

For Ages
4-7

Tears Are Not Forever

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Illustrated by Marieka Heinlen



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free spirit

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For anyone who has ever needed
a shoulder to cry on. Big hug!
—E.V.

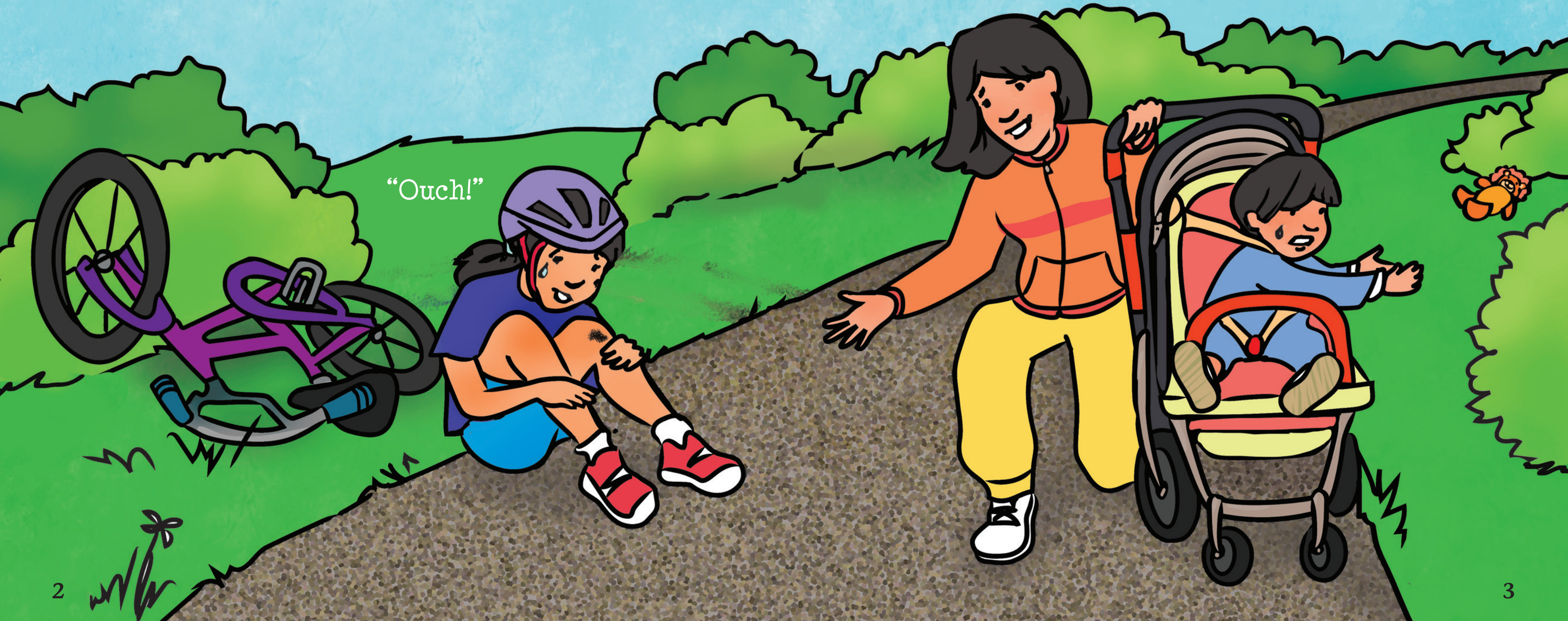
For Marcy, a true Nonna, who's devoted
much of her life to teaching and helping
young children.
—M.H.



You have “sad-mad” days
and “bad” days . . .
“Wish I didn’t feel this way,
make it go away” days.

You have times when your body
or feelings get hurt.

Or when you've lost something you love.



“Ouch!”

Tips and Activities for Caregivers and Parents

Crying is a natural human response to strong feelings: sadness, anger, fear, anxiety, joy. School-age children may not cry as often as toddlers or preschoolers—a result of increasing self-awareness and growing communication skills. But crying still happens, which is why *Tears Are Not Forever* may be helpful for children in your care. A child who can say “I’m sad today because my friend is in the hospital” is giving voice to emotions. Learning how we as human beings both express and handle our feelings is an important skill for children of all ages.

Start with Acceptance

For adults, it can be distressing when a child cries. While we may wish we could bring the tears to a quick end, children need us to respond with acceptance and validation. A crying child may feel mad, frustrated, overstimulated, or disappointed, or could be dealing with something more difficult and confusing like sorrow and grief. You can help by searching for the underlying emotions and their cause and showing empathy through your words and actions.

What Response Works?

Remind children of what they can do to feel better on their own and with guidance. Make sure your words and actions are helpful, not hurtful.

Responses to Avoid

Avoid telling your child to “stop.” Think about how you feel when someone says to you, “Stop stressing” or “Don’t get so upset.” Usually worse, right? Telling a child to stop crying has that same effect.

Avoid offering rewards and bribes. When you promise candy if your child will just stop crying or bribe them with screen time to avoid a meltdown, you’re inadvertently reinforcing crying behaviors. There’s nothing wrong with crying, but watch for genuine tears versus a learned behavior that’s designed to provoke a particular reaction on your part.

Avoid being the constant soother. Of course you want to be a source of comfort to a child. You need to be that helpful shoulder to cry on. But be sure to encourage self-soothing skills as well. This helps children in the moment and introduces skills they can use to calm themselves when they’re away from you as well.

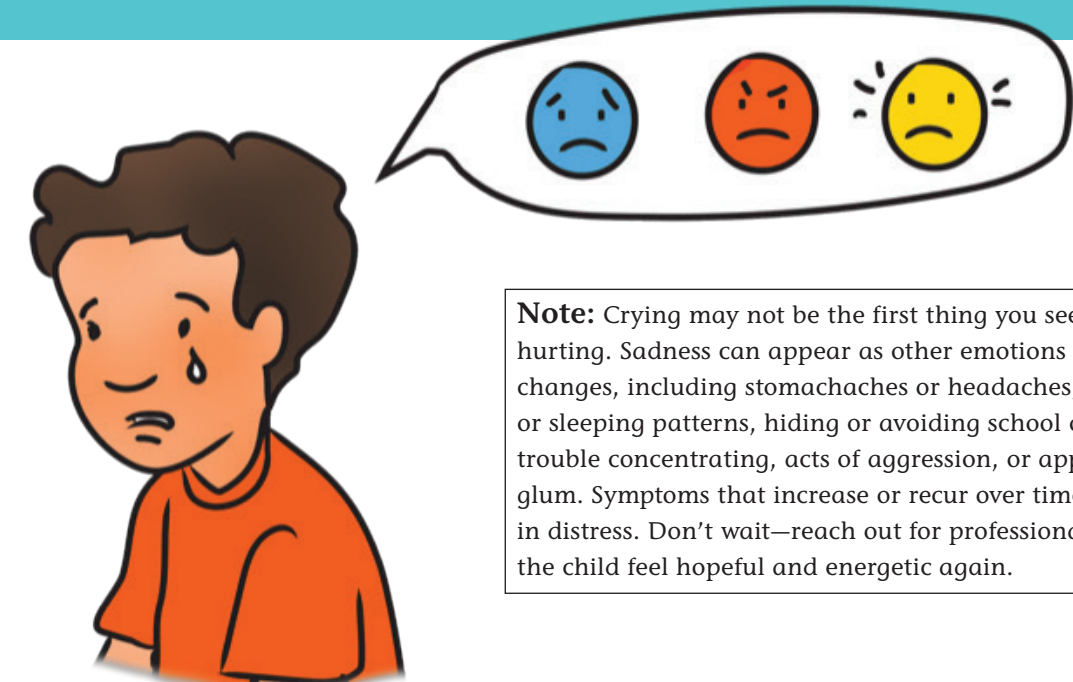


What to Say

- ▲ “I see that you’re sad/upset/struggling right now. I’m here for you.”
- ▲ “I want to listen—can we talk?”
- ▲ “You’re safe. Let’s talk about what’s going on.”
- ▲ “Let’s be a team and find out what’s bothering you. Please let me help.”
- ▲ “I can try to help you feel better. Let’s take a deep breath together.”
- ▲ “It’s okay to cry. Everyone cries—children and grown-ups too.”
- ▲ “Do you need a hug? I’m a good hugger.”
- ▲ “Let’s think of a way to make this sadness smaller.”
- ▲ “How about we get some tissues/alone time/fresh air?”
- ▲ “I’ll stay with you while we work through this.”

What NOT to Say

- ▼ “Don’t cry.”
- ▼ “It’s not a big deal—don’t be so upset.”
- ▼ “Big boys/girls/kids don’t cry.”
- ▼ “Boys don’t cry.”
- ▼ “Don’t be such a baby.”
- ▼ “Get over it.”
- ▼ “Why are you being so sensitive?”
- ▼ “Toughen up.”



Note: Crying may not be the first thing you see when a child is hurting. Sadness can appear as other emotions or as behavior changes, including stomachaches or headaches, changes in eating or sleeping patterns, hiding or avoiding school or social activities, trouble concentrating, acts of aggression, or appearing down or glum. Symptoms that increase or recur over time are signs of a child in distress. Don’t wait—reach out for professional support to help the child feel hopeful and energetic again.