Positive self-esteem is based on facts and truths, achievements and competencies. It is the single most important psychological skill we can develop in order to thrive in society. Without self-esteem, kids doubt themselves, cave in to peer pressure, feel worthless and inferior, and may turn to drugs or alcohol as a crutch. With self-esteem, kids feel secure inside themselves, are more willing to take positive risks, are more likely to take responsibility for their actions, can cope with life’s changes and challenges, and are resilient in the face of rejection, disappointment, failure, and defeat.

Self-esteem isn’t something we’re born with. It’s something we learn, which means it can be taught.

This Teacher’s Guide is a step-by-step curriculum for use in upper elementary through middle school. It is meant to be used with the student book, Stick Up for Yourself! Every Kid’s Guide to Personal Power and Positive Self-Esteem. Together the two books provide a complete course for kids on three important lifeskills: building self-esteem, becoming more self-aware, and being assertive in positive, meaningful ways.

Look inside for:
• easy-to-follow instructions for ten consecutive sessions
• clearly defined learner outcomes
• tips on preparing for each session
• dozens of experiential activities
• additional activities and resources
• reproducible handout masters for students and parents
• evaluation tools
• and more

Created for the classroom, this course can also be used in other group settings, including counseling groups, after-school programs, youth groups, clubs, and community programs—anywhere children and youth need help becoming their best selves.

INCLUDES 14 REPRODUCIBLE HANDOUT MASTERS

Gershen Kaufman, Ph.D., is Professor Emeritus in Psychology at Michigan State University and the author of several books. Lev Raphael, Ph.D., is a prize-winning author of dozens of novels and short stories. Pamela Espeland has authored and coauthored many books for children and adults. Gershen, Lev, and Pamela are the authors of Stick Up for Yourself! Every Kid’s Guide to Personal Power and Positive Self-Esteem.
A TEACHER’S GUIDE TO

STICK UP FOR YOURSELF!

EVERY KID’S GUIDE TO PERSONAL POWER
AND POSITIVE SELF-ESTEEM

A 10-PART COURSE IN SELF-ESTEEM
AND ASSERTIVENESS FOR KIDS

Gershen Kaufman, Ph.D., Lev Raphael, Ph.D.,
and Pamela Espeland

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# CONTENTS

List of Reproducible Pages ................................................................. iv

**Introduction** .................................................................................. 1
  What Is Self-Esteem and Why Should We Teach It? ......................... 1
  About This Book ........................................................................... 2
  About the Sessions ....................................................................... 3
  General Guidelines ...................................................................... 4
  Your Role as Teacher .................................................................... 4
  Your Role as Discussion Leader .................................................... 5
  Child Protection Laws ................................................................... 6
  About the Evaluations .................................................................. 6
  Getting Support for Yourself .......................................................... 7

**Getting Ready** .................................................................................. 8
  Scheduling the Sessions ................................................................. 8
  Time Requirements ....................................................................... 8
  Informing and Involving Parents and Caregivers .......................... 8
  Preparing the Room ...................................................................... 9
  Group Discussion Guidelines .......................................................... 9
  Relating Activities to Your Group .................................................. 10
  Using the “Get Personal” Activities ................................................. 10
  Before the First Session .................................................................. 11

**The Sessions** ................................................................................... 15
  1: What Does It Mean to Stick Up for Yourself? .......................... 16
  2: You Are Responsible for Your Behavior and Feelings ............. 23
  3: Making Choices ....................................................................... 36
  4: Naming Your Feelings ............................................................... 44
  5: Claiming Your Feelings ............................................................. 53
  6: Naming and Claiming Your Dreams ......................................... 64
  7: Naming and Claiming Your Needs ............................................ 76
  8: Getting and Using Power ........................................................... 86
  9: Building Self-Esteem ................................................................. 94
  10: Sticking Up for Yourself from Now On................................. 105

**Additional Activities Across the Curriculum** .................................. 116

**Resources** ..................................................................................... 119

**About the Authors** ......................................................................... 121

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LIST OF REPRODUCIBLE PAGES

Letter to Parents and Caregivers ................................................................. 12
Session Topics and Reading Assignments ................................................. 13
Group Discussion Guidelines ................................................................. 22
Questions for Role Play .......................................................... 34
How to Keep a Happiness List ............................................................... 35
Talk Things Over with Yourself (Talk About Feelings) ......................... 63
Talk Things Over with Yourself (Talk About Dreams) .......................... 74
How to Keep an I-Did-It List ................................................................. 75
Seven Needs ................................................................................. 84
Talk Things Over with Yourself (Talk About Needs) ......................... 85
Six Good Things to Do for Yourself ..................................................... 104
Role-Playing Scenarios ............................................................. 113
Student’s Course Evaluation ............................................................. 114
Parent’s/Caregiver’s Course Evaluation ............................................. 115
WHAT IS SELF-ESTEEM AND WHY SHOULD WE TEACH IT? 

Positive self-esteem is the single most important psychological skill we can develop in order to thrive in society. Having self-esteem means being proud of ourselves and experiencing that pride from within. Without self-esteem, kids doubt themselves, cave in to peer pressure, feel worthless or inferior, and may turn to drugs or alcohol as a crutch. With self-esteem, kids feel secure inside themselves, are more willing to take positive risks, are more likely to take responsibility for their actions, can cope with life’s changes and challenges, and are resilient in the face of rejection, disappointment, failure, and defeat.

Self-esteem is *not* conceit, it’s *not* arrogance, and it’s *not* superiority. Unfortunately, it’s often confused with all three (and also with narcissism, egotism, and disrespect), which has contributed to a “self-esteem backlash.” You’ve probably seen the articles and heard the assertions that too much self-esteem is bad for kids. Nothing could be further from the truth. Indiscriminate praise, flattery, social promotion, and falsely inflated self-worth are bad for kids, but those aren’t what self-esteem is about. Self-esteem is based on facts and truths, achievements and competencies. The more self-esteem kids have, and the stronger it is, the better equipped they are to make their way in the world.

Conceit, arrogance, and superiority aren’t the result of genuine pride. They are the result of contempt for others. Pride grows out of enjoying ourselves, our accomplishments, our skills and abilities. It’s not about diminishing anyone else.

Contempt often masquerades as pride, but it’s a false pride. When we’re contemptuous of others, we perceive them as being beneath us. Secretly, however, we feel inferior to others. Contempt allows us to rise above those feelings of inferiority temporarily, but in order to keep feeling this way, we must continually find someone else to feel superior to—someone else we can put down in order to stay on top.

We believe that contempt is a root cause of two great problems facing our schools (and our world) today: bullying and violence. Bullies who taunt, tease, and harass others aren’t kids with positive self-esteem and genuine pride in themselves. They are kids who lack social skills and empathy and may have other serious problems, including parents or older siblings who bully them, deep-seated anger, jealousy of other people’s success, and loneliness. In order to bully others, you must believe that their feelings, wants, and needs don’t matter. You must feel contempt for them.
When contempt combines with feelings of powerlessness and shame, this may (and often does) escalate into violence. We’ve seen this in the school shootings that have shocked us so profoundly in recent years. The children and teens who wounded and killed their classmates and teachers weren’t kids with positive self-esteem and genuine pride in themselves. Some were bullied, tormented, and humiliated by their peers; some were rejected, excluded, and ignored. For reasons we may never fully understand, these kids developed absolute contempt for others, coupled with a desire for vengeance. It wasn’t just that other people’s feelings, wants, and needs didn’t matter. Their lives didn’t matter.

Self-esteem isn’t the culprit here. Rather, the lack of positive self-esteem may lead some kids to take inappropriate, hurtful, even desperate actions. When we help kids build self-esteem, we’re not teaching them to diminish others, and we’re certainly not teaching them to be contemptuous. We’re teaching them to take pride in themselves, feel good about themselves when they do the right thing (and own responsibility when they don’t), celebrate their achievements (both tangible and intangible), know what they stand for (and what they won’t stand for), and strive to be their best inside and out. When kids have a solid grasp of their feelings and needs, when they trust their emotions and perceptions, when they have a realistic sense of their capabilities, and when they have personal power—they feel secure and confident inside themselves—there’s no need to put other people down.

Self-esteem isn’t something we’re born with. It’s something we learn, which means it can be taught. We believe that all children should be taught the skills of personal power and positive self-esteem at home and in the classroom, right along with reading, writing, and arithmetic. All of these “basics” work hand-in-hand.

**ABOUT THIS BOOK**

*A Teacher’s Guide to Stick Up for Yourself!* helps children and youth in grades 3–7 build self-esteem, become more self-aware, and develop and practice assertiveness skills. It was designed for the classroom, but it can also be used in other group settings, including counseling groups, after-school programs, youth groups, clubs, and community programs.

It is intended to be used with the student book, *Stick Up for Yourself! Every Kid’s Guide to Personal Power and Positive Self-Esteem*. Students are asked to read portions of that book before and/or during each session, so you’ll want to have several copies on hand if at all possible. Ideally, each student will have his or her own copy.
The student book is based on a program originally developed for adults. Called “Affect and Self-Esteem,” it is currently offered as an undergraduate course in the Psychology Department at Michigan State University. For *Stick Up for Yourself!,* we adapted the course materials for ages 8–12. By reading the book and doing the “Get Personal” writing exercises, children can learn essential self-esteem concepts on their own. That learning becomes especially powerful in a classroom or group setting, where children benefit from the guidance of a caring adult leader and the opportunity to explore the concepts more fully in activities and discussions.

*A Teacher’s Guide* includes clear and complete instructions for ten consecutive sessions. Each session is presented in a logically organized, step-by-step way. The sessions are scripted so you can literally read many parts aloud, if you like. Our goal was to create a guide that would be welcoming and easy to use for any classroom teacher or adult group leader, beginning or experienced.

*A Teacher’s Guide* also includes suggestions for additional curriculum-related activities and a list of resources.

**ABOUT THE SESSIONS**

The sessions are:

1. What Does It Mean to Stick Up for Yourself?
2. You Are Responsible for Your Behavior and Feelings
3. Making Choices
4. Naming Your Feelings
5. Claiming Your Feelings
6. Naming and Claiming Your Dreams
7. Naming and Claiming Your Needs
8. Getting and Using Power
9. Building Self-Esteem
10. Sticking Up for Yourself from Now On

Each session includes the following parts:

- **Overview:** Introduces and briefly describes the session topic(s).
- **Learner Outcomes:** States the purpose of the session and what your students should be able to do after participating in the session.
• **Materials:** Lists all of the materials (handouts, writing materials, etc.) you and your students will need for the session.

• **Agenda:** Gives you an at-a-glance plan for the entire session.

• **Activities:** Guides you step-by-step through the session, from introduction through closing. Each activity relates to one or more of the learner outcomes.

**GENERAL GUIDELINES**

1. Familiarize yourself with the entire course before you lead the first session. Read this introduction and “Getting Ready” (pages 8–13) first, then read through all ten sessions and “Additional Activities Across the Curriculum” (pages 116–118). Depending on how much time you have before the course begins, you may want to consult one or more of the resources listed on pages 119–120.

2. Give yourself time to prepare for each session. Make sure you have all the materials you need, including enough copies of any handout(s) used in the session.

3. Make use of the generous margins in this guide. They’re here for a reason: to give you plenty of space to jot down notes, observations, personal experiences, additional questions, ideas, reactions, and anything else that comes to mind. We hope you’ll customize this guide and make it your own.

4. Keep parents informed about what you’re doing in the course. Invite their questions before, during, and after. See “Informing and Involving Parents and Caregivers” (pages 8–9).

5. Remember that as a caring, concerned adult, you’re in a perfect position to help students build personal power and positive self-esteem. Treat them with respect. Encourage them to do their best—without expecting perfection. Allow them to make mistakes and take positive risks. Give them opportunities to make choices and decisions. Invite them to share their feelings, needs, and future dreams. Be someone they trust and can talk to about things that matter to them.

**YOUR ROLE AS TEACHER**

In this course, the teaching role may be somewhat different than what you’re used to. You’ll structure the activities and organize the physical setting, just as you do in other teaching situations. But the students, in a sense, will determine the content. Their life experiences will form the basis for discussion.
For this reason, you may feel somewhat apprehensive about your ability to respond and to teach. You may not feel the same self-assurance you have in other teaching situations. Two things may help you:

1. being willing to serve as a model for your students, and  
2. being familiar with the tools presented in the course.

We have found that teachers who are willing to serve as models by sharing their own experiences and feelings are more effective as facilitators. Plus they come away from the course feeling that something significant has happened for everyone, including themselves.

Modeling means letting students see that you, too, have situations in your life that require you to sort through your feelings, figure out which needs are important to meet at the time, and so on. It doesn’t necessarily mean sharing in every activity. But whenever you see an opportunity to help students understand by sharing a personal experience or feeling, do it.

The tools presented in the course include the Happiness List (pages 30–32), the I-Did-It List (pages 70–72), and the methods for talking things over with yourself (pages 58–59, 69–70, and 81–82). Practice using the tools yourself so you’re able to model them for students. If you start writing your own Happiness List and I-Did-It List each day, you’ll have examples to share with students when those tools are introduced.

YOUR ROLE AS DISCUSSION LEADER .........................................................

1. As teacher, you provide the structure. Be clear about the purpose of each session, and let the students know that it’s your role to keep the session moving along.

2. It’s important to try to give everyone who wants to share an opportunity to do so. But sometimes you’ll need to move on before a student has said everything he or she wants to. When this happens, say “I’ll come back to you if there’s time.”

3. Sometimes students will want to share their thoughts and feelings; sometimes they won’t. Let them know it’s okay to say “I pass.” At the same time, encourage students to share whenever they feel comfortable doing so, because sharing allows the group to offer feedback and support. Point out that we also learn a lot by listening.

4. Model support and encouragement when students are talking. Don’t judge what they say. Sometimes you may want to point out choices they have, but never tell them which choice they should make or what they should think. Notice even small ways students are learning and growing, and comment favorably on them.

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5. Try not to talk too much; this group is for the students, and you want them to participate. When you have something to say, keep it short and to the point, then reinvolve the students in the discussion.

6. Ask open-ended questions, not those that can be answered with a yes or no. For example, you might ask “How would you feel if...?” rather than “Would you be upset if...?”

7. If you want to bring up a personal experience without identifying it as yours, you can begin by saying “I have a friend who...”

8. If someone monopolizes the discussion, gently direct attention away from him or her. You might say “Thank you for sharing. Now let’s hear what other group members are thinking.”

9. Find ways to involve everyone. If you have a student who isn’t ready to participate in discussions, find another role for him or her. Let the student hand out papers or arrange chairs, or ask the student to help you remember to do something.

10. It helps to see life—yours and your students’—as a journey. What you see and hear and learn along the way is amazing. If you can communicate that to students, it may help them accept change as a natural, desirable process.

**CHILD PROTECTION LAWS.**

Confidentiality is important to the success of this course, but there are certain things you may hear or observe that you must report for the protection of the child and any others involved.

Before beginning the course, be absolutely clear that you know what you’re legally required to report and what the guidelines for reporting are. These reporting requirements usually fall under the category of child protection legislation.

Most school districts and youth organizations have developed guidelines to conform to child protection laws. Learn what those guidelines are and who you should report to if the need arises.

**ABOUT THE EVALUATIONS.**

It’s likely that you’ll teach this course more than once, and you’ll want to improve each time you teach it. Evaluations provide valuable feedback you can use to strengthen the course and your teaching.

This book includes two formal evaluations: one for students and one for parents (see pages 114 and 115). You might use information from completed evaluations to follow up after the course and plan future courses.
Students also have the opportunity to do a self-evaluation. During the first session, they are asked to write about particular situations for which they would like to learn how to stick up for themselves. During the final session, they are asked to read what they wrote during the first session and decide for themselves if they reached their goal(s). This helps students integrate their experience and realize what they have accomplished in the course.

**GETTING SUPPORT FOR YOURSELF.............................................**

In a course such as this, where feelings are expressed openly, you can’t always anticipate what a session will be like or what needs may be revealed. Things may happen that indicate the need for follow-up, but you might not be sure how to proceed. For example, you may suspect that a child is showing signs of depression, but you’re not sure if your hunch is accurate. Or you may notice that one student seems to have a great deal of anxiety. Or you may wonder, based on what a student shares in the group, whether there’s a need for counseling or further discussion. Or you may not know what to do about a student who tends to be disruptive, but only in small-group settings. Or you may feel overwhelmed or drained by a particularly emotional session.

Think of someone you can talk to—a school counselor, the school psychologist, another teacher who has led similar classes, or another colleague you trust and respect. Ask if he or she is available to help you debrief after sessions when you feel the need. You can talk about what went on, but you’ll want to respect the group’s confidentiality, just as you expect the students to do.

For more information about some of the principles presented in this course, you may want to read *Dynamics of Power: Fighting Shame and Building Self-Esteem* by Gershen Kaufman and Lev Raphael. See page 120.
SCHEDULING THE SESSIONS

If possible, schedule the sessions for a time when you can keep outside interruptions to a minimum. For example, try to avoid holding the sessions during a period of the day when class members are regularly called out of the room for various reasons. It’s frustrating to get students involved and interested only to be distracted. Especially when feelings are being shared, it’s disruptive to have people coming in and out who aren’t part of the group and aren’t aware of the discussion guidelines.

TIME REQUIREMENTS

Each session should take about 30–45 minutes from start to finish. The actual time required will depend on the amount of discussion that takes place during the activities.

As you teach the course for the first time, you may want to keep track of how long each session takes so you have this information when you teach the course again.

INFORMING AND INVOLVING PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

At least one week before the course begins, send home a letter to parents and caregivers describing the course and telling them when it will start. A sample letter is found on page 12. You may copy and send this letter or use it as a starting point for your own letter. Depending on your situation, you may want to ask parents/caregivers for their support, and you may need to get their written permission for children to take the course.

Encourage parents/caregivers to read the student book, *Stick Up for Yourself! Every Kid’s Guide to Personal Power and Positive Self-Esteem*. Tell students that their parents/caregivers may ask to borrow the book, and suggest that they take it home with them. If parents/caregivers want to look at the book before the course begins, arrange for them to see a copy.
Invite parents/caregivers to call you with any questions they have before, during, or after the course. Give them a phone number where they can reach you, and let them know the best times to call.

If you’re teaching a group that is new to you, you may want to ask parents/caregivers if there’s anything they would like you to know about their children before the class begins.

It’s a good idea to stay in touch with parents/caregivers during the course. Consider sending home brief notes about how the course is progressing, or copying parents on handouts you use with the students. At the end of the course, invite feedback and comments from parents/caregivers by sending them an evaluation form (page 115).

**PREPARING THE ROOM**

The physical setting is important to the success of the course. Try to organize the room so you can, if possible, sit in a circle for group discussions. Allow space between small groups, but keep it organized so you’re able to monitor what’s going on in all of the groups.

Think about how you might signal the beginning of the session. Turning the lights off and on is one way to get your students’ attention. You might play a few moments of relaxing music to let them know it’s time to begin. Whatever you choose, you want it to be a pleasant way to shift gears.

**GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDELINES**

You may already have guidelines in place for class or group discussions. If so, make sure that everyone understands them and agrees with them. For the purposes of this course, your guidelines should include the following:

1. **What is said in the group stays in the group.**

2. **We are polite and respectful to each other. We don’t use put-downs. We want everyone in the group to feel valued and accepted.**

3. **We listen to each other. When someone is talking, we look at the person and pay attention. We don’t think about what we’re going to say when it’s our turn.**

*See “Child Protection Laws,” page 6.*
4. Everyone is welcome to share their thoughts and feelings. But no one has to share. It’s okay to say “I pass” if you don’t want to share.

5. There are no right or wrong answers.

### RELATING ACTIVITIES TO YOUR GROUP

Good teachers are flexible and responsive, and the success of this course doesn’t depend on teaching it to the letter. As you plan for each session, think about ways you might adapt the activities to your students’ needs and relate the examples to their interests. You may decide to modify an activity or example, to ask additional questions or substitute new questions. You may choose to replace or skip some of the activities. Keep the learner outcomes in mind when making changes to the sessions; let them guide your planning.

Many of the activities revolve around students’ discussion of their own life experiences. This has a side benefit of automatically relating the course to the community in which they live. If students can’t relate to an activity, they won’t be able to use it as a springboard, and the discussion may fall flat. Often a minor change is all that’s needed to help them see the connection between the activity and their lives. Take time to read through all the activities for a session before you conduct the session. If you feel that a particular activity isn’t relevant to your students and their community, change it so it is.

### USING THE “GET PERSONAL” ACTIVITIES

The student book includes several writing activities titled “Get Personal.” (For examples, see Stick Up for Yourself! pages 26, 41, 46, 50, etc.) You might use these as optional activities during the course, or assign them when assigning students’ reading for each session. Either way, make it clear that students’ “Get Personal” writing will remain personal and confidential. Emphasize that they never have to share it with anyone (including you) unless they choose to.

Encourage students to think of the “Get Personal” activities as things they can do now and may want to do again, after the course is finished. Point out that their ideas and feelings will be changing along the way, and they may find they have new things to write about.

At a minimum, ask students to read the tips at the bottom of page 6 in Stick Up for Yourself! These briefly explain why the “Get Personal” activities are important and how to make the most of them.
BEFORE THE FIRST SESSION

A week before the course begins:

1. Tell students that next week you’ll be starting a new course that will help them build self-esteem and be more assertive. Keep this announcement brief; explain that students will learn more once the course begins. Say that they’ll need to bring a notebook to the first session, but that’s all the preparing they’ll have to do.

2. Send home a letter to parents and caregivers announcing the course. See “Informing and Involving Parents and Caregivers” (pages 8–9). You may want to attach a copy of “Session Topics and Reading Assignments” (page 13).

A day or two before the course begins:

1. Remind students that the course will start on (date), and ask them to be sure to bring a notebook to the first session.

2. Make copies of the “Session Topics and Reading Assignments” handout (page 13) and give one to each student (or wait until the first session to do this). You may want to add dates or other information about location and times. If students will be sharing copies of Stick Up for Yourself! Every Kid’s Guide to Personal Power and Positive Self-Esteem, post a copy of the handout on the reading table.
Dear Parents/Caregivers,

I’m writing to tell you about an exciting new course called “Stick Up for Yourself!” that the children and I will be starting soon.

This ten-session course helps kids build self-esteem, become more self-aware, and develop and practice assertiveness skills. It teaches them to be responsible for their own behavior and feelings. Through readings, activities, and discussions, kids learn how to make good choices, get to know themselves better, handle strong feelings (like anger and jealousy), and form more positive relationships with the people in their lives (including you).

I want to make it very clear that this course does not teach kids to be conceited, arrogant, or disrespectful. That’s not what self-esteem is about. Instead, it’s about having the skills and strength to resist negative peer pressure, take positive risks, cope with life’s changes and challenges, and feel proud of one’s own accomplishments and abilities. We all need self-esteem to survive and thrive in today’s world…and the earlier we learn it, the better.

You may want to read the book your child will be reading during the course. I encourage you to do so. It’s called Stick Up for Yourself! Every Kid’s Guide to Personal Power and Self-Esteem. Ask your child if you can borrow his or her copy. Or contact me and I’ll arrange to get you a loaner copy right away.

This course can be a wonderful growing experience for your child. You may notice that he or she is “trying on” new behaviors and ways of relating to you or others in the family. Sometimes new behaviors are awkward; change takes time. You may see a new behavior one day and wonder where it went the next. When this happens, it might help to think about those times in our adult lives when we try to make changes. Changing is often slow for us, too.

Please feel free to call me with any questions you have before, during, or after the course.

Yours sincerely,

________________________________________

Telephone: ________________________________

Best times to reach me are: ____________________

The course begins on: ________________________

P.S. Students want their parents to know about the course, but they don’t always want to talk about it while they’re taking it. I suggest you let your child bring it up in discussions with you or your family. Please be patient!
SESSION TOPICS
AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

All readings are from Stick Up for Yourself! Every Kid’s Guide to Personal Power and Positive Self-Esteem.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What Does It Mean to Stick Up for Yourself?</td>
<td>pages 1–4 (through “What You Need to Stick Up for Yourself”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. You Are Responsible for Your Behavior and Feelings</td>
<td>pages 8–15, pages 86–90 (starting with “How to Live Happily Ever After”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Naming Your Feelings</td>
<td>pages 21–45 (through “Talk About Your Feelings”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Claiming Your Feelings</td>
<td>pages 57–71 (starting with “Claim Your Feelings, Future Dreams, and Needs”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Naming and Claiming Your Dreams</td>
<td>pages 45–48 (starting with “Name Your Future Dreams”), pages 57–60 (starting with “Claim Your Feelings, Future Dreams, and Needs”), pages 97–100 (starting with “Keep an I-Did-It List”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Naming and Claiming Your Needs</td>
<td>pages 49–60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Getting and Using Power</td>
<td>pages 72–86 (up to “How to Live Happily Ever After”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Sticking Up for Yourself from Now On</td>
<td>no reading assignment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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