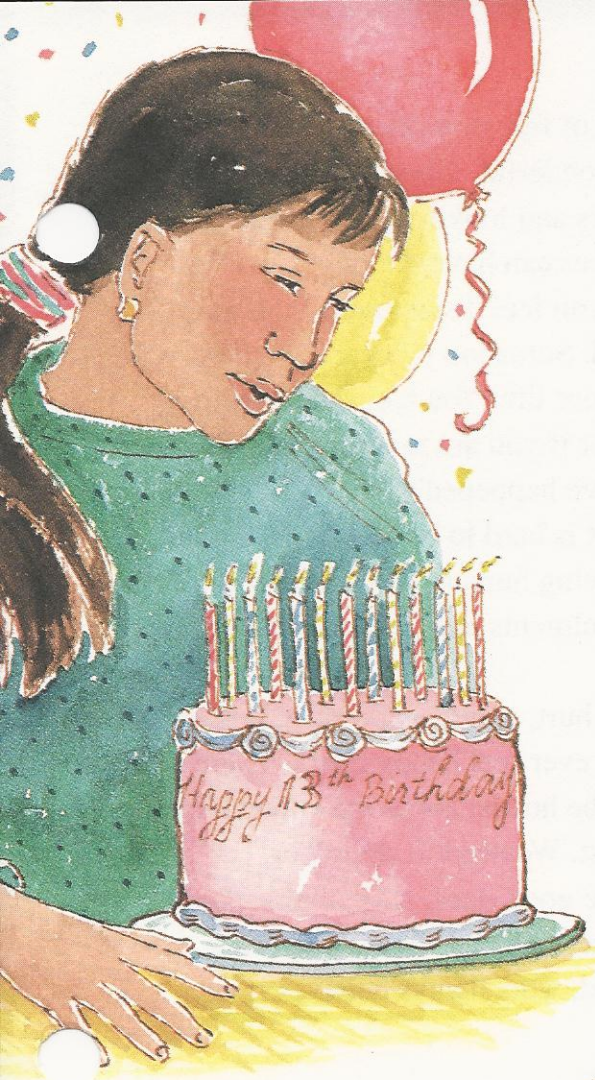
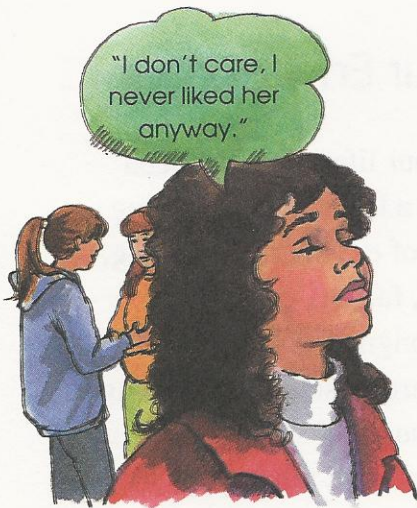


Your Experience in Your Environment

Did you know that at this point in your life you have been alive for over 100 000 hours? That's a lot of living. During these hours you have had thousands of experiences. Eating, sleeping, loving, learning, achieving, failing, celebrating, praying, working, being friends, belonging to a group, being left out, making plans, looking forward to something, being disappointed, being surprised — these are just a few of your life experiences. At various times you have felt happy, sad, lonely, excited, angry, frustrated, jealous, worried, guilty, bored, interested, hopeful, curious, and fearful. You have been very busy becoming the person you are.

All of these experiences are part of you. Among them, however, there are probably some that stand out in your mind because they were either very good or very difficult. A particularly wonderful birthday, an unhappy event in your family, a high mark on a school project, being blamed for something that you didn't do — these are the kinds of experiences that people remember.





We can deny our feelings.



We can blame others for the way we feel.



We can confide in people we trust.

When you have had a lot of fun, or worked hard and achieved a goal, you feel wonderful. Good experiences help people believe in themselves and look forward to the future.

Difficult or sad experiences can have the opposite effect. You fail an important test; you feel disappointed and upset, and wonder if you're stupid. Someone you care about very much is no longer part of your life. You feel sad and angry, and deep inside, you wonder if you are to blame. If you were a better person, would it have happened?

We all have times when it is hard to believe in ourselves. This experience is part of being human, and we have to find ways to cope with disappointments and failures, both small and large.

When we are very upset, hurt, and disappointed, it is often hard to believe that we will ever feel happy again. These are the times when we have to be honest about the way we feel, and talk to someone we trust. We need to share our experiences, and not just the good ones, with others. And above all, through good times and bad times, we need a strong relationship with God, who always believes in us.

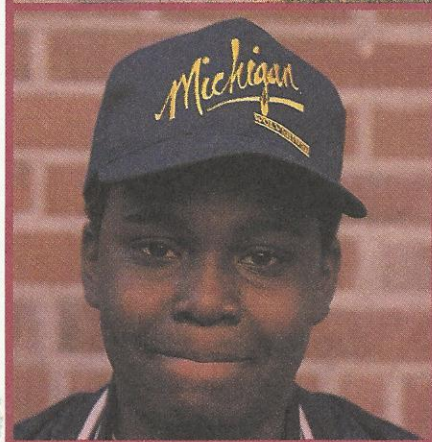
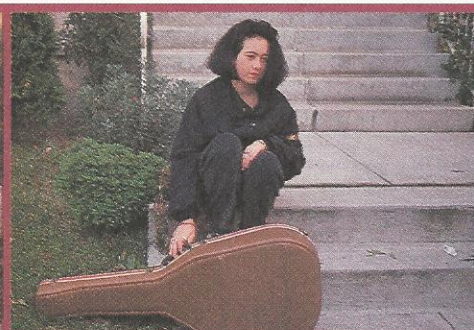
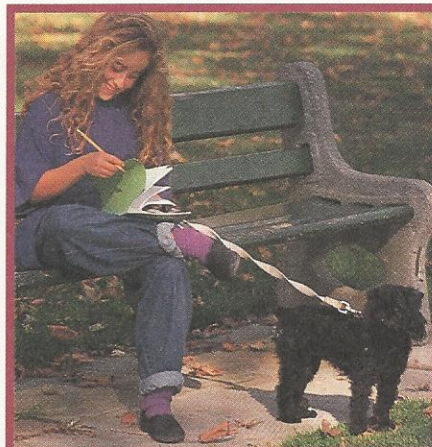
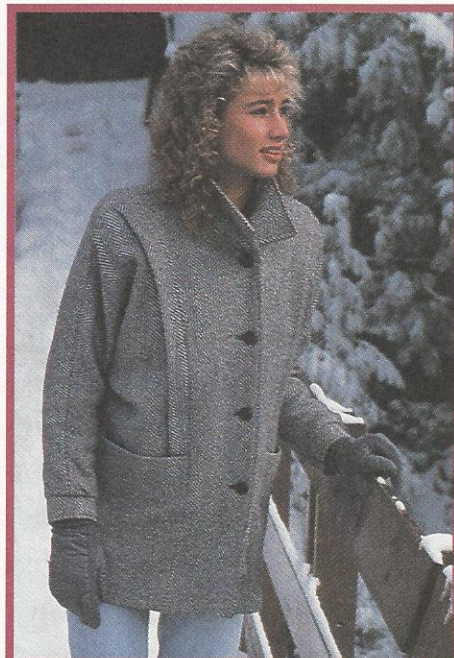
We can turn our attention to other aspects of our lives.



Where Do You Go From Here?

As you think about your heredity and environment, you will discover that there are some aspects of your life over which you have no control. You did not choose your genes or your family. You may wish that you were taller, stronger, or smarter, that your parents were less strict, or that you had different brothers and sisters. Maybe you have hopes of being a famous singer even though you have no ear for music. Everyone daydreams once in a while about being a different person. But spending a lot of time wishing you were someone else doesn't get you very far.

You are meant to be the person that you are, with all your strengths, weaknesses, potential, and limitations. To accept yourself doesn't mean that you are unaware of your faults or spend all your time thinking about yourself. Self-acceptance means saying "yes" to the gift of being yourself, of being this unique person. This is what we mean when we say that God loves each of us. God says "yes" to us in this way.



Many people have contributed to your development as a person. By loving you, being honest with you, guiding you, and supporting you, they have made it possible for you to believe in yourself. There have also been times when people have disappointed you, failed you, and hurt you. They have made it difficult for you to believe in yourself. But important as other people are in your life, you are ultimately responsible for yourself and your growth. It is not a responsibility that you can give to someone else.

When you were a baby, you had little control over your life. With each passing year, you have played a larger and larger role in deciding what kind of person you want to be. The choices you make as you continue to develop will have an impact, not only on your own life, but on the lives of others. For you are part of the physical and social environment. You share the earth with others. You are a family member, a friend, a student in a classroom, and a resident in a neighbourhood. Above all, you are a member of the body of Christ, and are called to be a sign of God's love.

Along with every other person in the world, you have been given the capacity to know, to love, to choose, to act, and to seek what is good. You are also unique. Your personality, your experiences, and your potential are not exactly like anyone else's. There are limitations in your life just as there are in every life. You are not free to be anything you want. But you are free to make wise choices and decisions. You are free to develop the habits of self-honesty and self-discipline that will allow you to fulfill your potential. With God's help you are free to be you.