



**A Guide for Deepening a Conversation about
*Life in our Garden: Anthology of Youth***

The CosmoTeenz comic book, *Life in our Garden: Anthology of Youth*, includes five brief stories, primarily for young people, on the topic of mental health. Each story is based on the life experiences of five young women living in three different countries who each have their own encounters with and observations about mental health.

The purpose of this guide is to provide questions of curiosity based on each of the five stories. We hope this will provide another opportunity to deepen your own thinking and lived experience about the mental health challenges of teens and young adults, whether as a young person yourself, or as someone who loves and cares about them.

Story #1: Fatima’s Garden, Fatima Razvi

Fatima’s story introduces the metaphor of a garden to talk about her experience of anxiety; “when I was struggling with anxiety, my world felt overgrown.” She also talks about the tools that helped her “tend to [her] garden,” saying, “trimming down my fears little by little can free my space for new growth.”

Questions:

Fatima uses the metaphor of a garden to explore her mental health.

1. If you were a gardener in training with Fatima, what do you think you have learned that is helpful for your own garden?
2. If you were getting together a group of people important to you, how would you like to cultivate your shared experiences and learnings to encourage new growth?
3. If you notice parts of your garden flourishing and other areas that are not doing so well, what ideas and practices can you use so all of your garden can flourish?
4. What other metaphor might you use to explore your own mental health?
5. What, if anything, in Fatima’s story do you recognize and find helpful?

Fatima talks about inner chaos and bad habits as something she is learning to know, accept, and manage. She does this by: (1) leaning on friends and inviting others to help; (2) focusing on one thing at the time; and (3) loving herself.

6. In which ways do you relate to any of these as ways of trimming down your fears?
7. What other ways have you tried that have been helpful in trimming down your fears?
8. In which ways are you able to support others in managing their fears and chaos?

9. What one thing can you do today that would strengthen your abilities to make good choices for yourself and to help the people around you?

Story #2: Finding Yourself, MableAlexis Jackson

MableAlexis encourages us to tend the garden of our self and relationships. She reminds us that talking with others can help us grow while also remembering that “what works for someone else might not work for you.” And, just as it takes time for flowers to grow and bloom, she reminds us, “don't be afraid to take it slow.”

Questions:

1. What did MableAlexis teach you about learning more about yourself and your relationships?
2. How can you develop both patience and confidence to turn to others when you need them?

Mable Alexis provides some guidance to help us stay mentally and emotionally healthy based on her experiences:

- talk about it, come to yourself, recognize you need guidance
 - let your community talk to you, console you
 - don't be afraid to take things slow
 - what works for someone else might or might not work for you, and both are okay
 - listen, and meet others where they are
 - focus on what makes you happy, deep down
 - you have the power to change how you feel
3. Which, if any, of these pieces of advice do you resonate with?
 4. Which, if any, have you tried, and what did you notice?
 5. What would you add to this list, and why?
 6. Who have you turned to in a time of need, and what difference did that make to you?
 7. Who in your life would be most happy if you opened up more to them?
 8. Who turned to you in a time of their need, and what did you say or do that may have helped them?
 9. Choose someone close to you who you can be extra considerate, kind, and open towards in the next few days.

Story #3: Bigger Than, Johanna Bach Dall

Johanna's story is about lovingly caring for the garden of others when they need it. While her friend was in the psychiatric hospital, Johanna visited her and tended the garden of the familiar... “so this happened in school today” ... to remind her friend she is loved, she is not forgotten, and she is still connected to the world outside of the hospital.

Questions:

Joanna begins her story by describing her uncertainty about how to connect with her friend who was in the hospital.

1. Can you give some examples from your life where you wanted to reach out to someone who was struggling and you were not quite sure how to do it?
2. How did you decide what to do?
3. What was the response?
4. What did you learn from that experience?
5. What things would you possibly be doing differently today?
6. If you were struggling, how do you hope others would respond?
7. How do you let people know you would welcome their kindness and care?

Joanna mustered up the courage to see her friend because an adult encouraged her to just share her normal world with her.

8. Who are the “mentors” in your life that you can go to for advice when you want to help someone and you are not quite sure what to do?
9. If a moment of your time could make a difference to someone who is struggling, what could you offer?
10. Choose someone close to you who you can be extra considerate, kind, and open towards in the next few days.

Story #4: A World of Color, Haruka Suwabe

Gardens are comprised of a dazzling display of colors, and Haruka reminds us that people and their lives are also colorful. She encourages us to not “get lost in a black and white world.” “Color makes the world brighter” and our pursuit of a more colorful world makes us and our relationships healthier.

Questions:

Haruka is using the metaphor of color to describe something about being human.

1. What do you think she is talking about?
2. Can you name various ways that our lives are colorful and add to the richness of being human?

Haruka reminds us that our genetics and our nervous systems affect our lives.

3. How may this knowledge support increased tolerance for differences?
4. What are the experiences in your life where differences have been embraced in ways that enhanced a sense of belonging?
5. What have people said and done to you that made you feel good about your own diverse life?
6. What have you said and done to make others feel good about their diverse lives?

7. What do you notice when people see the world in black and white? What is gained and lost when we view the world in this way?
8. Be a detective like Haruka. Seek out someone who is not like you and learn something new about the person that you don't already know. Together, find a way of celebrating your differences.

Story #5: Power, Ambition, Conversation, Tumelo Victoria Eikaas

In some gardens, there are plants that can overwhelm the rest of the garden. Tumelo spotlights the online world as something that can feel like an invasive plant. "Being online can be an overwhelming experience," that "brings unnecessary division and places walls before actual conversation." Tumelo works on tending this kind of garden through "empathic communication, trailblazing the way for others to stand with me.... Now is a time to hold space for ourselves and others. Navigating mental health is not easy."

Questions:

Tumelo points out that the online world can create unnecessary stress and divisions.

1. What are your experiences with social media and mental health?
2. How has your experience of being online affected you for better and for worse?
3. How do you think being online affected your friends and people you know for better and for worse?
4. How have you used social media in ways that have improved your relationships with others?
5. What can you do if you notice one of your friends posting something that tells you they are having a bad time?
6. If you could change one thing about your life online that would improve your quality of life, what would it be? In the next few days, practice doing just that. Notice how it makes you feel.

Final remarks:

As you reflect on all the stories together, which mostly address our mental and emotional experiences, take a moment to tend to your physical self.

1. When you are feeling connected with yourself, or others, or your environment, what is it that you are experiencing? And where do you feel it in your body?
2. When you are struggling, what emotions are present? What emotions are you experiencing, and where do you feel them in your body?
3. Ask yourself, what do I need most right now? Movement, or stillness?

The book concludes with some reminders:

- Greet each other when you meet, whether online or in person.
- Hold space for yourself and others. Remember, navigating social worlds is not easy.

- Say “Thank you!”
- Lean into conversation.
- The world is complex, so be curious!
- Notice how you can discover a meaningful social and emotional world.

We encourage you to practice these reminders on a daily basis and notice what happens when you do so. Enjoy!

The CosmoTeenz Comic Book is part of the CosmoActivities educational series created by the CMM Institute for Personal and Social Evolution.

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