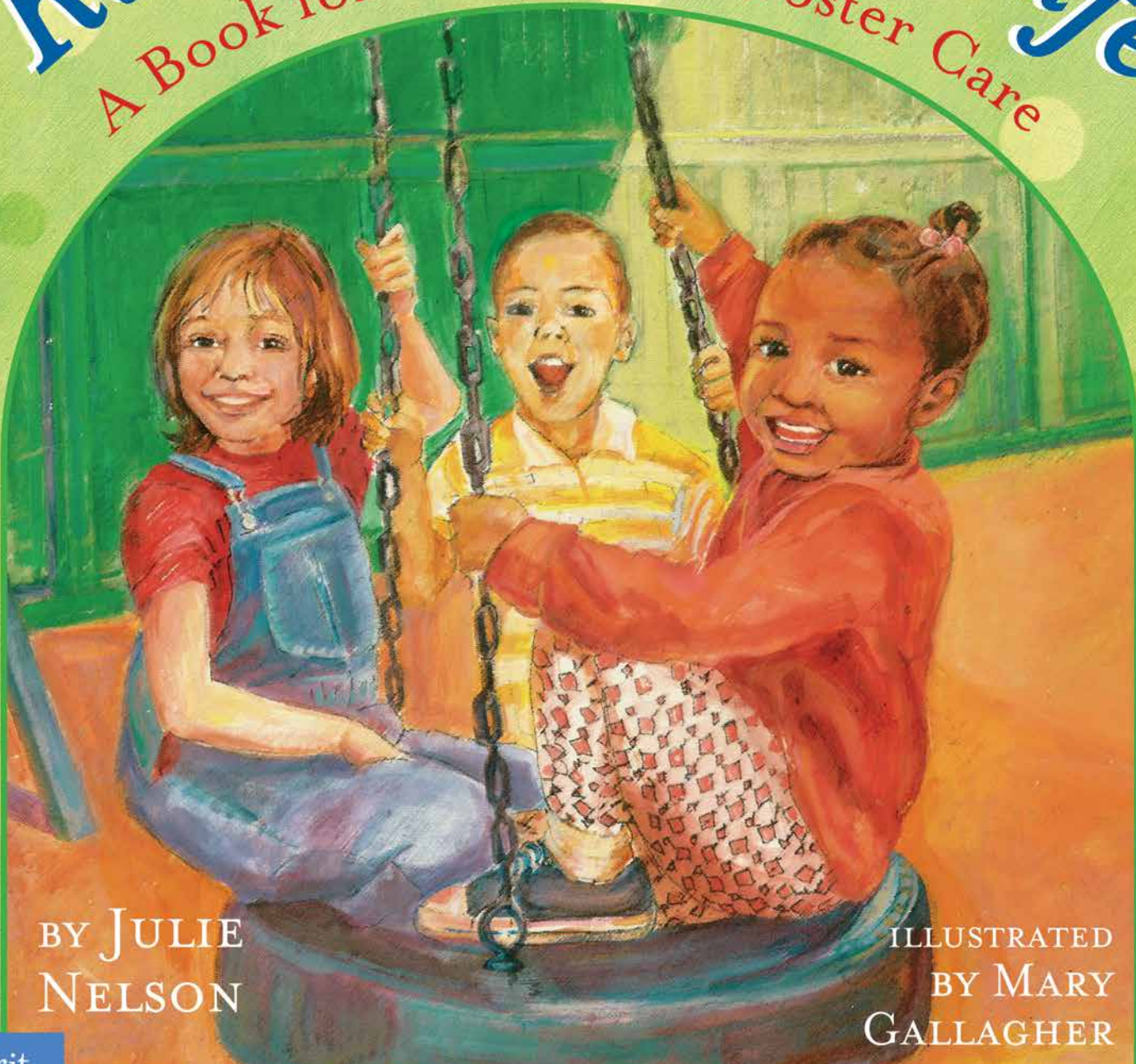


★ Kids Are Important Series
Help for Troubled Times

Kids Need to Be Safe

A Book for Children in Foster Care



BY JULIE
NELSON

ILLUSTRATED
BY MARY
GALLAGHER

free spirit
PUBLISHING®

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Kids Need to Be Safe

“Julie Nelson demonstrates remarkable sensitivity to the needs and feelings of young children in foster care. I’m confident that countless young children will draw strength and comfort from the clear and simple words Ms. Nelson has written for them. And foster parents and other caregivers will find a wealth of wisdom in the information provided for them, particularly in the ‘healing words’ to use when children are feeling confused and afraid.”

—Martha Farrell Erickson, Ph.D., senior fellow & co-chair
President’s Initiative on Children, Youth & Families
University of Minnesota

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Dedication

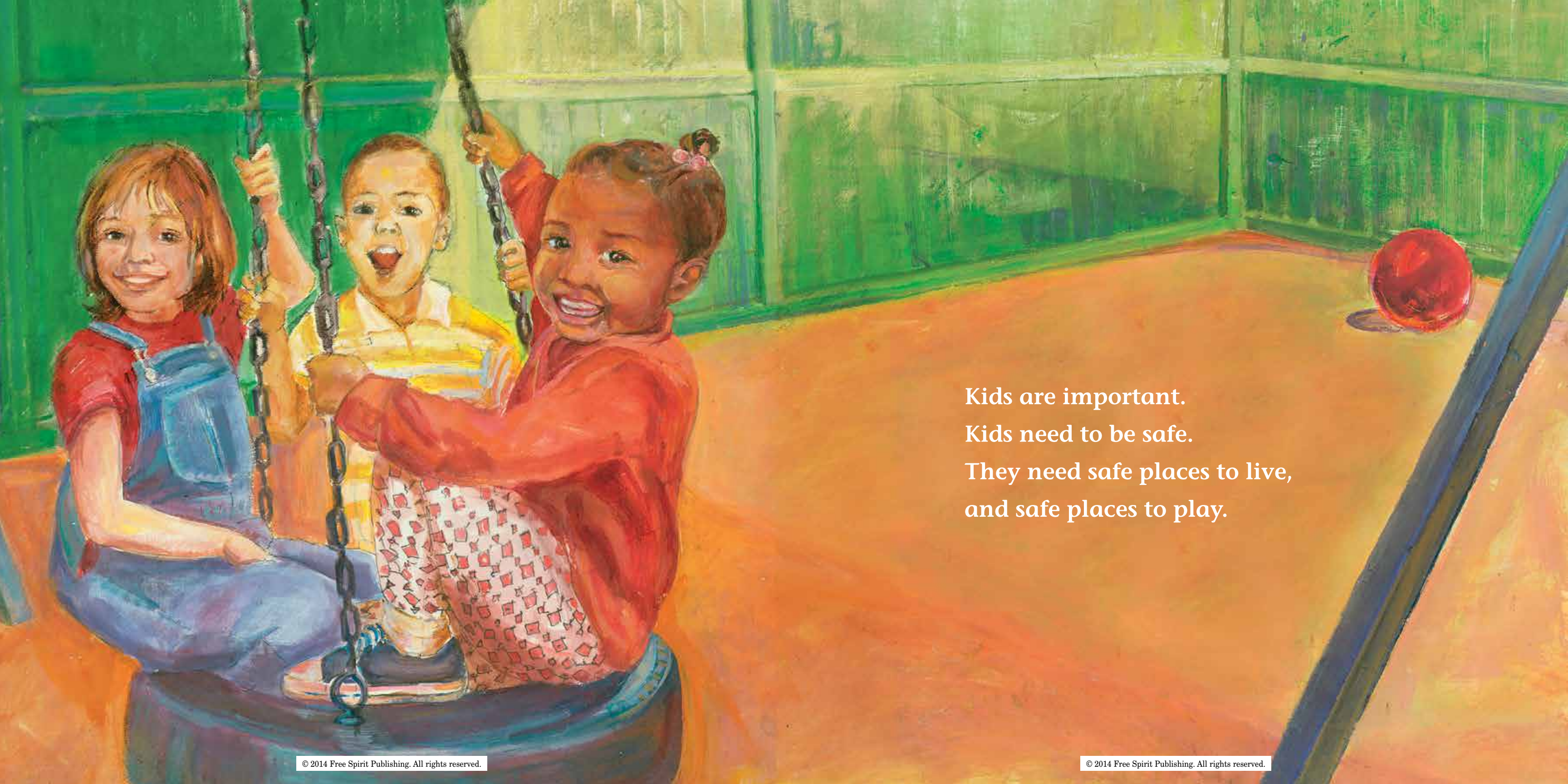
This book is dedicated to children in foster care
and the adults who support them.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the caring staff of Families Together for supporting
the stressed young children in our preschool each day. Thanks also
to Lifetrack Resources for its assistance with this project.

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Kids are important.
Kids need to be safe.
They need safe places to live,
and safe places to play.

An illustration showing two women in profile, facing each other. The woman on the left has short brown hair and is wearing a red shirt. The woman on the right is wearing a green helmet and an orange shirt, and is adjusting the chin strap of the helmet. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with green trees and a blue sky. The overall style is painterly and warm.

Usually moms and dads take
good care of kids and keep kids safe.

Providing Support and Encouragement to Stressed Young Children

A message to foster parents, social workers, teachers, and caregivers

Foster placement provides increased safety for the thousands of young children in out-of-home placement, but it also brings loss and fear. Adults who teach and support young children in foster care can provide support and encouragement. You can send messages of hope on the following topics.

SAFETY

Children who have been abused or witnessed family violence may not know if they are safe and may be confused about what is safe. Building trust with a hurting child will take time. Fearful children may appear withdrawn or angry and may interpret limit-setting as being disliked or rejected. Healing words include: *This is a safe place for children. I will keep you safe, me safe, and all the children here safe.*

ACCEPTANCE

Stressed children may feel angry, frightened, worried, sad, or confused. Some children will act out, while others will withdraw. Children need to be accepted and cared for no matter what they are feeling. Help children to understand their feelings and to express emotions in safe ways. Accept emotions while providing limits for inappropriate behavior. Healing words include: *I will take care of you when you are happy, and I will take care of you when you are angry, too. I will take care of you with all your feelings.*

RELAXATION

The stress children experience with a major life change, such as out-of-home placement, is physical as well as emotional. Elevated stress hormones can make it hard for children to sit still. Stressed children may be edgy and quick to act out, with seemingly small problems causing big reactions. Healing activities to do with children include playing in water, playing with clay, dough, or sand, and doing vigorous outdoor exercise. Experiences of non-threatening, nurturing touch can also be healing. Rub lotion on children's hands, paint their fingernails, or push them on a swing. These actions may help stressed children feel more calm.

CONFUSION

The changes that come with out-of-home placement may leave children feeling confused. "What happened?" and "Is it my fault?" are important questions to answer for children. If kids let you know they feel at fault, healing words may include: *Sometimes kids think they did something wrong when they move to a foster home. But foster homes are for helping kids! Tell kids why they are in foster care. For example: You are staying with us (or with your foster family) because your mom is working out some problems with her social worker.* Children often find their changing emotions confusing too. One minute they may feel happy about their new home, the next minute they may feel worried, sad, or angry. Children may worry that liking foster parents would be disloyal to their birth parents. Healing words may include: *Sometimes you might feel happy you are staying with a foster family, and sometimes you might feel sad. That's okay. When kids live with a foster family, they have lots of different feelings.*

COMMITMENT

Children with so many losses may worry that they will lose you too. Reassure children that you will be there for them through the hard times as well as the happy times. Healing words include: *I will take care of you when you like me, and I will take care of you when you are mad at me. Even when you have really big feelings, I will still be your foster mom (or foster dad, teacher, day care mom, or social worker).* When it is time for children to move away, help children with a planned goodbye. Celebrating the time you have had together and acknowledging the importance of the child's experience with photographs or a memory book can be helpful.

HOPE

Children need to look to the future with hope. The harder it is today, the more important it is to have hope that tomorrow may be better. Help children express their hopes, dreams, and wishes. Use language that conveys the possibility of change and a better tomorrow. Help children have a wide—rather than a narrow—sense of future. Healing words include: *This was a hard day. Tomorrow will be a new day. We can work together to have a better day tomorrow.*