better coping mechanisms, are in a better mental space, or are in a safer environment to explore them.

Before you start drawing, spend some time considering the features that you want your container to be. Imagine its shape, how it works, and where it is located. Some examples are a chained trunk located under the sea, a locked room at the end of a long corridor, or a filing cabinet in a vault. The container should be able to be securely closed but also re-opened by you when you are ready,

When you are ready you can draw your container and the surrounding location that it is in. After it is complete, spend some time imagining what the process of putting a thought, emotion, or memory in it would look like. Imagine how you would get to the container, open it, put a thought or memory in the container, close it, and walk away. You can use this container every time you need one, or you can use this directive every time you have something you need to contain and add another container for each thought, memory, or emotion needing to be addressed later.

Protective Container

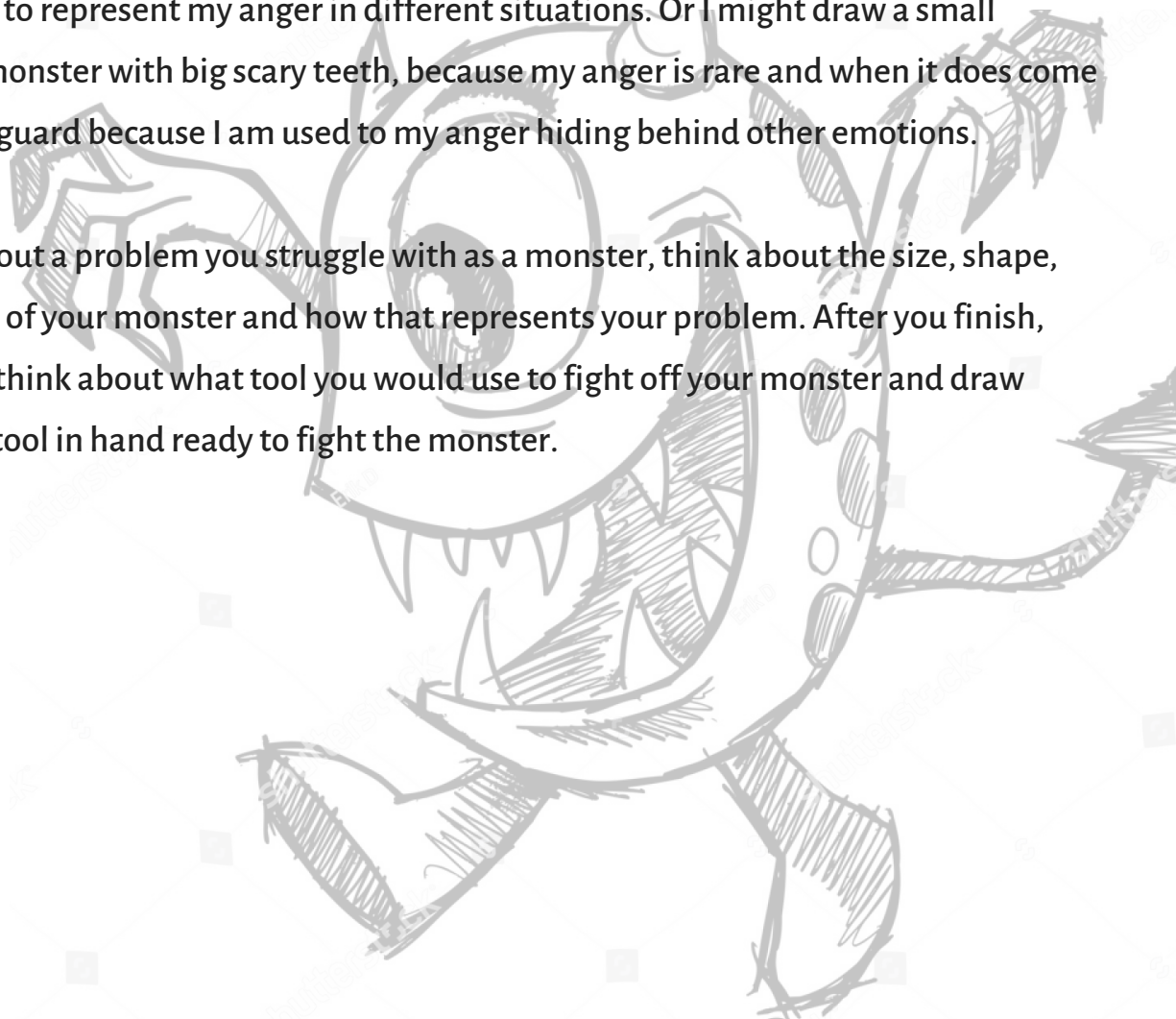


# MONSTERS

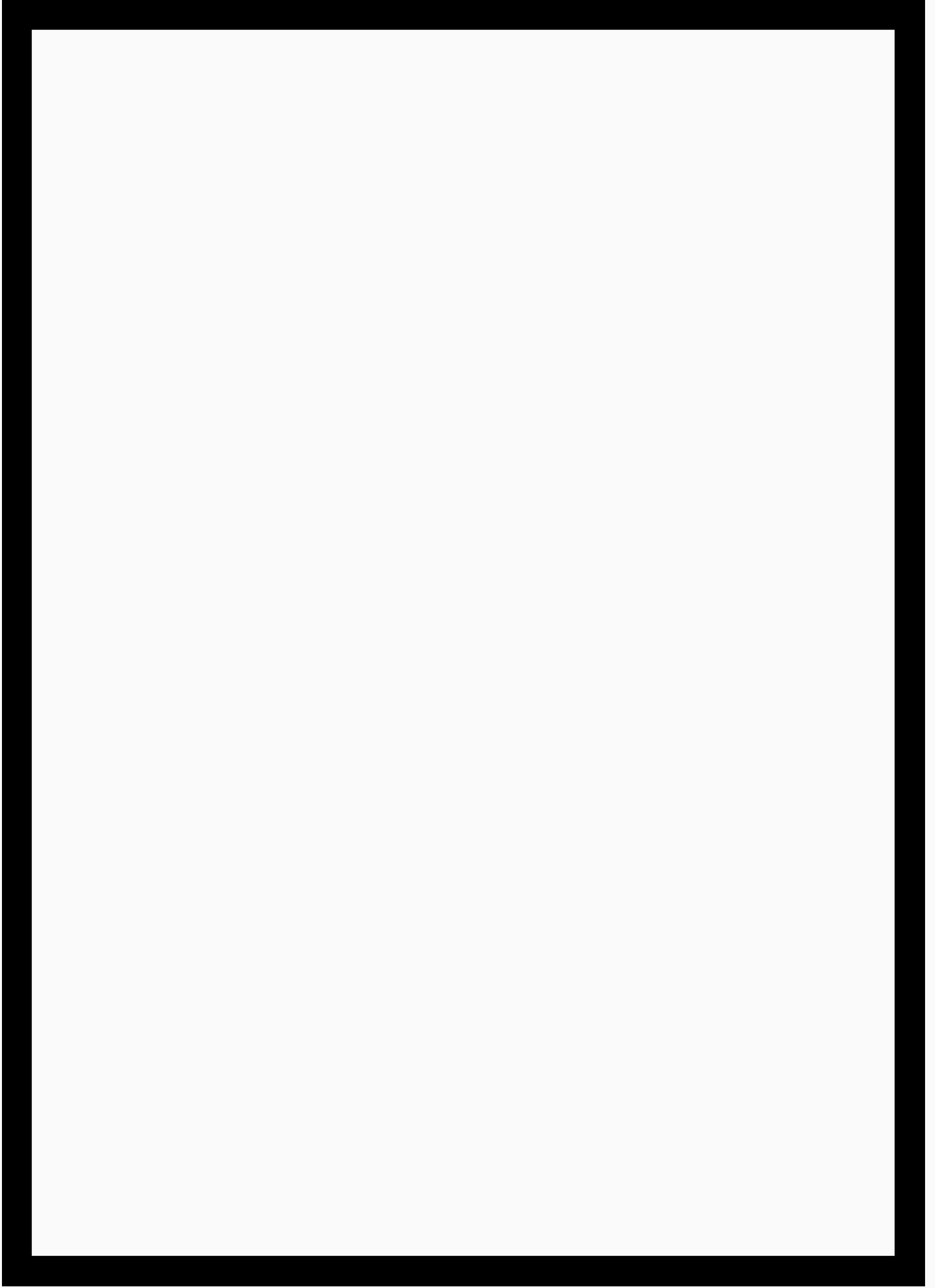
We all face problems in our lives, but oftentimes our problems are different from other people around us. Not only that, but we experience the same problem in different ways than other people. In this directive we are going to think about the characteristics of our problems and turn those characteristics into a monster. This is a chance to think more about our problems and understand them on a deeper level as well as use a little humor in the process.

An example of what this would look like is if I was to say that my problem was anger. I experience anger as something small but always present until it explodes, so I might draw two separate monsters to represent my anger in different situations. Or I might draw a small innocent looking monster with big scary teeth, because my anger is rare and when it does come out it takes me off guard because I am used to my anger hiding behind other emotions.

Take time to draw out a problem you struggle with as a monster, think about the size, shape, and characteristics of your monster and how that represents your problem. After you finish, take some time to think about what tool you would use to fight off your monster and draw yourself with that tool in hand ready to fight the monster.



# Monsters



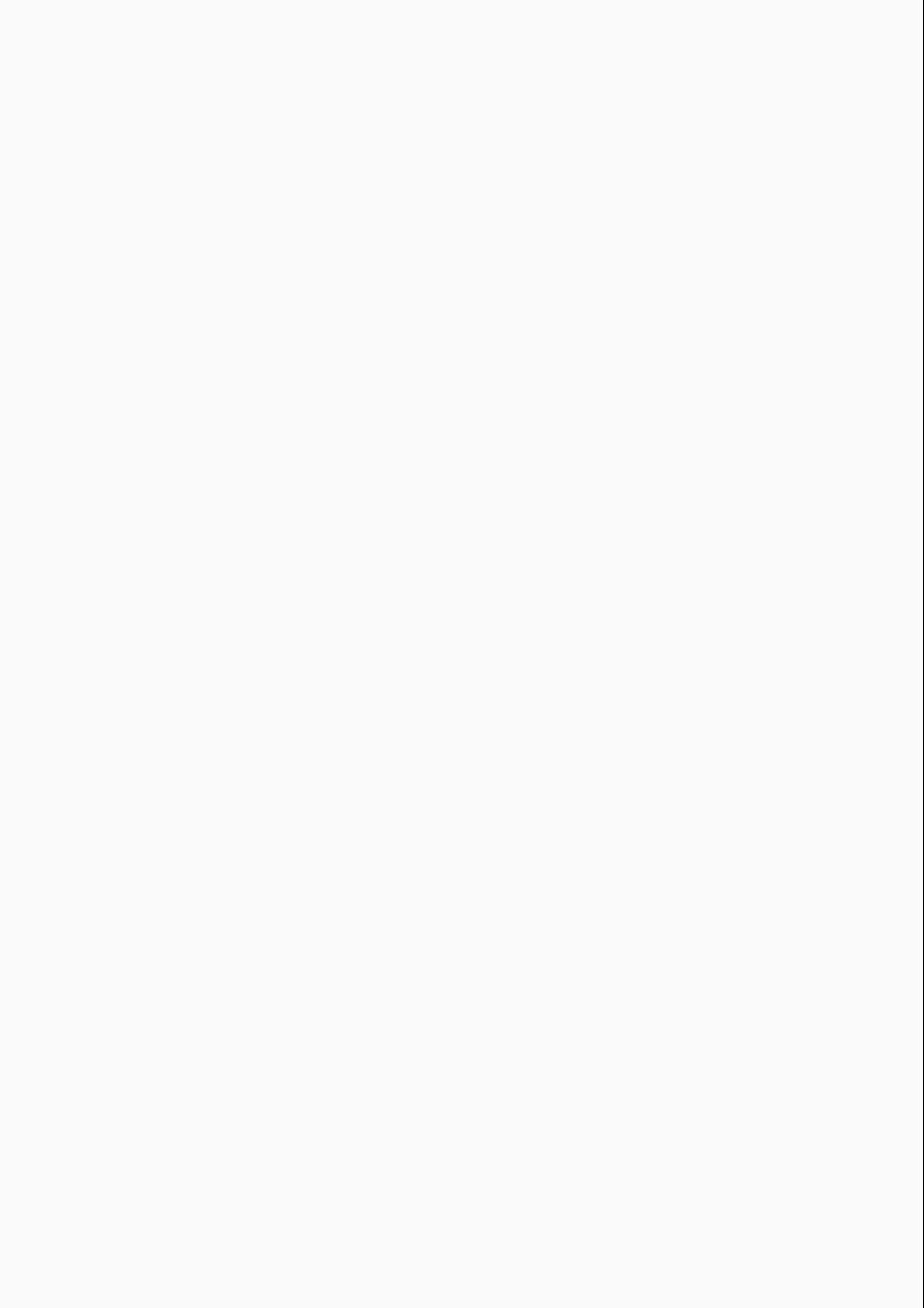
# PAVING THE WAY

After surviving trauma, it is common to feel more vulnerable and fragile. However, despite feeling that way, you still have inner strength and skills that are essential to your healing and restoration of well-being. It is easy to become discouraged when thinking about all of what you have lost due to trauma, but this project is to highlight what you still have inside of you to help you on your journey.

Some examples of strengths that you might have are determination, will, faith, courage, responsibility, creativity, resilience, and open-mindedness. Take time to really think about what your strengths are, acknowledging that the trauma may have lessened the prevalence of some strengths while it heightened others. If you are having trouble thinking of your strengths, you can reach out to anyone who interacts with you often and see if they have any insight. Friends and family can be a great starting point. It is also helpful to think about what things come easy to you, what you enjoy, and what are you doing when time moves fastest!

On your paper you are going to draw a stone path, it can be winding, straight, spiral, or a maze. This is your metaphorical pathway to healing. In each of the stones in your path write out one of your strengths that will help you on your journey. After you have listed all of the strengths you can think of, take time to fill in the other stones with the other people, truths, or supports that will help you to heal. After you have filled the stones with words, take some time to draw a landscape around the stones. Think about what the landscape looks like at the beginning of your healing journey versus what it would look like when you are healed.

After you have completed your artwork, you can refer to it when you are feeling stuck or frustrated on your healing path. It can remind you of the strength and support that you have around you and help you identify what you need to utilize in order to continue on your journey of healing.



Written and Designed  
by Shalom Parker



# Sharing Your Art

You have completed this zine/workbook on art for healing! You can come back to these exercises anytime you want and repeat what works best for you. If you want to share your art, we would love to see it and engage in correspondence with you!

Send it to us at:

Chicago Torture Justice Center  
Attn: Shalom Parker  
6337 S Woodlawn Ave  
Chicago, IL 60637

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We would like to thank the following resources and people who helped inform this zine/workbook:

- Managing Traumatic Stress Through Art, written by Barry M. Cohen, Mary-Michola Barnes, and Anita B. Rankin
- Grieving is Healing: Reflections and Practices for Politicized Grief, written and curated by Annabeth Roeschley, designed and illustrated by Peregrine Bermas