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We say what's OKAY

WE CHECK IN WITH EACH OTHER

Lydia Bowers

illustrated by Isabel Muñoz



With Song from
Peaceful Schools

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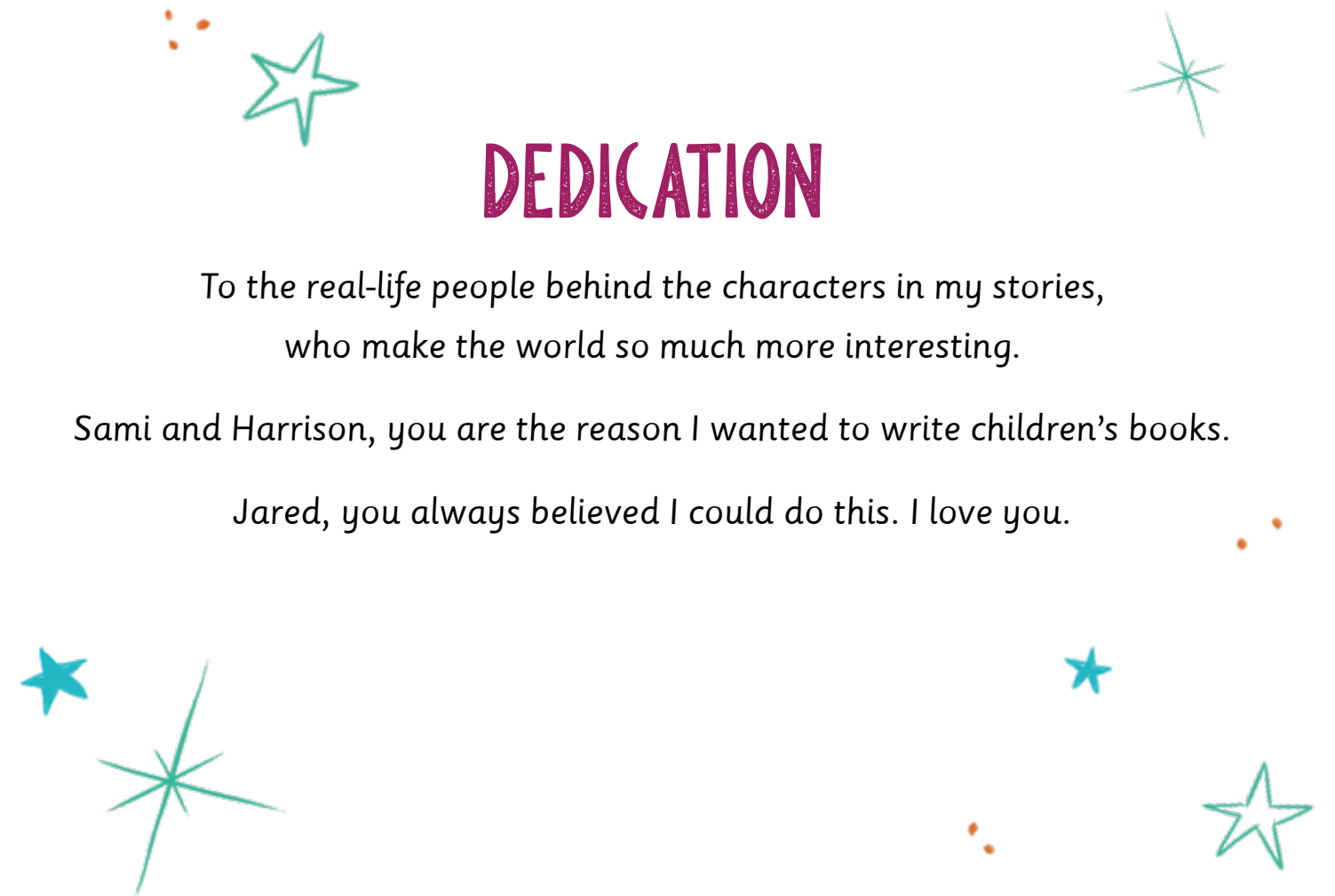
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DEDICATION

To the real-life people behind the characters in my stories,
who make the world so much more interesting.

Sami and Harrison, you are the reason I wanted to write children's books.

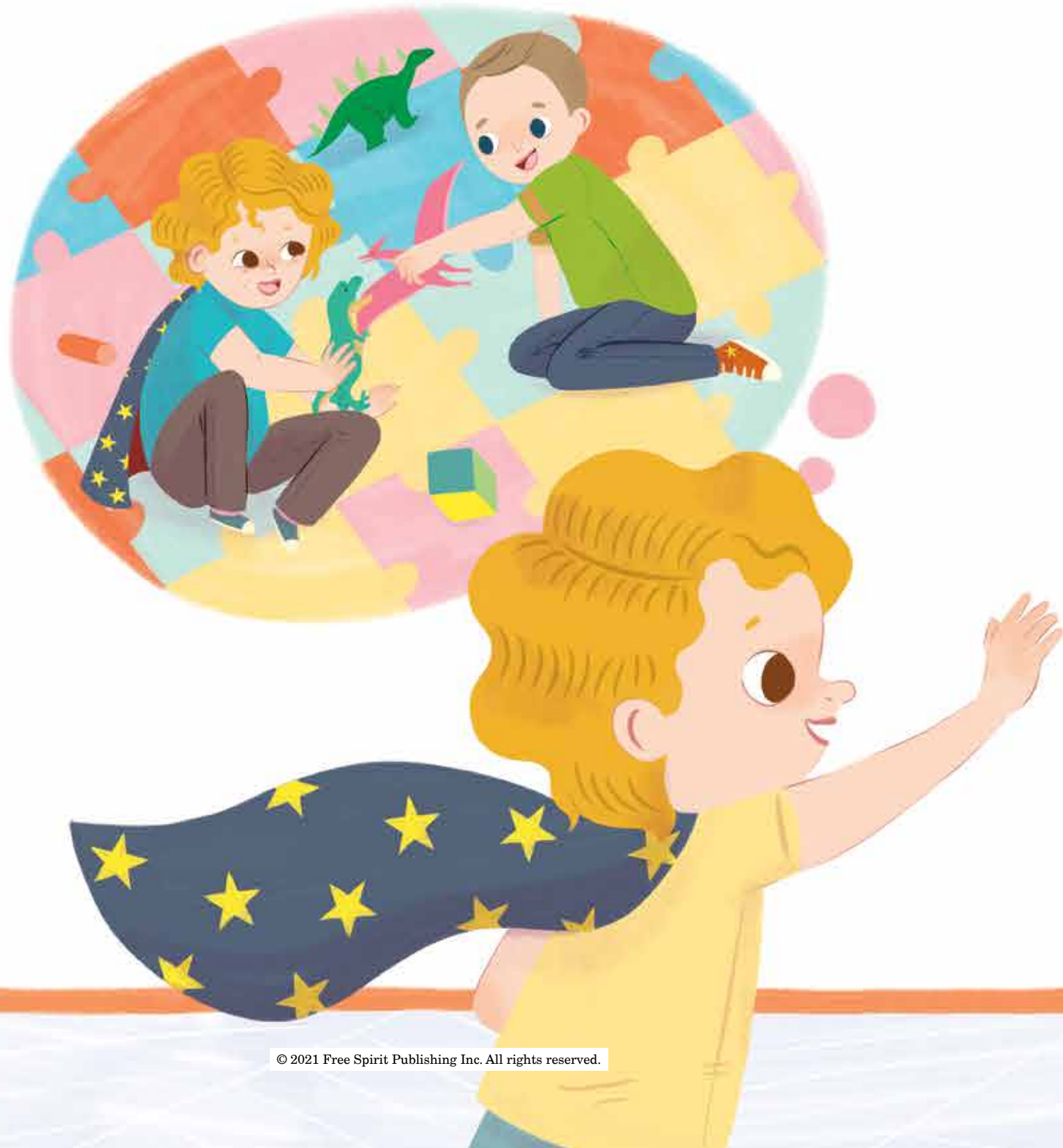
Jared, you always believed I could do this. I love you.



Harrison was the first kid at school today. As soon as he arrived, he pulled out the big basket of dinosaurs. Then he carefully set up wooden blocks, making a jungle of rectangular trees.

T. rex stomp, stomp, stomped through the trees, knocking them over. It sneaked up behind Stegosaurus and gave a huge *RAWWWWWR!* Stegosaurus swung its spiky tail at *T. rex*. Then came the sound of footsteps—

“Jamin!” Harrison shouted. “Come play dinosaurs with me!”



Harrison was excited to see his friend. Yesterday, he and Jamin had spent almost all day playing T. rex and Stegosaurus. Harrison couldn't wait to continue their game.



CONSENT: A GUIDE FOR CARING ADULTS

CONSENT FOUNDATIONS

What Is Consent?

Consent is a nuanced concept. Its meaning expands as children and situations mature. With young children, we can use the definition *agreeing because you want to*. This child-friendly definition inspired the series title *We Say What's Okay*.

Why Consent?

As high-profile assault allegations and hidden abuse have come to light in recent years, more and more people have called for the need to teach about consent. These conversations tend to focus on high schools, colleges, and places of employment. However, they need to happen much earlier to be the most effective—just as it is important to read to young children and give them opportunities to run and play to support cognitive and physical development. Consent is a social and emotional skill that requires learning and practice. Caring adults can help children build the foundations of consent early on.

Consent is a principle that we as adults can practice in our lives and model for children. When we create a culture of consent, we provide a safe space for children and empower them to have a voice. This guide offers help in that effort. It is not just a one-time lesson plan. This is ongoing work. The more we and the children in our care practice

trusting our instincts and saying no when something feels off in the day-to-day, the more likely we are to trust ourselves when we are in danger. When we as parents, teachers, social workers, and caregivers can make our spaces safe, consensual, and communicative, children know that they can come to us for support.

The Fallacy of Stranger Danger

Of children who are sexually abused, 93 percent are abused by someone they know.* Saying no to someone you know and trust can be difficult, but it is a vital skill. We need to empower children to say no at home and in other familiar, day-to-day environments. It is not children's job to protect themselves from abuse. That is our job. But we can use consent foundations to empower children and to mitigate risk.

Five Steps for Teaching Consent

Building consent foundations involves teaching children five key concepts:

- I listen to my body.
- I am in charge of my body.
- I ask permission.
- I check in.
- I accept no.

PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL AWARENESS

Checking In

Have you heard the saying *consent can always be revoked*? It means that even if we agree to or give permission for an activity, we can change our minds at any time. Ask children, "Which characters in the story changed their minds about activities? Were they having fun at first? Why do you think they changed their minds?"

Because we can change our minds, we need to check in with each other and ourselves. First, we ask ourselves: "Am I enjoying this? Am I still feeling safe? What is my body telling me?" We also check in with other people: "Are you still enjoying this? What's your body language telling me?"

To check in with ourselves, it's important for us to know how to listen to our bodies. When we listen to our bodies, we notice our body's response to a situation. Harrison said he needed a break from playing ball and from tickling. Ask children, "What do you think Harrison's body was telling him?" Talk with children about what signals their bodies send when they're hungry, tired, sad, and so on. (For another story and more discussion and activity ideas on listening to our bodies, see *We Listen to Our Bodies*, another book in this series.)

For adults, it's critical to model checking in! Tickling is a common activity that offers a good opportunity to model checking in with others.

Tickling evokes a laughing response in most humans. However, that laughter is not always voluntary, and it doesn't always mean tickling is desired. Laughter is a physiological response to a physical stimulus. Many children love to be

tickled, but others may feel panic or fear when they're tickled—yet still can't help laughing.

If a child enjoys tickling, set up rules together! For example, we tickle only if both people agree. ("Please tickle me!" or "May I tickle you?" "Yes!") After a few seconds of tickling, pause and check in: "Are you still okay? Are you having fun?" Remember, laughter is not a yes. If the child says "stop" or "no," stop the tickling immediately.

Discuss with children how Harrison's dad waited for Harrison to answer his question. Explain that sometimes we need to catch our breath first. Ask children, "Who in the story does not like tickling? Do you like to be tickled?" Emphasize that checking in doesn't ruin the fun or stop the party.



* RAINN. 2020. "Child Sexual Abuse." [rainn.org/articles/child-sexual-abuse](https://www.rainn.org/articles/child-sexual-abuse).