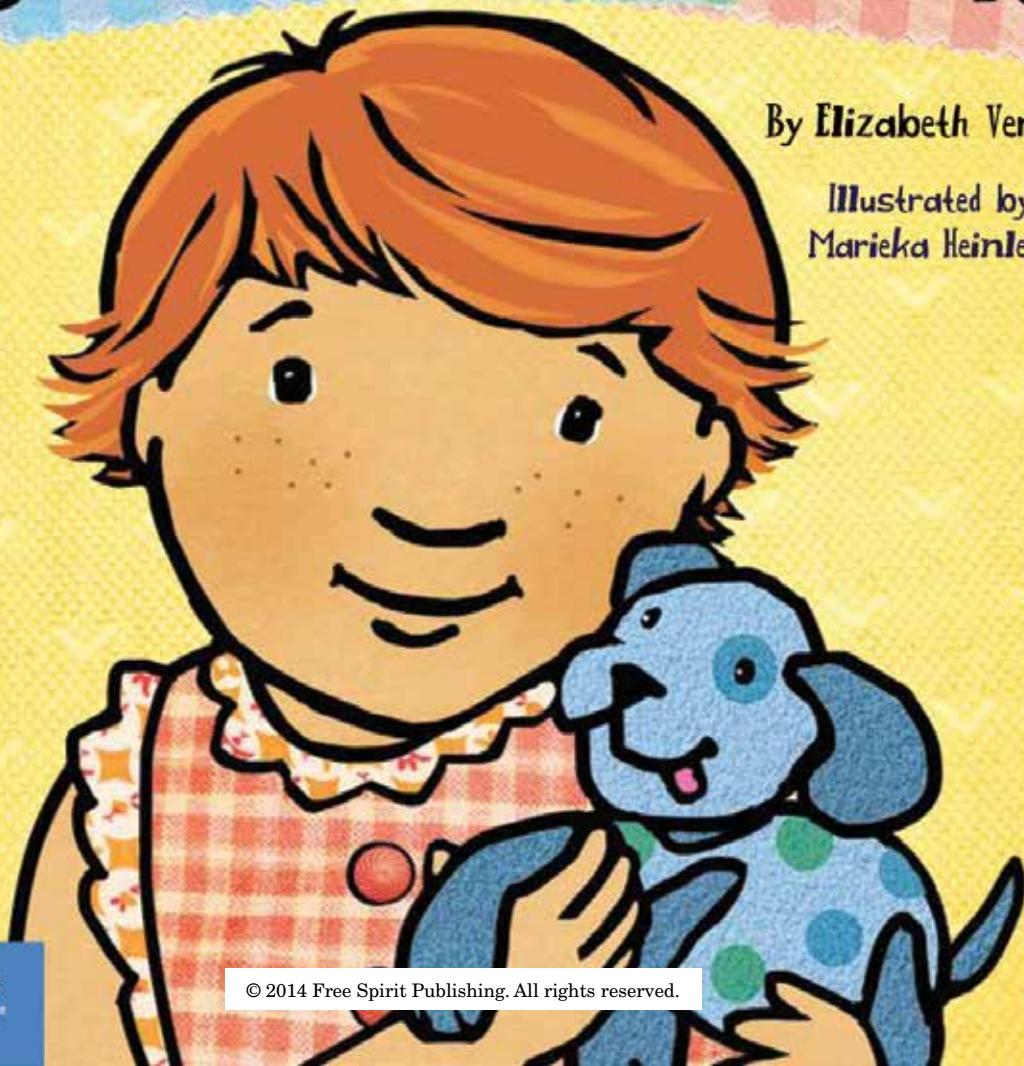


Calm-Down Time

By Elizabeth Verdick

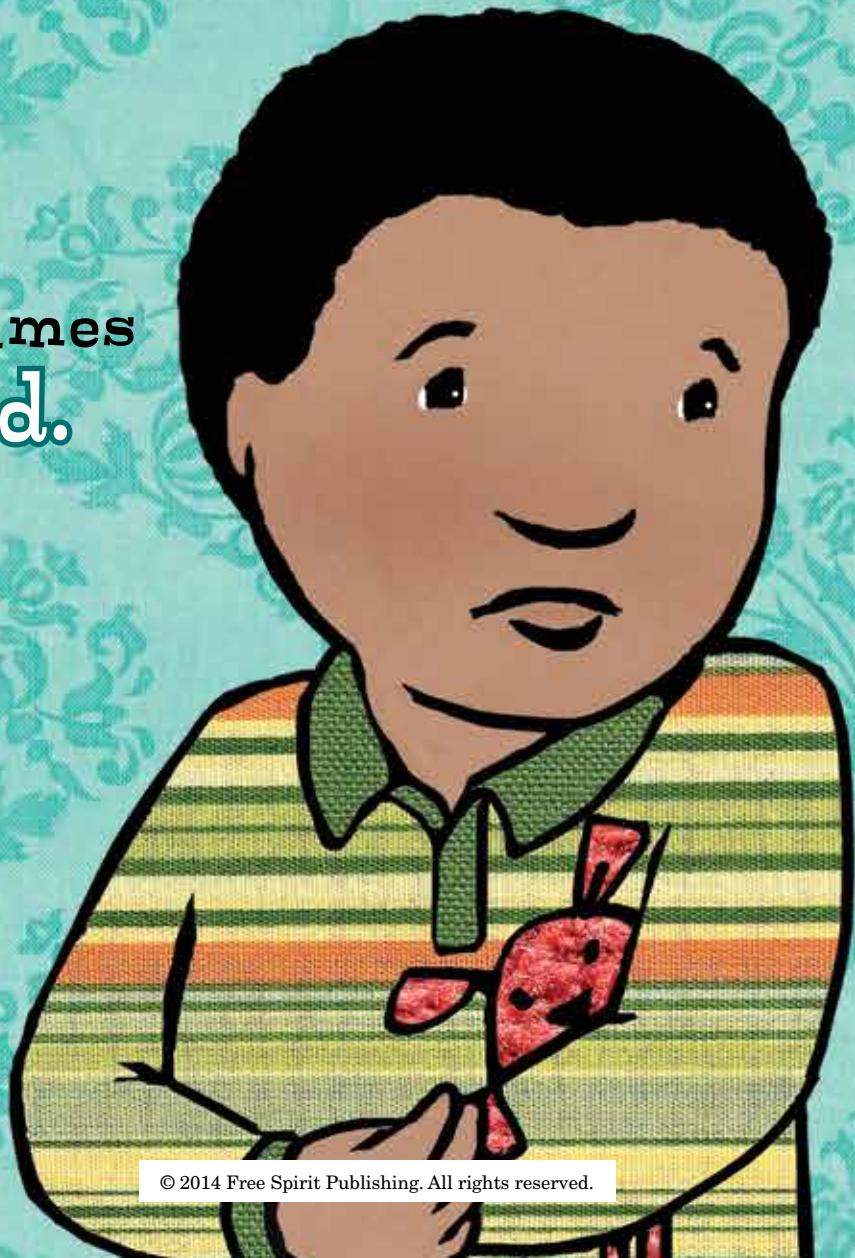
Illustrated by
Marieka Heinlen



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Sometimes
I'm **sad**.



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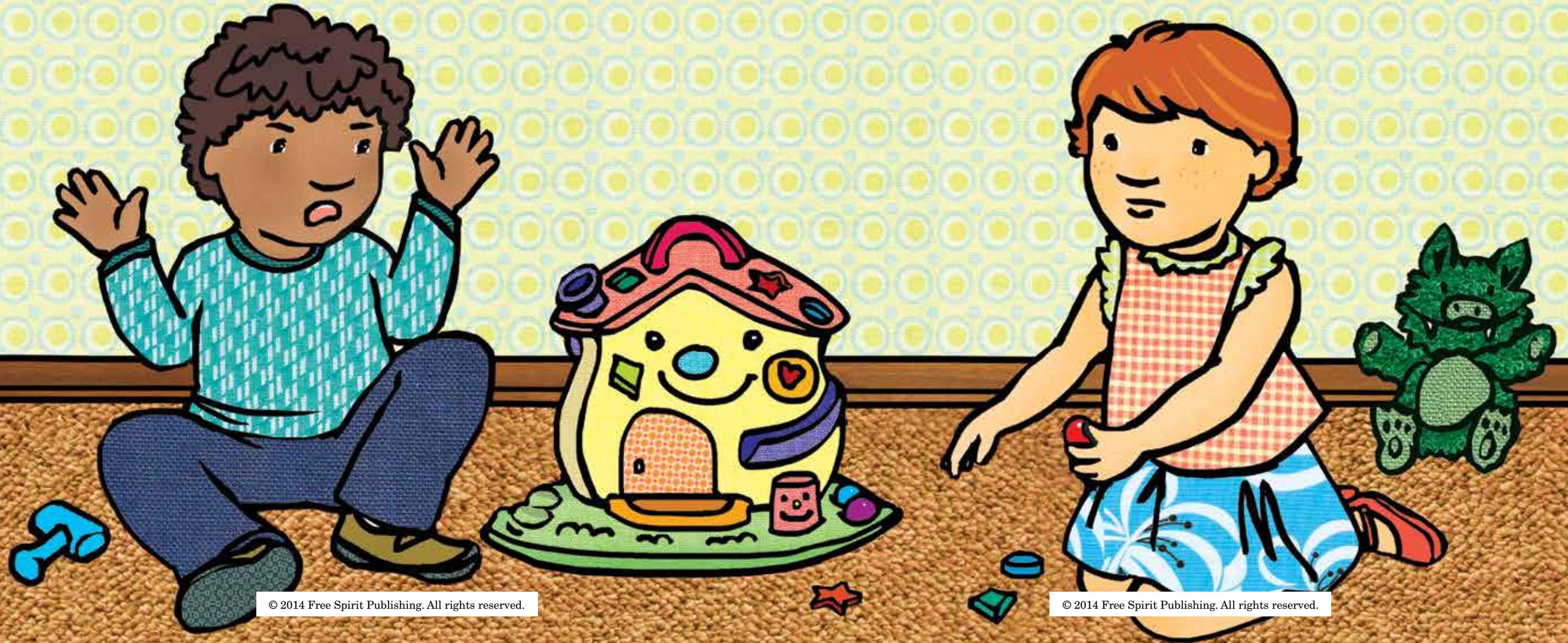
Sometimes
I'm **mad!**



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Sometimes I start to
scream and shout.

I want to get my feelings out.



Calm-Down Tips for Parents & Caregivers

Stay calm. When a child hits, throws a tantrum, or melts down, it's not only an expression of emotion but a call for your help. The calmer you are, the calmer the toddler will feel. Keep your voice steady, low, and matter-of-fact. Get down to the child's level and make eye contact when you talk.

Show empathy. Put an arm around the child or hold her hand. Acknowledge how she feels: "You look frustrated. It's okay to feel that way." When you name the feelings you see, the *child* begins to learn to name them, too.



Help solve the problem. Something caused the frustration—you can help fix it. Rebuild a fallen block tower together, or help a child ask a friend to give back the toy that was taken. If a child has hit, help the victim first. Then calmly tell the other child, "Hands are not for hitting—hitting hurts." Encourage the child to apologize.

Have a cozy calm-down area. Add a beanbag chair or comfy pillows. Keep blankets and stuffed animals handy. Explain that this is a place for taking breaks to calm down.

Be nearby. Calm-down time is not meant to punish or isolate a young child. Some children need to be hugged, held, and soothed during tantrums; others don't want to be touched. See what works in each situation—but always stay close by to help and keep the child safe.



Help end the break. Eventually children wind down and feel ready to return to play. Help reinforce the positive

nature of breaks by saying, "You feel better now. You helped yourself calm down!" Ask if the child is ready to rejoin or needs more time to calm down. After the break, offer hugs or high fives, and smooth the transition into a new activity.

Teach and practice calm-down tools. During quiet moments when no one is upset, show children how to breathe deeply to relax. Say, "Let's watch our bellies get bigger while we breathe." Together, close your eyes and talk about feeling peaceful. Play soothing music and hum or sing along. Show a child how to hug his shoulders with his arms or rock slowly back and forth to help calm down the body.

Redirect. Before young children explode like little volcanoes, try stepping in quickly with a favorite toy, book, or other object to refocus their attention. Even before that, keep an eye out to make sure toddlers' basic needs are being met. Is a child hungry, thirsty, bored, tired, anxious, or overstimulated? Staying on top of those needs is a first line of defense.

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