

**SELF-HELP BOOKLET  
FOR MEN FACING  
CRISIS AND DISPLACEMENT**





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# INTRODUCTION

This booklet is designed for men, like you. It is a booklet that helps you, as a man, to understand some of the thoughts, feelings and emotions you are experiencing in a time of crisis, and how to cope with them. Men in Syria and neighbouring countries often carry financial and psychological burdens since men are recognized as the pillar of every household. Finding a job, getting married and providing for the family are the most important social challenges that society and community expect from men.

The current crisis is affecting everybody on different levels. Many people lost someone dear to them, some others lost also their jobs and houses. Some were forced to move away from their cities or towns. Some others did not move, but are facing violence and uncertainty, and can barely recognize their neighborhoods, so much have they transformed. A lot may also have changed in your life.

Men, like you, are facing these consequences along with other individuals, but because of cultural norms they may be more embarrassed than women and children to share their feelings. Moreover, your sense of responsibility for the family may aggravate your fears and frustrations.

The ongoing crisis and war may affect anyone to some extent, and accidentally some people more than others; therefore some suffer more, as is only normal.

## **Self-Help Booklet for Men in Syria**

International Organization for Migration 2014

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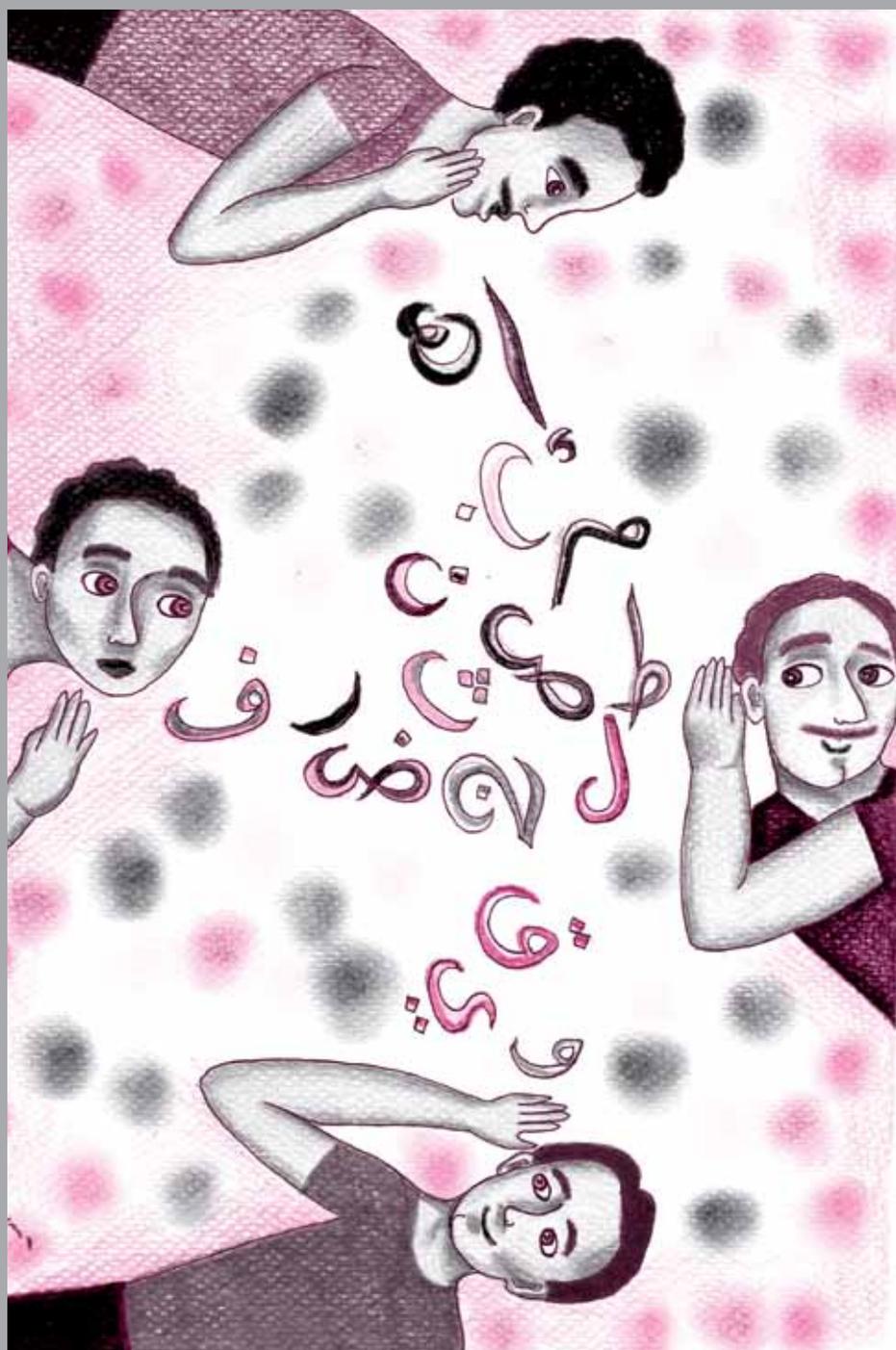
Some men at times of crisis are facing social and psychological distress and experiencing violence. Crises lead to enormous financial, social and emotional difficulties that prevent men from doing things they used to do in their communities, **both in terms of social activities and professional engagements. For these reasons men, like you, can face negative emotions.**







Sometimes during crises, you feel isolated and you don't want to or are too shy to talk about fear, grief, anger or even changes in your character. Subsequently, you think that you alone are having these feelings. It is important that you know that these feelings and reactions are normal and not a sign of weakness. In addition, you may need support from others, as well as time to heal. **Talking to people you love, doing activities with others, spending time outside whenever it's safe and engaging in entertaining activities with others, help you get out your inner solitude and feel better.**





**Feeling angry is a normal reaction to the abnormality of a conflict situation.**

Anger is like fire, it can burn but it can also help you feed others and be warm, it's just a matter of how it is used. It is wise to see anger as a source of energy that you can use to do things and activities, to solve problems and to protect your family. But when the feeling of anger turns to behaviors, it can be destructive to you and to those around you. You often think of anger as a feeling that you cannot control or defeat. **Try to acknowledge that you have the problem and learn how to relax until your feeling of anger is over, then you find that you can control it.**







The experience of losing work is not easy, especially under the harsh living circumstances and family demands of the current period, and this can make you feel insecure and guilty for not being able to protect and take care of your loved ones. If you lost your job due to the crisis, do not underestimate yourself; you are not responsible for this, it is due to the crisis and the war. You are not the only one suffering from unemployment; there are so many men who lost their jobs. **It's good to communicate with other men to share problems and common concerns about losing work.**





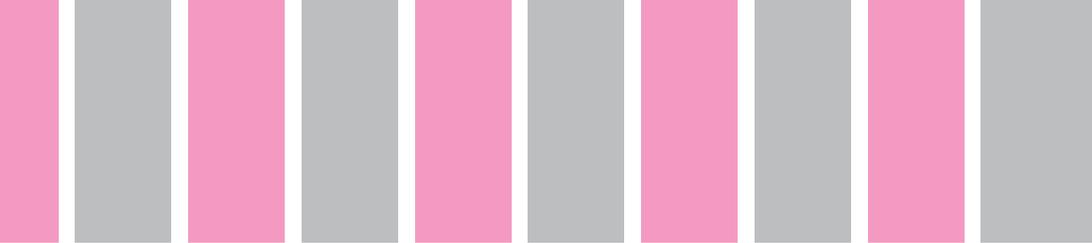
Before the crisis, in most Syrian families, men went out to work and make a living for the families, while women managed the house and looked after the children. **During and after the crisis, even in traditional societies, there is often a reversal of roles** . Men lose their jobs and are spending more time at home, while some women manage to find work in house, to confront the difficulties. Your wife may be one of these resilient women.



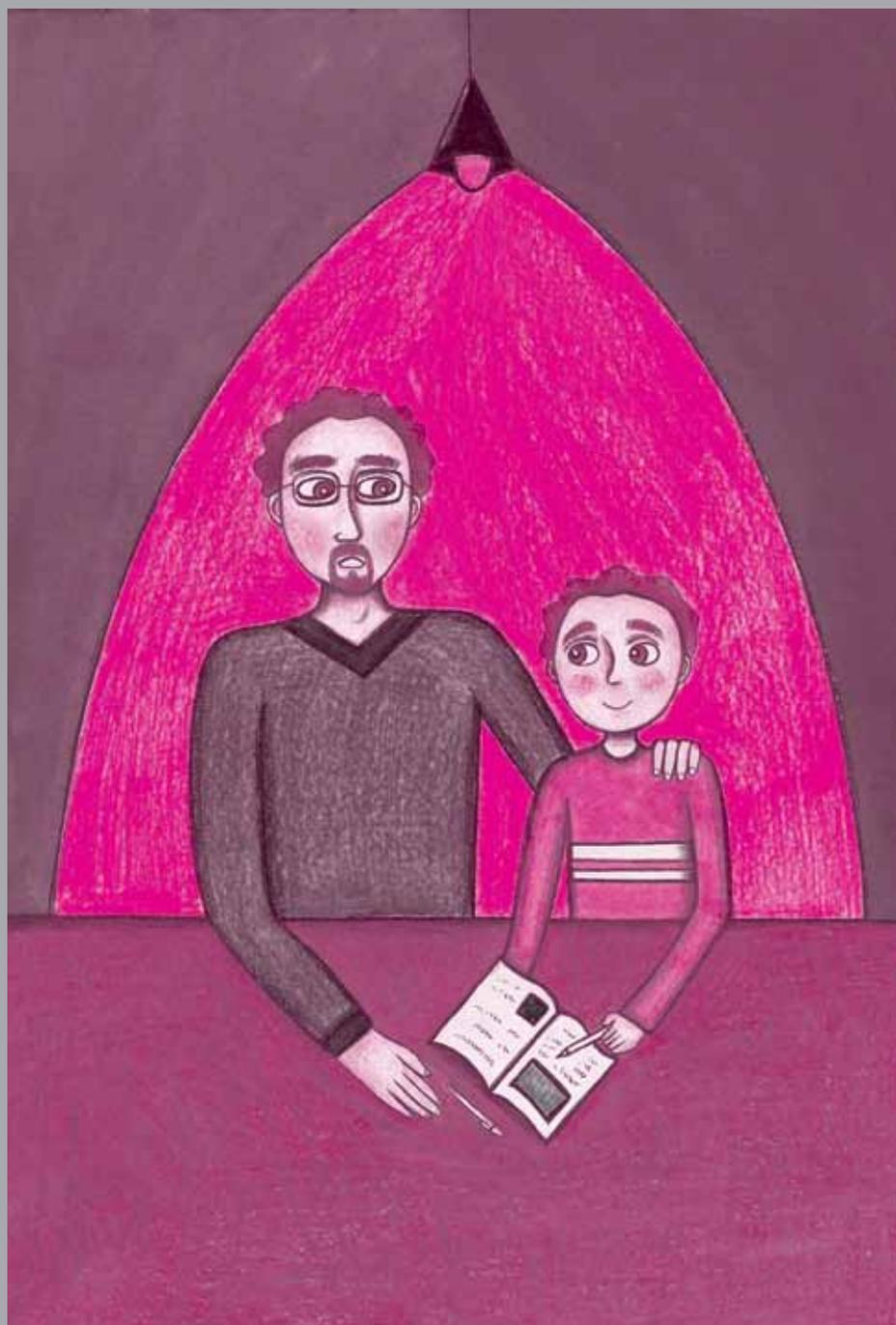


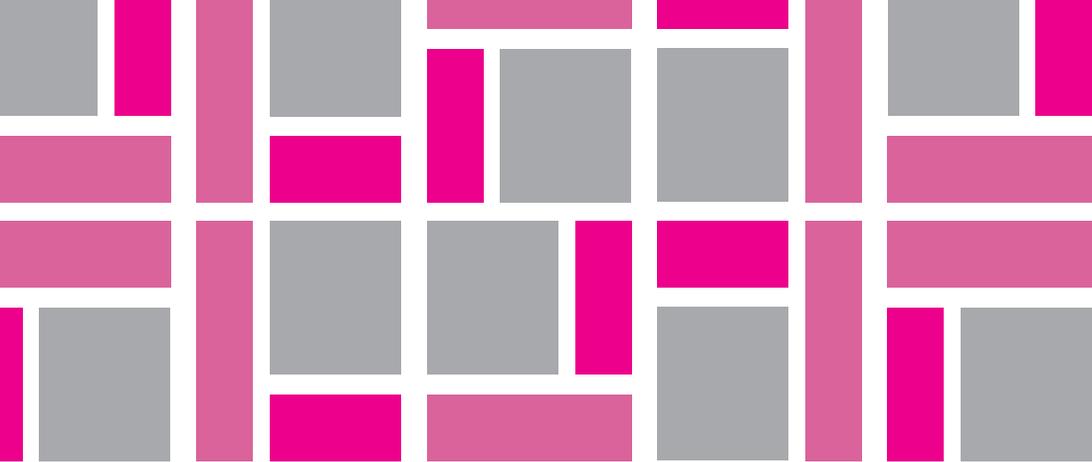
Sharing family responsibilities is essential during crises. Women (your wife, your sister, your mother or your daughter) must be given a role. There is nothing bad at all in letting the women in your house perform tasks at home or in the shelters / or tents if they wish so. In case she does not have a profession you can encourage her to attend vocational training like hairdressing, sewing, embroidery and computer classes, in order to increase her chances to find a job that can add to the family income. **This encouragement will create an atmosphere of trust among your family members and will prevent any feelings of isolation.**



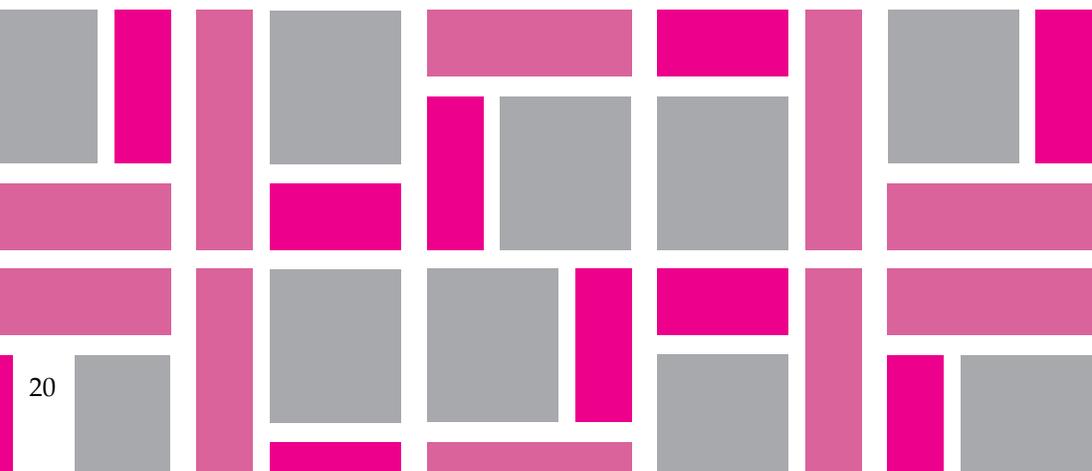


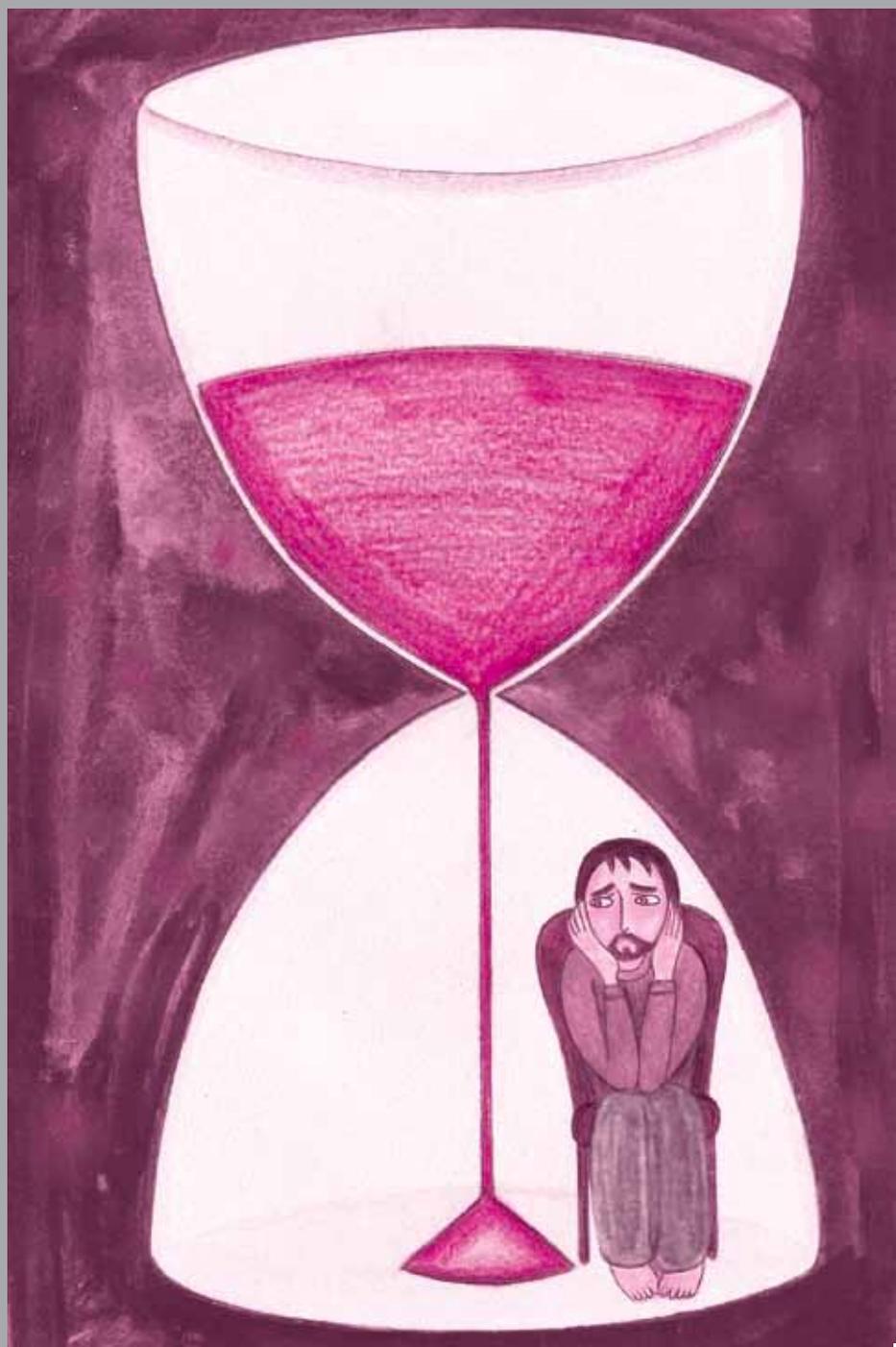
You can learn a lot from the crises you have been going through. **You can transform your predicaments into challenges, prove your ability in finding solutions and move on.** Having to stay longer hours at home for security reasons or having lost your job gives you the opportunity to talk with your loved ones and to know more about their personal problems and resources. You may find in the process an occupation that interests you more than the one you had before. **If you are a father you may find it enjoyable to have the time to teach your children and tell them fairy tales before going to sleep.** You may be satisfied by developing new attitudes, skills and qualities you never thought you could have before. For instance some men in Syria and the neighbouring countries are expressing their satisfaction because the crisis has brought them to be more accepting of the opinions of their wives, children, and siblings, and relatives and to become more open to new ideas through which they could understand the point of view of their children, neighbors, and community.

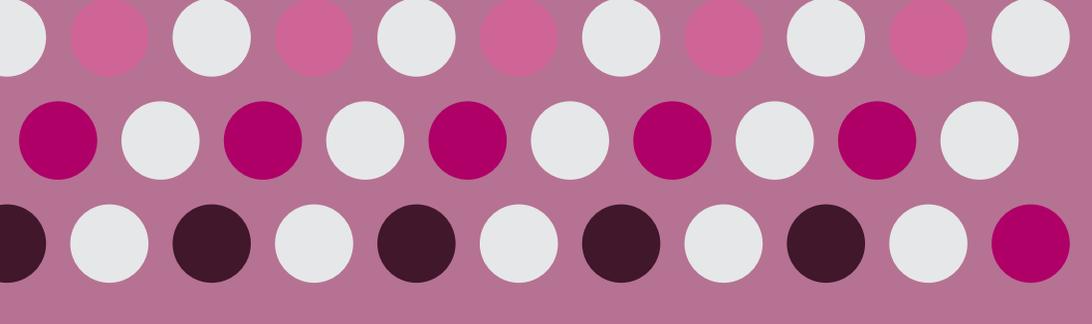




Every man has feelings of fear and grief which prevent his full engagement in certain activities. The usual perception is that men don't cry and are not afraid; but this is not true. In a crisis situation men can't be strong all the times and in all circumstances. **You have the right to be afraid and feel sad. Even the prophets expressed their grief by crying and didn't consider it a shame or a weakness.**

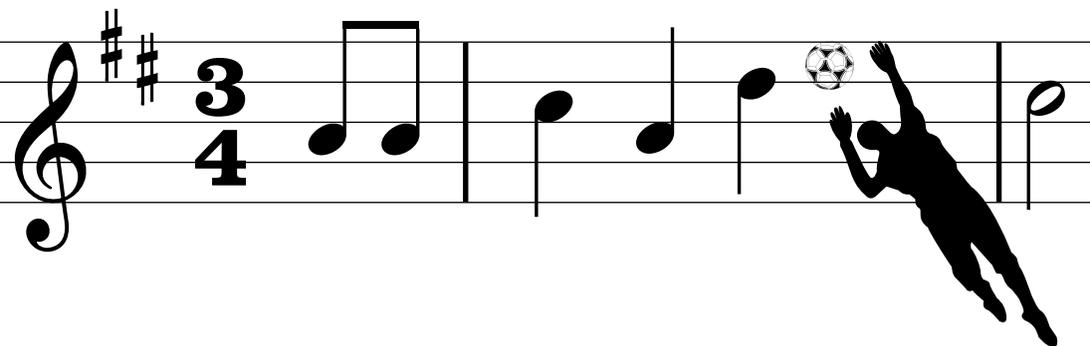




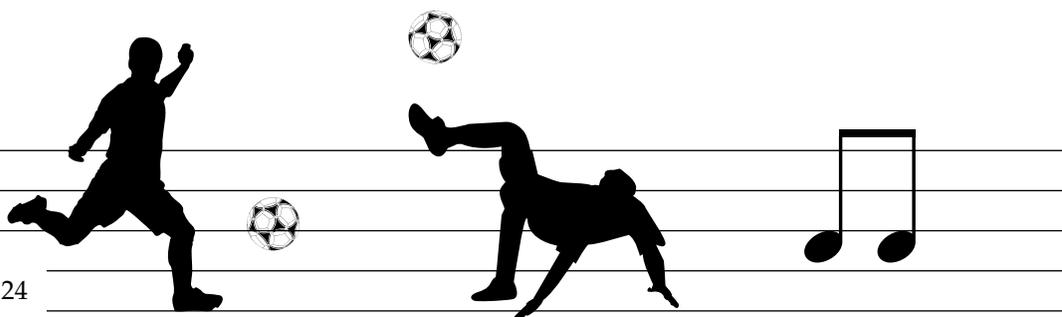


As a man you have internal resources to cope with stress, but, as many other men, you are not fully aware of them or can't use them efficiently in crises, when you are overwhelmed. It is very important to recognize these resources and use them in helping yourself and your family to deal with harsh conditions. **One good coping mechanism is helping others and asking for help in return.** For example, being relocated to a new place may make you ask for help from a neighbor who has the skills to fix some electrical problems, and you in return can help him with what you have as skills . Mutual assistance creates a friendly and social environment and alleviates stress.





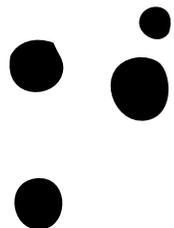
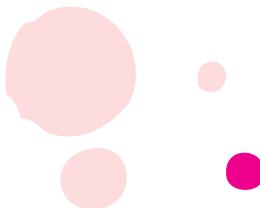
There are simple and general measures to alleviate stress like time management, sleeping, sport, appropriate food, resting, enjoying hobbies like listening to your favorite music and playing with friends. **You can meet with other men in your neighborhood to play backgammon and chat. You can also pay visits to each other and have some religious readings to help bring inner peace to yourself.**

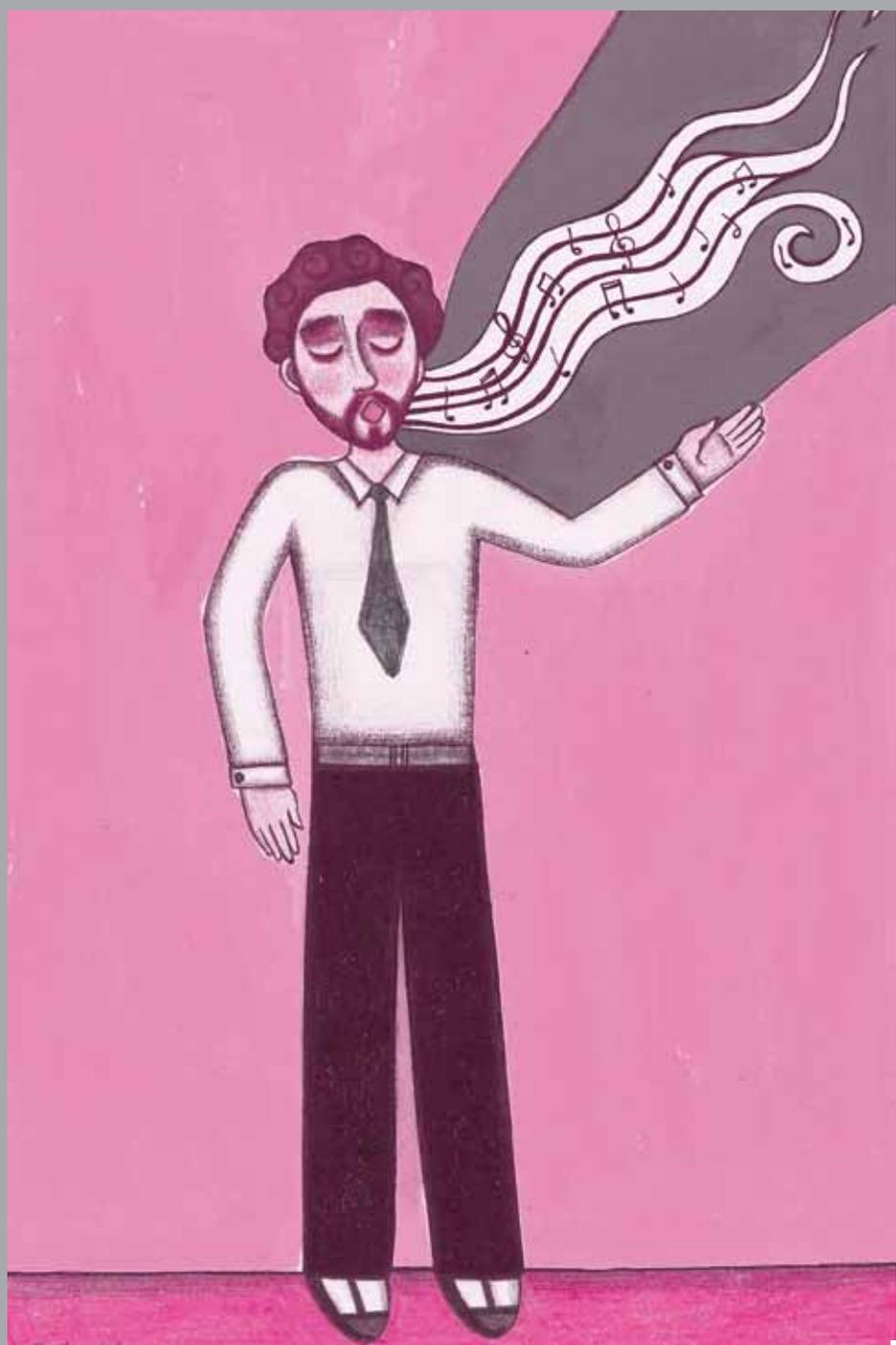






During crises, **men, like you, go through grief, fear and anger. The best way to deal with it is to express it in a positive way, like talking about your experience and how you tried to overcome those feelings, rather than to subdue them or to express them negatively through, for example, unleashing your anger on your children, your sister, or your wife.**

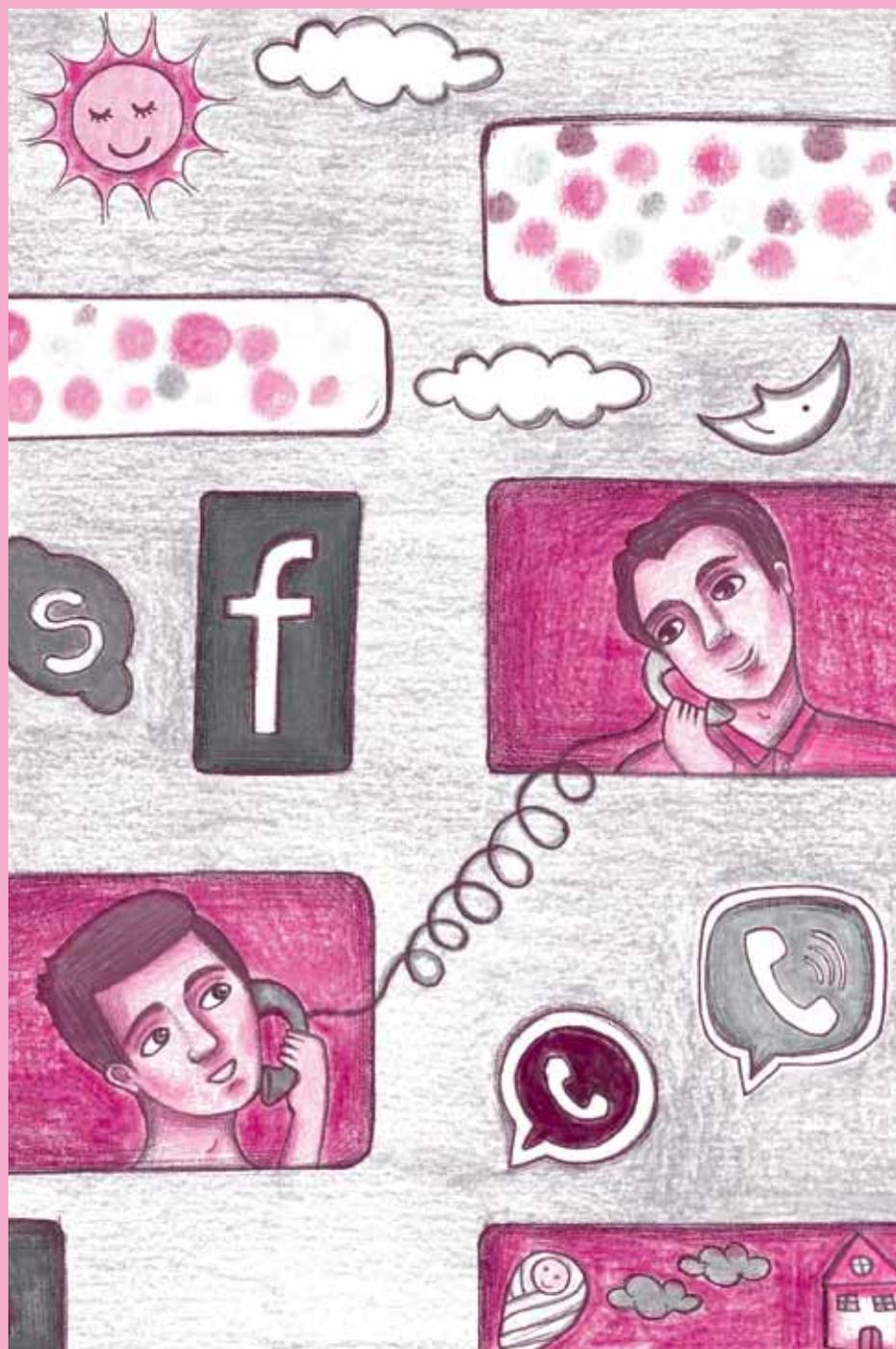


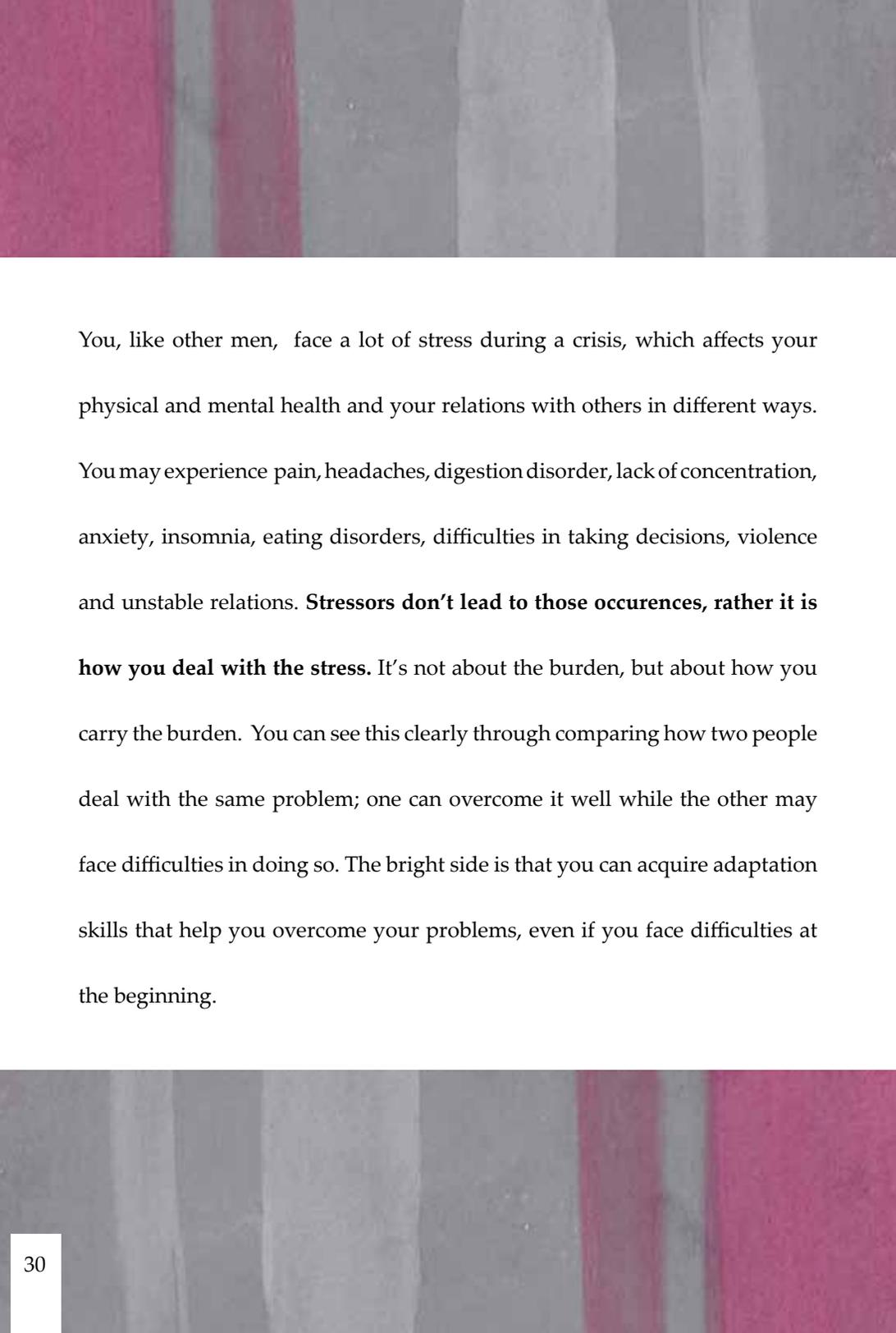




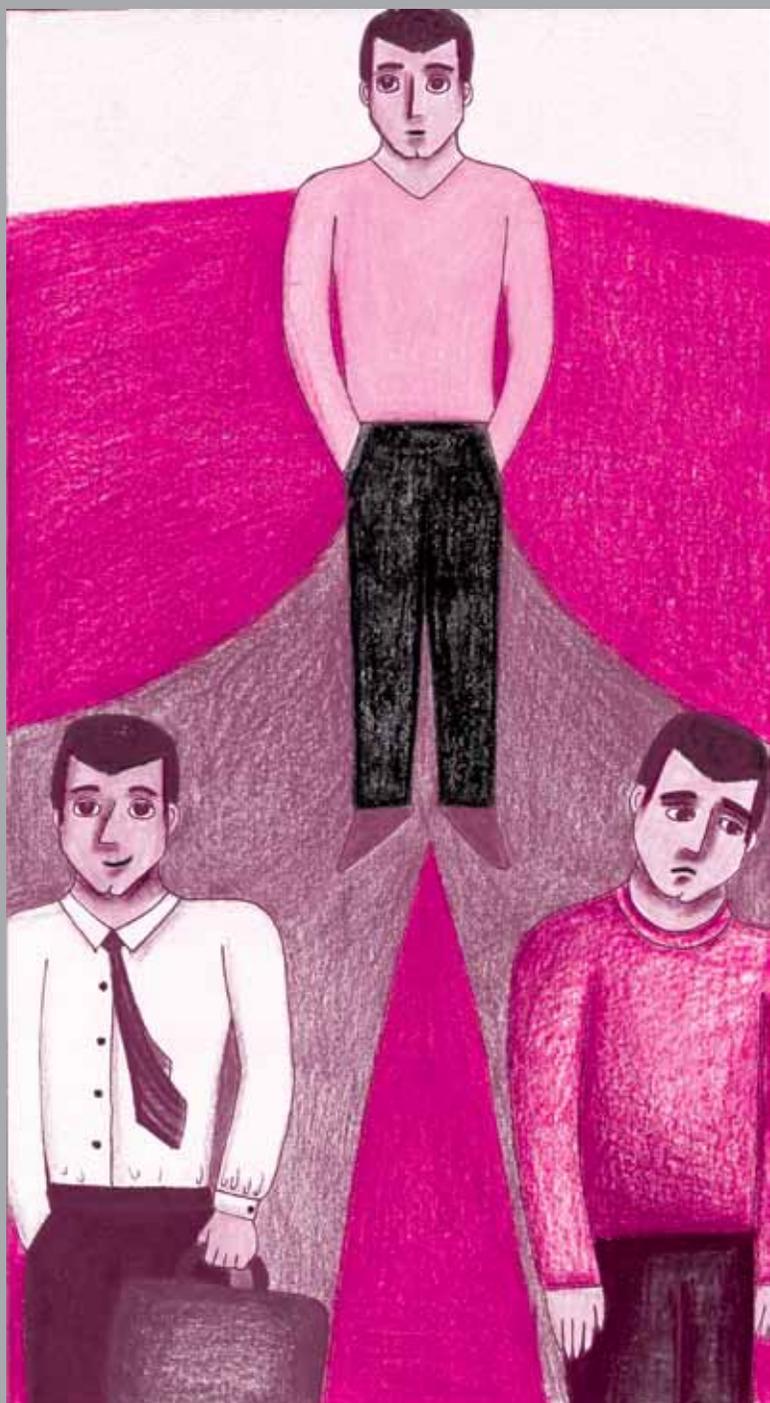
During crises and distress, **it is very important to keep communicating with the people you love. They are your social support network and being with them makes you feel safe. In case you can't be with them, you can communicate using mobile phones , or social media (Facebook and Skype),** this makes it easier to communicate with relatives, friends and neighbors, who were separated during the crisis. If available, these means can compensate for distance until you meet them again.





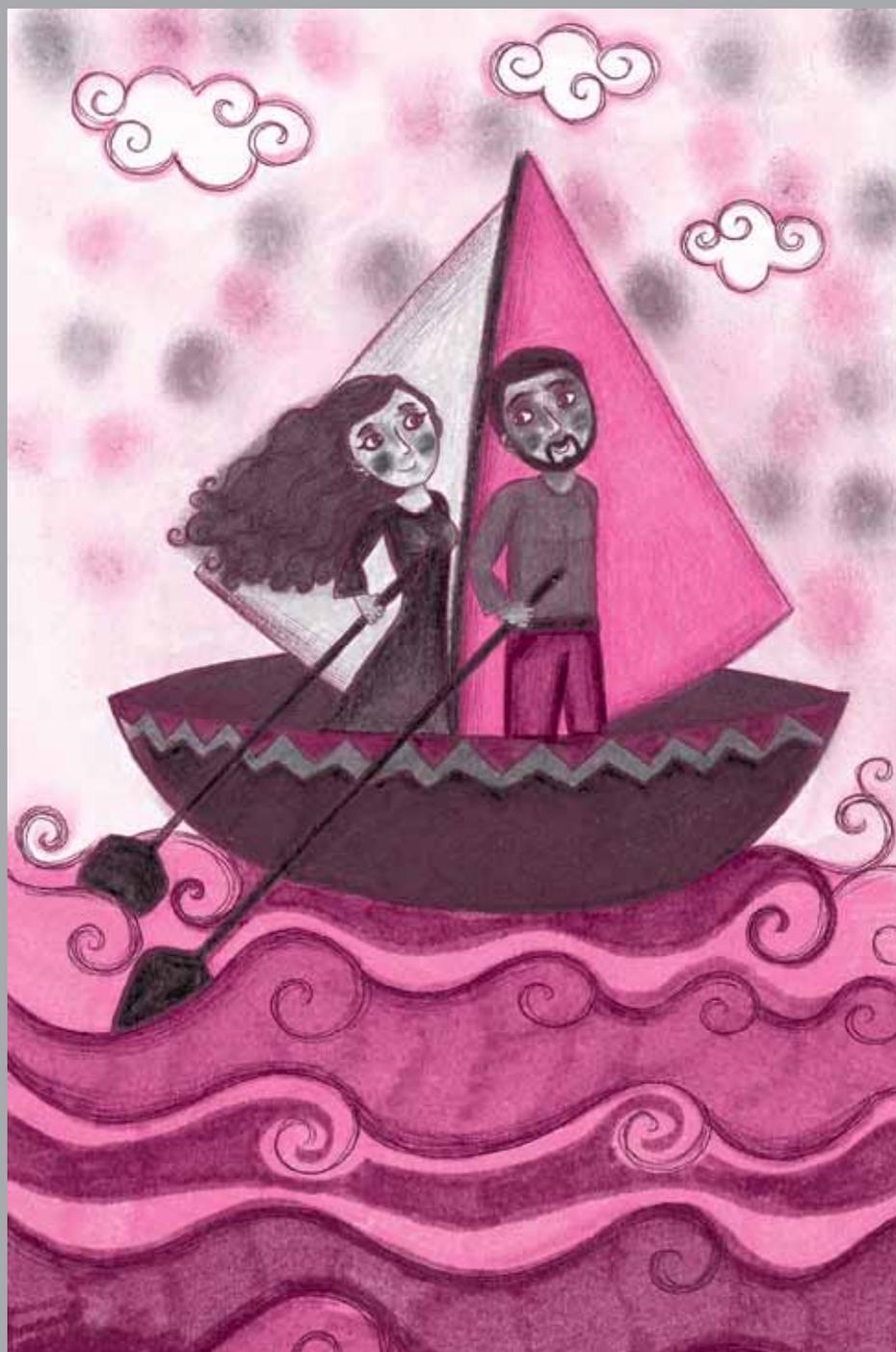


You, like other men, face a lot of stress during a crisis, which affects your physical and mental health and your relations with others in different ways. You may experience pain, headaches, digestion disorder, lack of concentration, anxiety, insomnia, eating disorders, difficulties in taking decisions, violence and unstable relations. **Stressors don't lead to those occurrences, rather it is how you deal with the stress.** It's not about the burden, but about how you carry the burden. You can see this clearly through comparing how two people deal with the same problem; one can overcome it well while the other may face difficulties in doing so. The bright side is that you can acquire adaptation skills that help you overcome your problems, even if you face difficulties at the beginning.



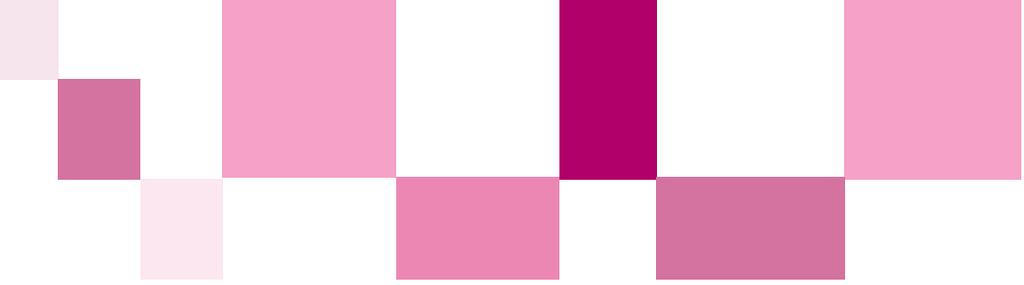


God created men and women to complete one another. Harmony is the essence of life. If one suffers some disturbance, the other should maintain balance in the family and emotional life. **They can reach that balance by communication and sharing that enhance mutual trust.** If you as a man lost your job and can't find a new one, you can help your wife to find a job that can restore economic stability for the family. You can also support her in her work and regain some of your efficiency.

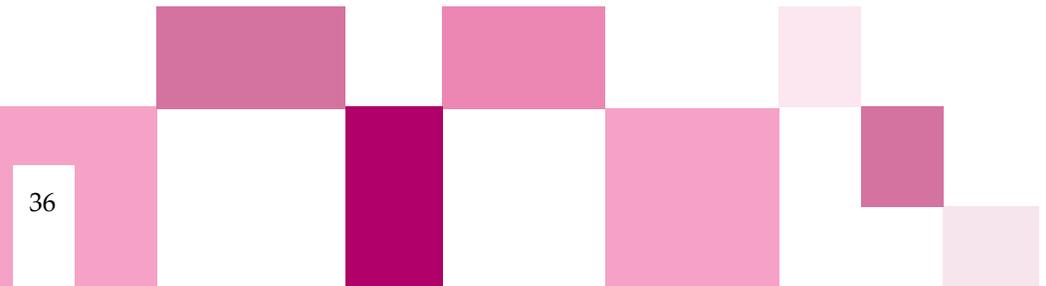


Traditions and inherited social norms in Syria and the neighbouring countries can limit the way you, as a man, can express your emotions, your distress and your grief to people around you. These customs and social norms in fact put you as a man or as a young boy, in a limited frame that doesn't allow you to grieve. Not being able to express your feelings because of what you think is appropriate may increase your suffering, distress and your sense of loss. **Linking manhood with the hiding of emotions and certain "normal" reactions does not allow you as a man to express and decompress, which is vital for your psychological health.**





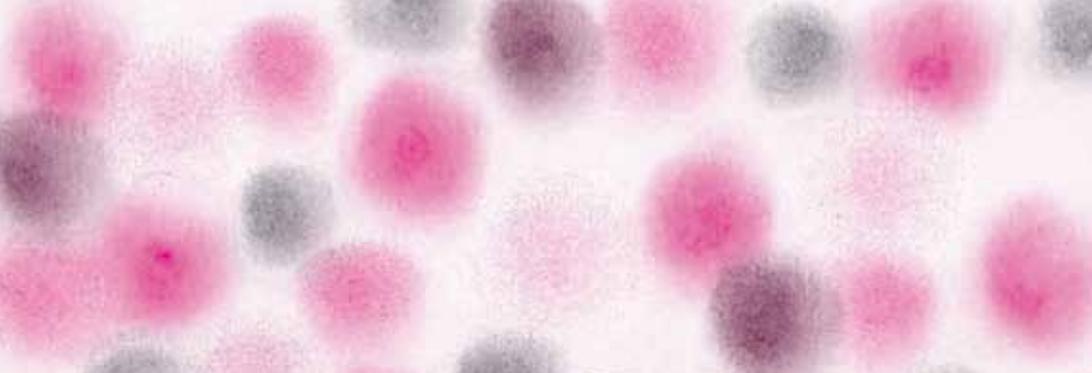
During stress and crises, children are often considered the most vulnerable. Some children can react to the crisis with aggressiveness, hyperactivity or getting back to old habits like urinary incontinence or stammering, and might refuse to go to school. They often become anxious about the reactions of their parents. These manifestations are often a normal consequence of the situation and can disappear gradually. **If you are a father, accepting your children reactions, acknowledging their fears, calming them down, by hugging them, playing with them, and helping them to address their fears, will have a very positive impact on their psychological response .**



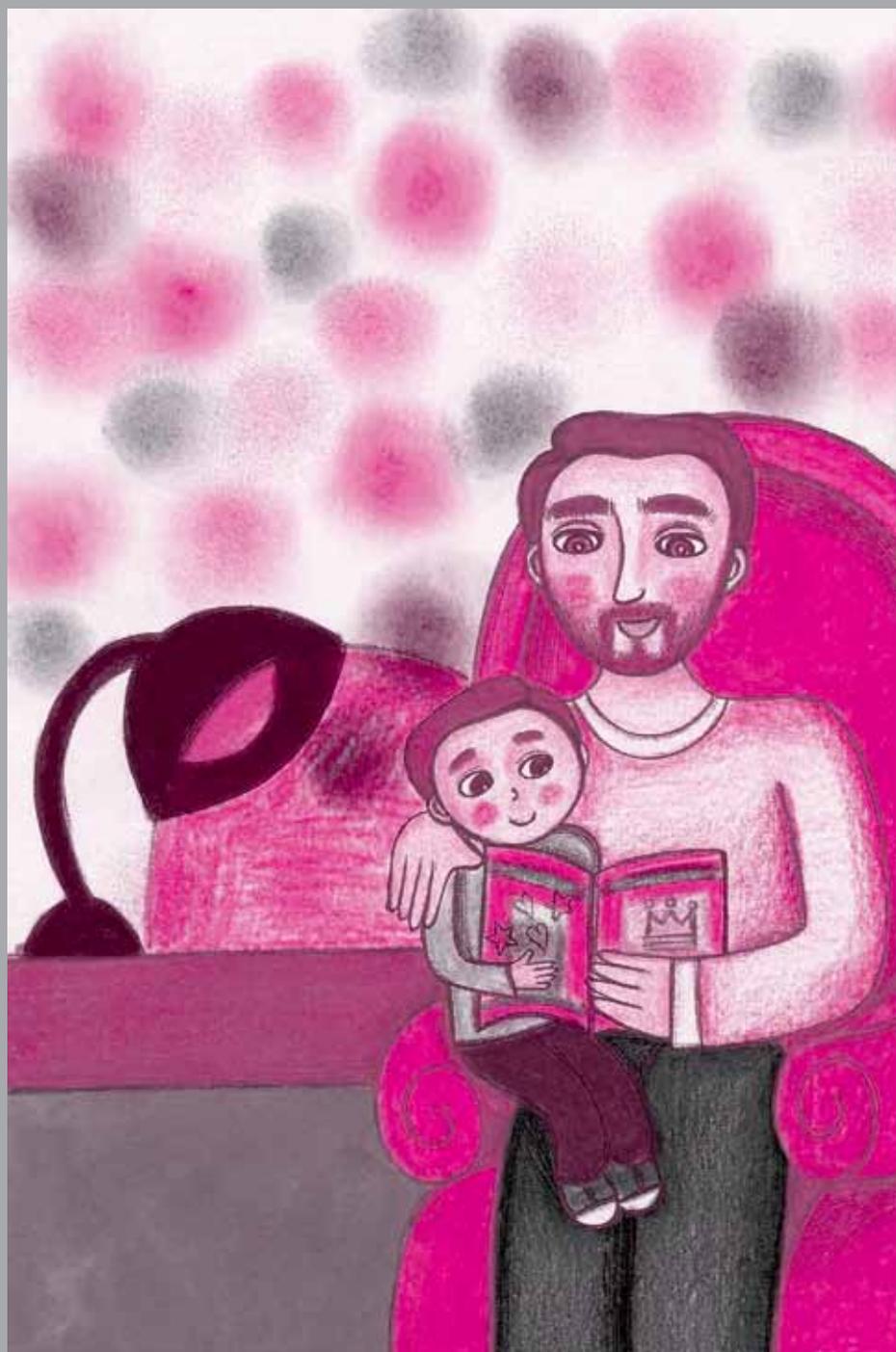


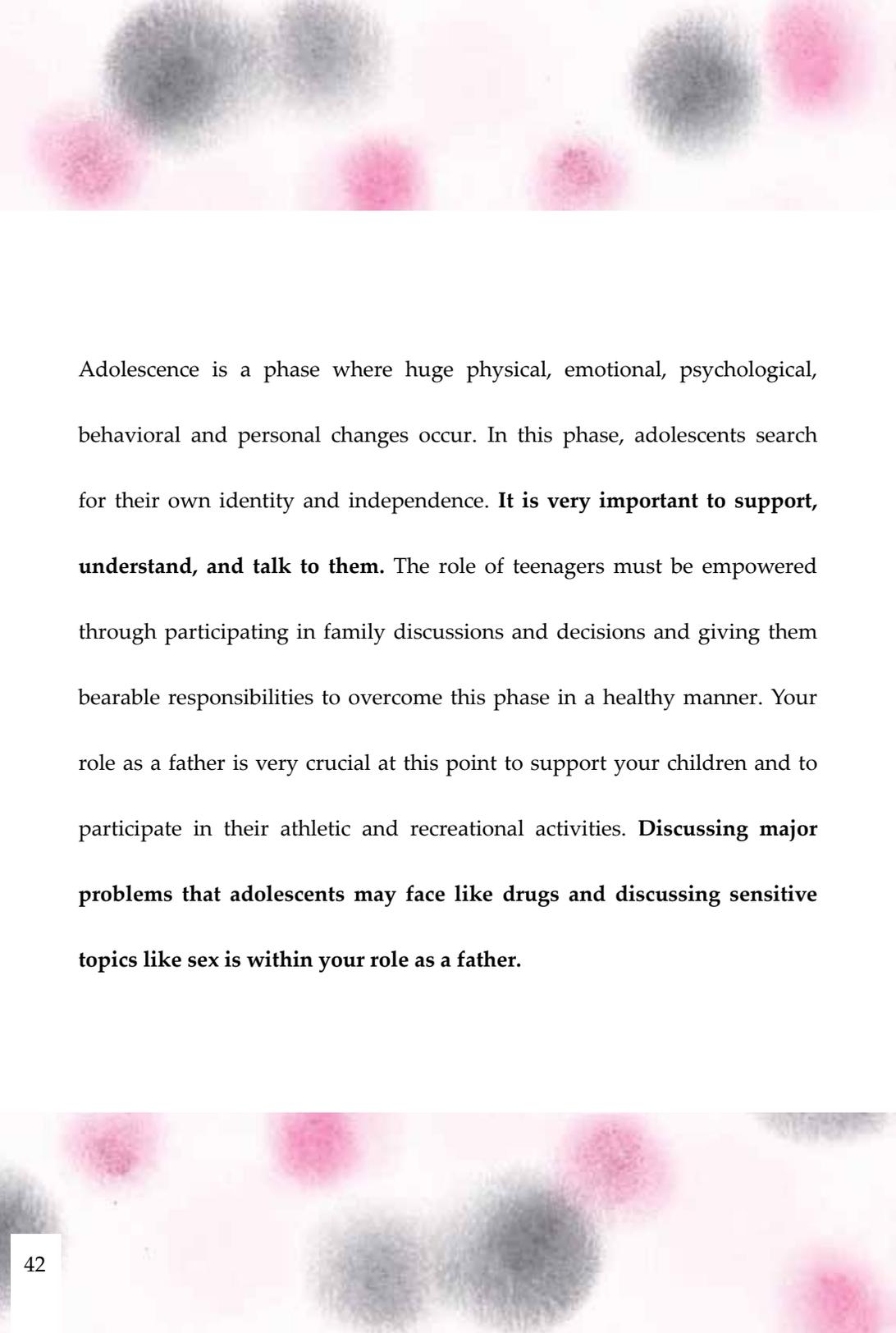
If you are a father, you should know that **your children can adapt to tough conditions more easily if you convey a sense of safety and respond to their needs by caring, communicating with them, providing for their basic needs, participating in their activities and listening to their opinions.** While in a normal situation, in some environments and in some families this may be considered to be the mother's responsibility, you as a father can always play a key role. This is especially true in crisis situations, since your wife may be overwhelmed.



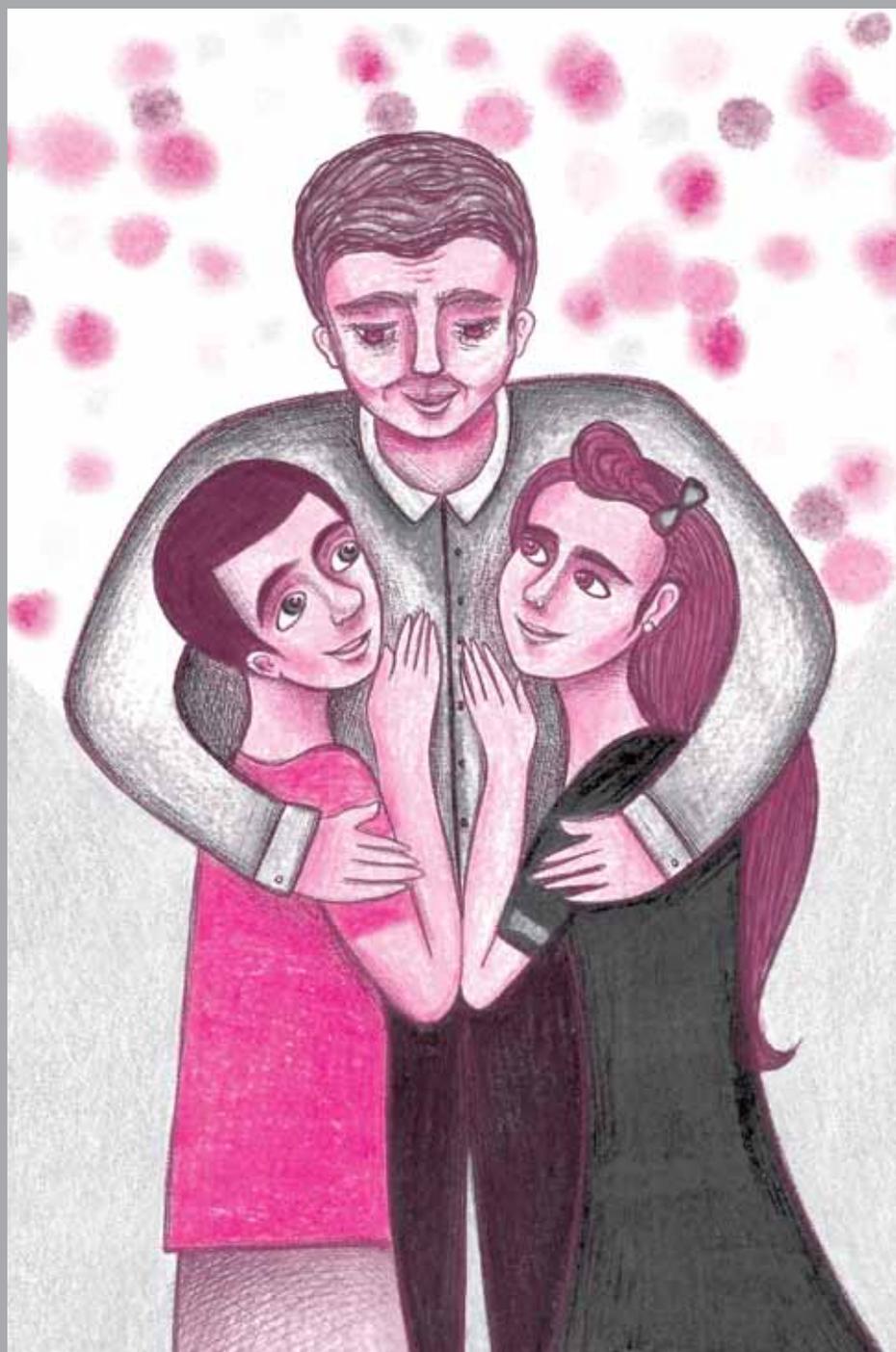


If you are a father, **you can help your children by caring and providing a reasonable routine in their daily life, like scheduling times for sleeping, waking up, eating and playing.** You can encourage your children to express their feelings through constructive means such as giving them opportunities to talk or through drawing, arts and sport. **It's important to give a space for your children to share with you their feelings and private opinions. This can enhance confidence and family bonding and can solve problems. It is however important to limit their expression of their feelings, wherever they become harmful for themselves or the others.**

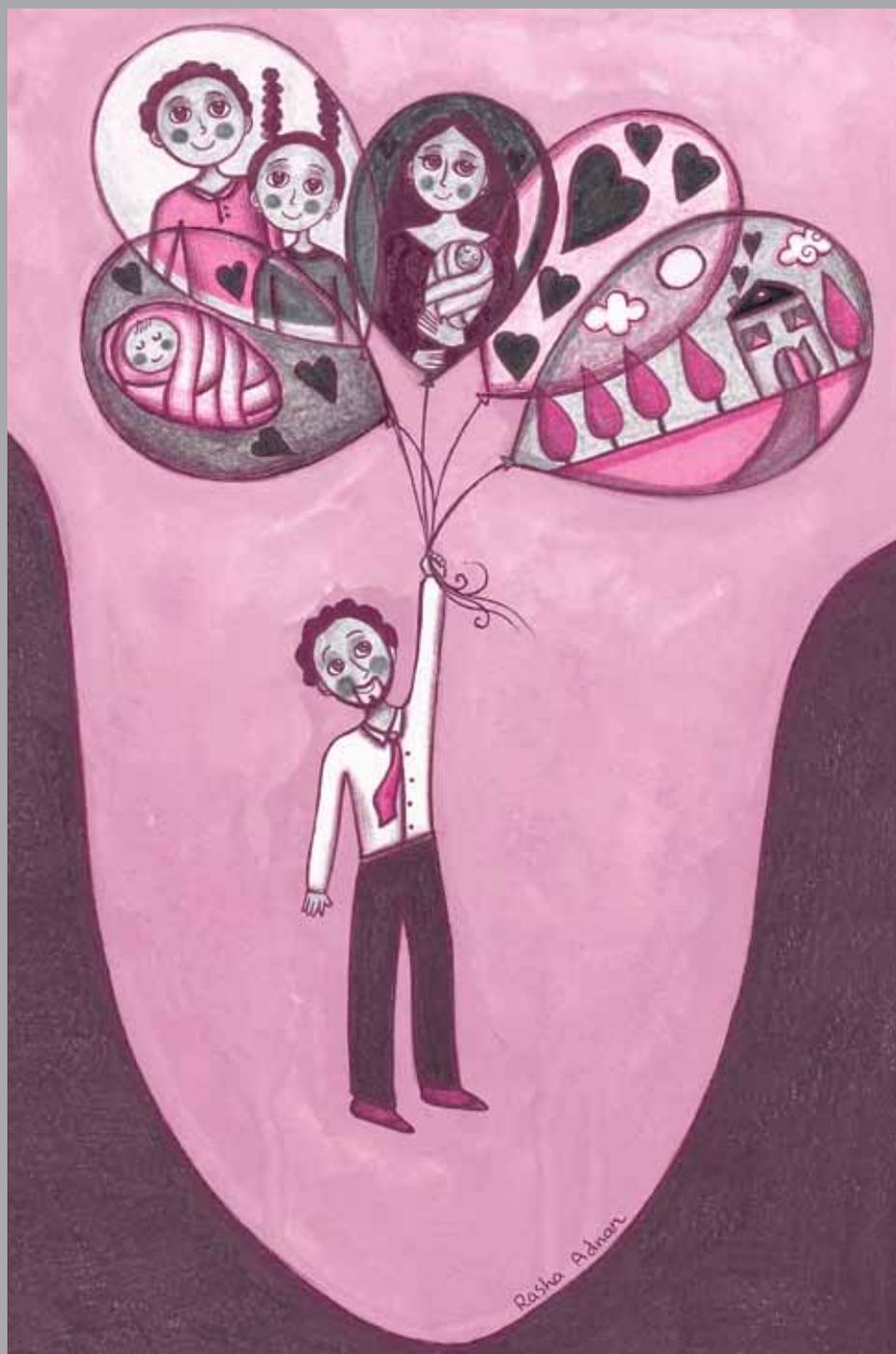




Adolescence is a phase where huge physical, emotional, psychological, behavioral and personal changes occur. In this phase, adolescents search for their own identity and independence. **It is very important to support, understand, and talk to them.** The role of teenagers must be empowered through participating in family discussions and decisions and giving them bearable responsibilities to overcome this phase in a healthy manner. Your role as a father is very crucial at this point to support your children and to participate in their athletic and recreational activities. **Discussing major problems that adolescents may face like drugs and discussing sensitive topics like sex is within your role as a father.**



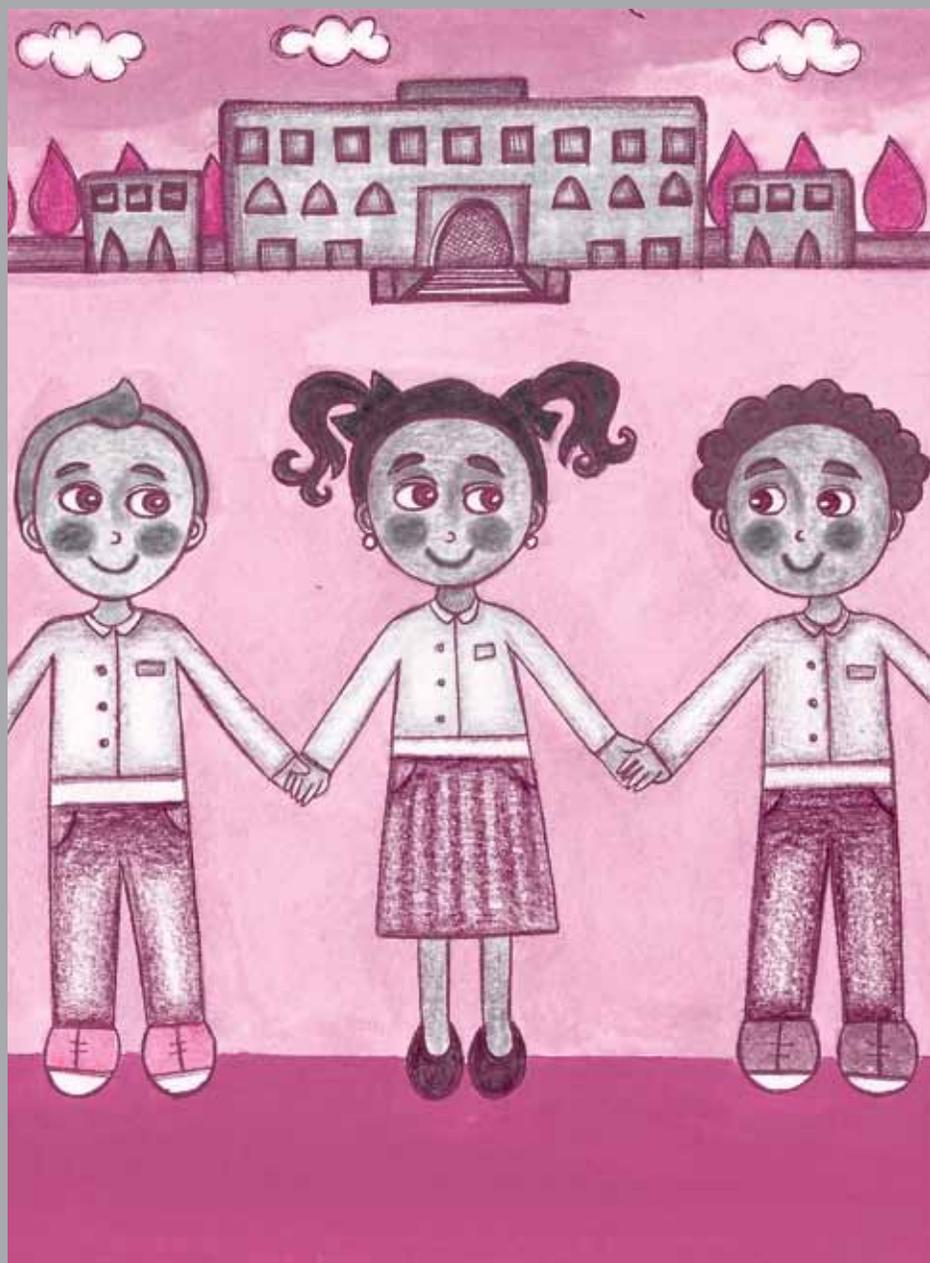
For a father, one of the best ways to express strength and courage during a crisis is looking after your children and mentoring their education and growth. Caring in harsh conditions is as important as working outside, and will help you and your children cope with distress.





In crisis situations, parents may be less motivated to send children to school, due to fear for their safety and a general sense of withdrawal. However, **if you are a father, it is important that you encourage your children to go to school, whenever it is safe enough. School, especially during crisis, is a place where your child can interact with friends and learn.** If you and your family are displaced you should know that school plays a critical role in integrating your children with their new environment and in rebuilding their social network that make them feel safe. It can introduce them to a normal routine that makes them feel secure. **Your participation in parent meetings helps you and your children build new relations.**



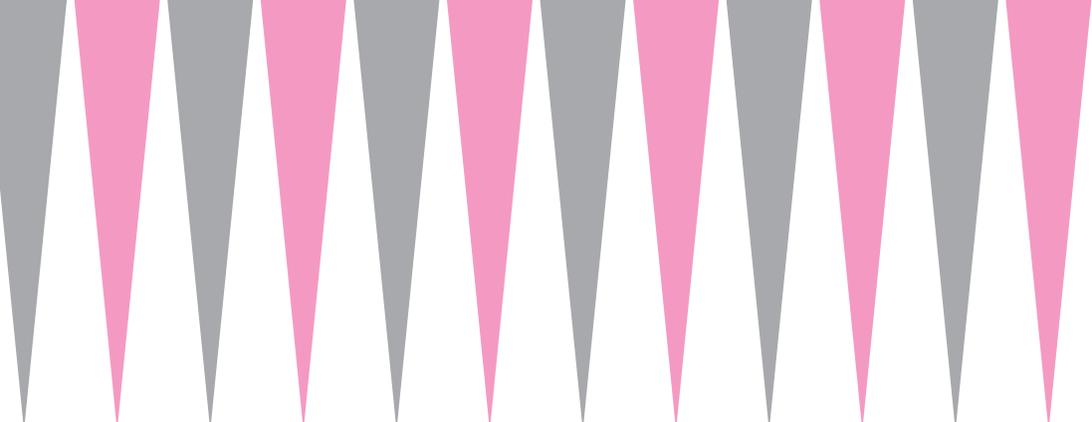




You as a man can benefit in reviving value-based and participatory activities you used to do before the crisis. You may have participated in associations with your colleagues and neighbors to fund raise to help neighbors or colleagues in need to buy food, or to support yourself in buying items for the house, or to provide care for an health problem of a person you knew. In Syria these activities usually took place at the end of the month. Reviving your participation to charity, community mobilization and fund raising work can not only improve your financial status, it can rebuild communication bridges with others and make you feel safe in the group.







Being isolated and not communicating with your family, can make things worse and more complicated. When you meet with other men, you can find common problems that allow you to talk and find the best solutions. **Being a member of a group makes you feel safe, affiliated, respected and not marginalized, and this will help you cope and will in course reflect on your family.** That's why many men should gather wherever possible to exchange ideas and move away from the surrounding stressful environment.



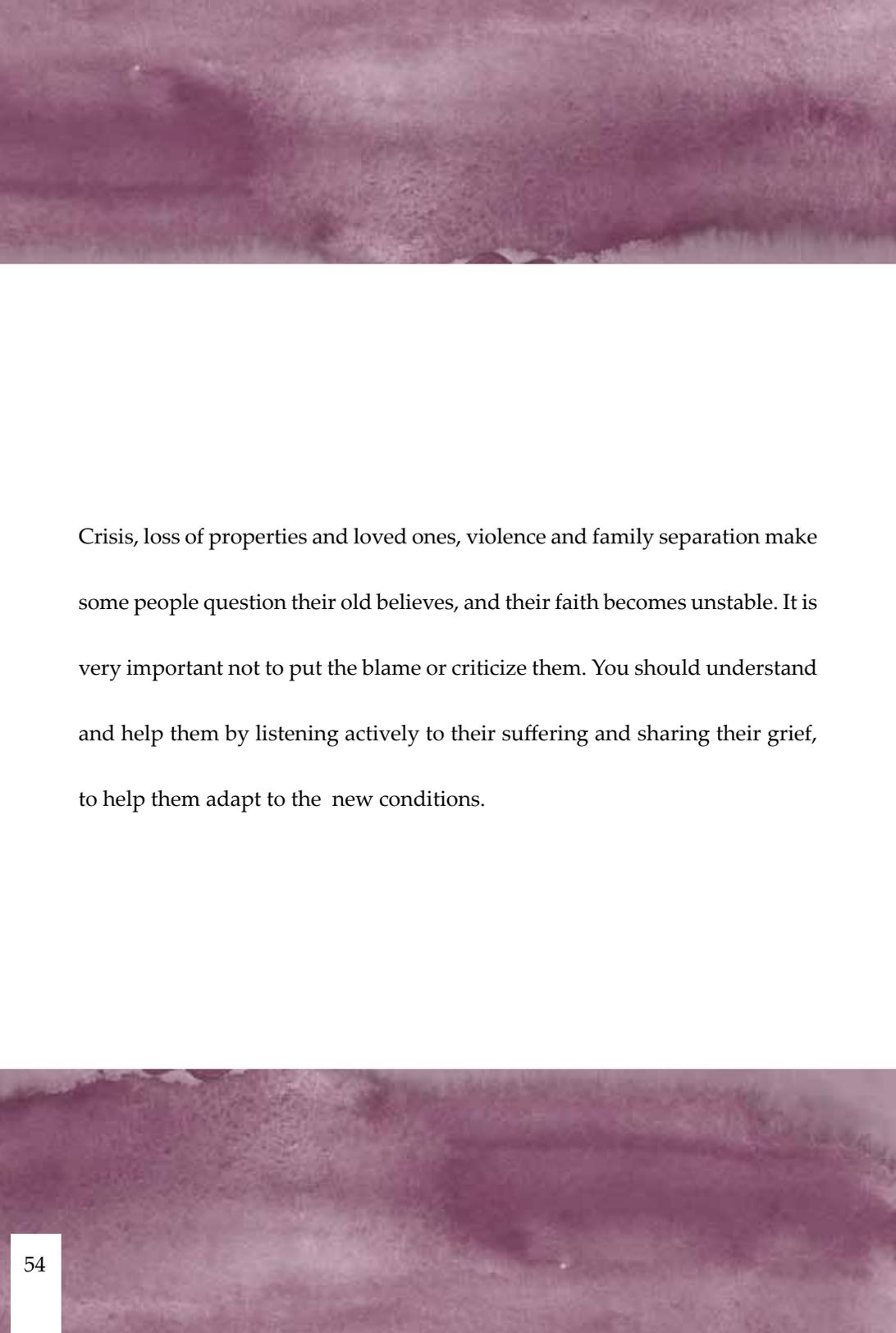


**Rituals, traditions, language, common interests and religious beliefs are the base that characterizes and distinguishes a society from another and gives it shape and identity. Collective identity makes people feel close and affiliated, sympathize with each other and provide mutual support.**

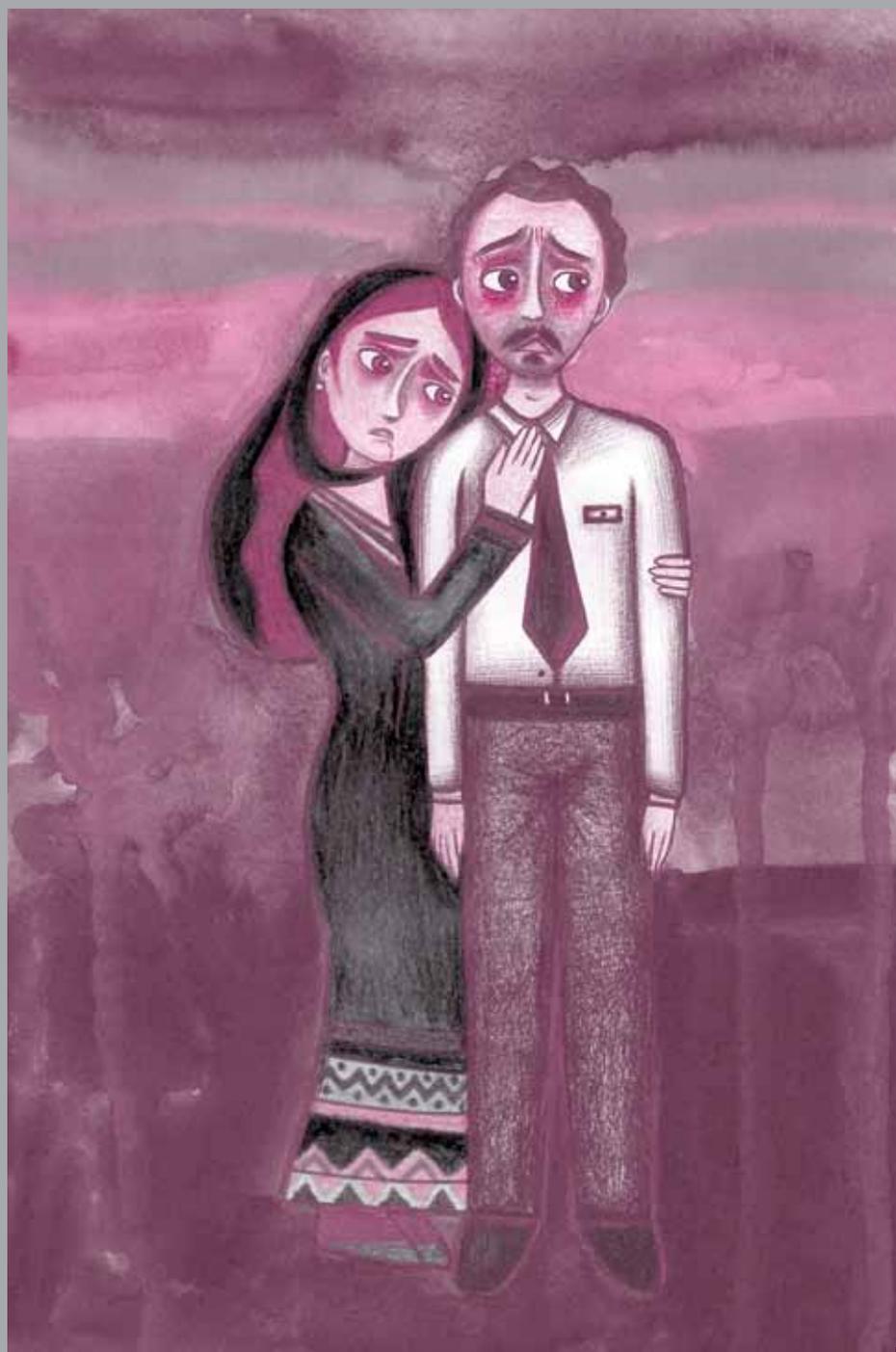
These links are very important in ordinary times. Their importance is increased in times of crises. People pray together and this makes them accept their difficult reality and helps them to overcome it. Participation in burial and condolences ceremonies can make it easier for those who mourn to accept the idea of losing someone forever.





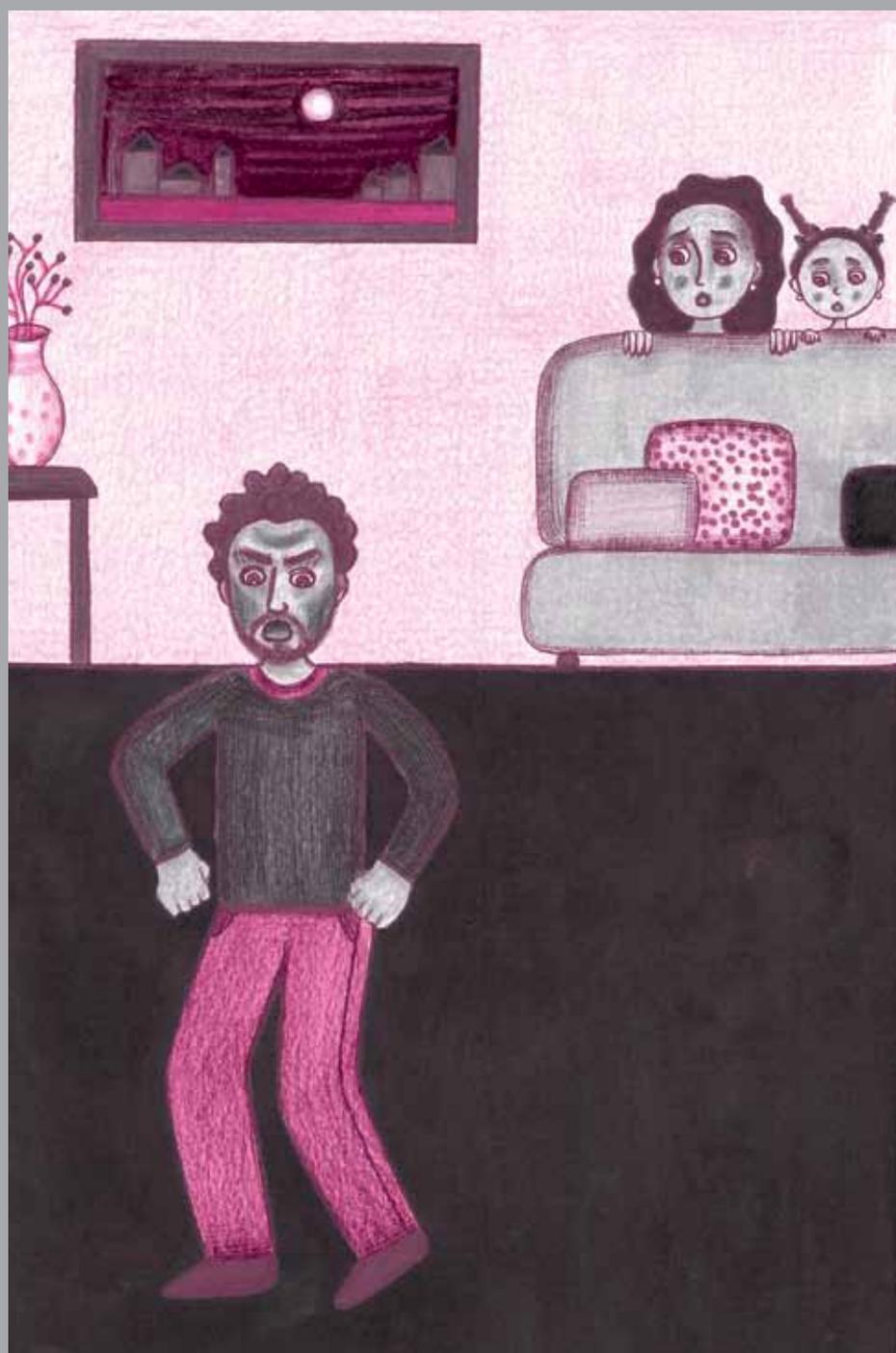
The page features a purple watercolor background at the top and bottom. The central text is in a clean, black, sans-serif font, centered horizontally. The text discusses the impact of crisis and loss on faith and offers advice on how to support affected individuals.

Crisis, loss of properties and loved ones, violence and family separation make some people question their old beliefs, and their faith becomes unstable. It is very important not to put the blame or criticize them. You should understand and help them by listening actively to their suffering and sharing their grief, to help them adapt to the new conditions.



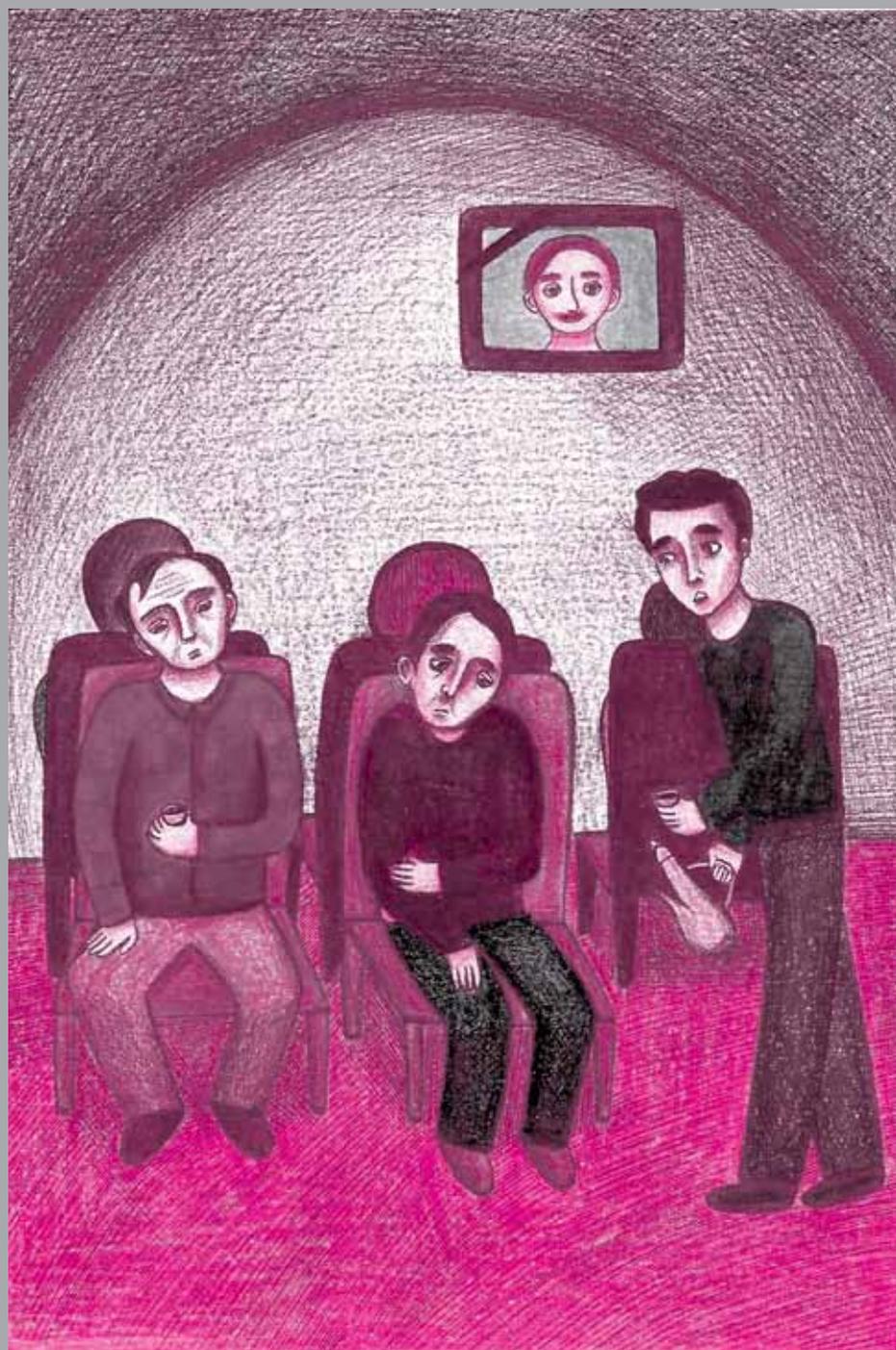
## IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS WHEN DEALING WITH ANGER:

- 1) Anger is not caused by a problem but by the way you are looking at the problem.
- 2) Try to explore the emotions linked to your anger, which could be the reasons for it, including grief and fear.
- 3) Stop, take a deep breath and think about something comfortable, try to relax for moments.
- 4) Avoid negative adaptation behaviors like using tranquilizers, unless instructed by a doctor.
- 5) Try to practice sports regularly.
- 6) Focus your thinking away from the disturbing issue, and do something else, or talk to someone you love.
- 7) Try to maintain your daily routine as much as possible .



## IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS WHEN DEALING WITH A LOSS:

- 1) Everyone has his/her own reaction to loss, it takes some people weeks to overcome grief, while it may take others months.
- 2) Ignoring the pain that loss causes will make you feel even worse on the long term.
- 3) Your feelings of grief, fear and loneliness are normal reactions to the loss. Crying is a normal response to your grief.
- 4) It is important to know that there are different phases of mourning and that's normal. At the beginning, you don't believe what happened, then you get angry and wonder what happened to you, you blame whom you think responsible, then you feel depressed and eventually you accept what happened.
- 5) Receiving support from others is the most important factor in overcoming grief. Therefore, it's important you accept that support and do not refuse it.
- 6) Your faith gives you comfort. Praying, religious rituals and participating in burial and condolences arrangements can alleviate your pain.
- 7) You should not forget yourself; stress caused by loss consumes your physical and emotional energies.
- 8) You must face your emotions, subduing them will make it more complicated rather than easier and can bring to anxiety, depression or physical problems.
- 9) You must not let others decide how you grief.
- 10) Beware that if you continue numbing and avoiding the thought of what happened for a long time, or keep on feeling guilty, or feel angry and bitter for an excessive period of time, you may want to seek for the support of a specialist, who will help you overcome the problem.



## ATTENTION:

There are some situations in which you should refer yourself or other people around you immediately to a doctor or a specialist. These include:

- 1) When the person threatens suicide or is thinking of harming him-herself.
- 2) When the person is attempting to or thinking of harming others.
- 3) When the person can't control anger attacks and fury even if he/she tries hard.
- 4) When the person doesn't eat for a long time.
- 5) When the person can't sleep for several days in a row.
- 6) When the person is unable to state very simple facts of his/her life (age, name, town of residence).